Arabic Contemporary Poetic Drama: Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir A Pioneer**Yahya Saleh Hasan Dahami**English Department, Faculty of Science and Arts, Al Mandaq
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Abstract

Many central playwrights significantly contributed to the progress and advancement of Arabic drama. They were apt to achieve dramatic illustrations in several Arabic countries all the way through ages and places. Still, this study attempts to shed light on an innovator poet-dramatist who represents many cultures and experiences. It aims at displaying the most significant features of renovation associated with the development of the modern Arabic poetic drama that employs history and social problems to present a vision for Arabic literature in the contemporary age. The researcher adopts the critical-descriptive approach in analyzing the poet-dramatist, Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir, and two of his poetic dramas. It is mapped with an introductory overview dealing with a concise notion of drama, concentrating predominantly on poetic drama. The foremost part copes with the developer and pioneer Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir, focusing on his thoughts and experiences in the field. The paper, then, moves ahead to deal with two verse plays as a model of his craftsmanship and mastery. After that, the study finishes with a brief argument and/or recommendations and an end.

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Introduction

Drama in general and poetic drama, in particular, is one of the most beautiful literary arts and the most acceptable expressive means; a person can convey his message by presenting a play. Drama was, in the beginning, a way to bring people closer to belief, refine them, and teach them. It provides the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong until it becomes an independent art like the other literary types such as poetry, novel, and the short story. It occupied a prominent position among the scientific and cultural circles and sometimes surpassed the other literary arts. Drama was initially a way to bring people closer to confidence, discipline them, and teach. Drama is enriched by the singers and represented by the actors.

Drama has existed among all the peoples of the world since ancient times. As available documents indicate, this art originated first in Greece and developed then spread through different countries and centuries. The plays' subjects were initially on gods, religious rituals, and idols and then flourished in the palaces of kings and princes, in which they enjoyed them.

1. Poetic Drama

The poetic drama continued to spread worldwide, and its presence began to strengthen with the successive days, in which many playwrights appeared to have enabled this genre to stand competitive to prose drama. It imposed itself within the map among modern European literature. One of the great pioneers of this genre is the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen (1828 – 1906). He:

Is a poet and playwright from Norway. He is estimated to be the major playwright representing the realities of modern life. Under Ibsen's influence, serious drama from 1890 onward ceased to deal with themes remote in time and place. He began his literary career as a poet where he wrote good poetic dramas such as *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, but then he abandoned poetry in his plays. Ibsen had taught men that drama, if it was to live a true life of its own, must deal with the human emotions, with things near and valuable to ordinary people (Dahami, 2017, p. 18).

What makes the distinction between poetic drama and prosaic drama is a sort of duplication in action. In a poetic play, poetry and movement are made fundamental to each other. They are not only brought together but also they are interchangeable and homogenous. The preference of verse in drama has appealed too many poet-dramatists through different ages and different places, such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton, Yeats, Christopher Fry, Christopher Isherwood, James E. Flecker, Eliot, Ahmad Shawgi, Salah Abdo As-Sabour, An-Nagash, Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir and many several others. They had the belief "that drama in verse is a center of cultural and proper rehabilitation" (Dahami, 2020c, p. 3; Dahami, 2018a, p. 484). In addition, verse and action in a poetic drama mutually enhance each other. Poetic drama enjoys two things: a poetic speech device like rhythm, which appears natural to performers and audience, as well as the supremacy and influence to express individual appeal. Furthermore, "It is believed that poetic drama has the

aptitude to pierce into the sources of action and passion of human beings” (Dahami, 2018b, p. 158).

In a poetic play, the verses' expressions actually have a richer connotation than the expressions used in a prose play. “Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*, confirms that the nature of poetic expression and its depth can be better achieved in verse than in prose” (Dahami, 2016, p. 158). Coleridge says, “It is certain that poetry when it has attained this excellence, makes a far greater impression than prose. So much so indeed, that even the gratification which the very rhymes afford becomes then no longer a contemptible or trifling gratification” (Sampson, 2015, p. 107; Coleridge, 2009, p. 316).

Some prose dramas are more limited in their profundity of expression than verse dramas because poetry significantly builds up the term. Eliot, the pioneer of poetic drama in twentieth-century England, declares, in his critical essays about poetic drama that verse is the right language of dramatic action in the theater. “Eliot was occupied with writing flowing poetic dramas in his modern age. His preoccupation was how to make such dramas better apply a modern language as its medium” (Dahami, 2020b, p. 76). The matter is similar with Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir. The most excellent drama is principally poetic, where poetry is fundamental, not incidental. A poetic drama has enough flexibility to convey anything and is considerably more apparent and more profound than a prose drama. Inherently, the verse is an appropriate compound to prose as a dramatic idiom because poetry can offer better occasions for the interaction and relationship of action, sentiment, and attitude.

In a poetic drama, verse establishes and creates the third voice in poetry, wherein the poet is “saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character” (Jackson, 2014, p. 192; De Molina, 2013, p. 59; Eliot, 2000, p. 80). Poetry and drama are integrated that “poetry expresses the most intense emotion only with a dramatic situation consisting of a persona whose identity is separate from the author's, and who addresses other characters and an audience according to particular circumstances dictated by plot action” (Dahami, 2016; Skaff, 1986, p. 104).

Several critics may opine that this art has originated among the Arabs due to the literary connections and ties between Arabs and the people of the West in the modern era. One of the pioneers in this genre contributing to its progress is Marun An-Naqqash, who tried to revive this art through serious attempts after experiencing theater and plays in Italy. They significantly influenced him, and then when he returned home to Lebanon, he tried to establish a group with his friends and taught them the art of drama and theater. Not only that but also, he wrote his first play, *The Miser* (البخيل), which saw the light on the stage in 1847.

Several Arab dramatists wrote their plays in prose and others in verse, as it is natural with other languages. Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir (1910-1969) is one of the pioneers who mastered Arabic poetic plays among several others such as Ahmed Shawgi (1870-1932), Mohammad Aziz Abathah

(1898-1973), Salah Abdul Saboor (1931-1981), Abderrahman Ash-Shargawi (1921-1987) and many others, in which poetic drama, through their hands progressed and cultivated.

2. Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir: A Man of Arabic Literature and A Designer Poet-Dramatist

Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir (باكثير) – also written as Bakatheer or Bakatair – is considered one of the most prominent Arab literary writers of the twentieth century. He is the author who is unique in producing many different literary arts, such as drama, poetry, and novel. He wrote more than seventy literary works in prose as well as in poetry long and short, which dealt with several social, historical, and religious Arabic issues. Ba-Kathir was born in Surabaya (Indonesia) in 1910 to Arab parents from Yemen. He is a man of multiculturalism, in which his birth was in Indonesia, his family originally is from Yemen, and he lived in Egypt as an Egyptian citizen.

Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir was one of the most famous Arabic dramatists during the forties and fifties of the twentieth century. He was a great author and poet. When he was ten years old, his father traveled with him to Siyoon city in Hadramout to be raised in an Arabic and Islamic way with his brothers and sisters. He started writing poetry when he was thirteen years old and got his education in the school of An-Nahthah Al-Elmiah (The Scientific Renaissance School مدرسة النهضة العلمية). He has been taught Arabic and Islamic law by many great sheikhs such as his uncle the judge, poet, linguistic and grammatical Mohamed Ba-Kathir.

It has been said that Ba-Kathir is one of the pillars of modern Arabic literature. However, his fame was less than some of his contemporaries because he preferred the distance from the focus of public attention, avoiding selfish talk about himself, without missing sight of the frenzied attacks against him late in his life. Nevertheless, it is true that the most prominent literary field in which Ba-Kathir excelled, and known for his abundance of production, is drama in general and poetic drama in particular. Ba-Kathir has accomplished and produced more than thirty-five diverse prose plays, ranging from the publication to the manuscript, including *The Promised Pharaoh* (1945), *Omar Al-Mukhtar* (1948), *Dar Ibn Luqman* (1960), and *the War of Al-Basus* (1990). Among his eminent plays, one could remark *The Caliph's Jester*, which was performed at the Royal Opera House in Cairo.

He is considered one of the pioneers of Arab theatrical literature who played a significant role in developing this literary genre. He was influenced by Shawgi's plays when he read them in his travel through Al-Hijaz. He had acquired a relevant experience and learned how poetry can be useful and operative in life and how the poet expresses himself and deals with historical events or issues that touch the nation's need.

During his stay in Hadramout, Ba-Kathir married when he was young but was shocked by his wife's death in her youth shortly after their marriage. This painful incident deeply moved him; he wrote several poems as an elegy of her passing away. Moreover, he dedicated the first play he wrote to her soul. He then left Hadramout to reside in Aden in 1931. Still, he did not stay long,

then moved to Ethiopia and Somalia before traveling to Al-Hijaz, in which he settled there for a reasonable period of time where he was able to organize and compose a notable work titled Al-Burdah or The Memory of the Prophet.

He composed his first work in poetic drama, which he printed on his arrival to Egypt entitled Hammam¹ in the Land of Al-Ahgaf. This play was reprinted in Aden with little modifications in 1967, in which he included a number of his reform ideas that shaped his thought throughout his stay in Hadramout. This play was considered one of the first Arab social poetic plays in which the Arab poetic dramas were dominated by historical characteristics, in events, themes, and characters.

After four years of writing Hammam in the Land of Al-Ahgaf, he wrote his second play Akhenaten and Nefertiti (إخناتون ونفرتيتي) in 1938 and published in the same magazine in 1940. After more than four years, his third play, The Palace of Howdah or Qasr Al-Howdaj (قصر الهودج), which was published in 1944. It can be said that Ba-Kathir wrote his poetic plays in ten years from 1934 to 1944. His first poetic play Tammam fi Bilad Al-Ahgaf was written in the traditional rhythm and rhyme style.

He was the first to write the operetta in classical Arabic as the play called Ash-Shayma (Shadiat Al-Islam) (1969) (الشيماء شادية الإسلام), a historical religious play. Ash-Shayma is the sister of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from breastfeeding. She is the daughter of Halimah As-Saadiyah, the Prophet's nurse, and is the focal point of this play. It is composed of five chapters. Through this play, in intelligence, and through a captivating dialogue, Ba-Kathir presents the prophetic biography's many events. In this play, poetry is mixed with prose as a necessary element suitable for singing. Ash-Shayma has a sweet voice that through this beautiful voice; she used to sing with meaningful and profitable poetry of variation and flexibility. She is calling for Islam and the support of her brother, the Prophet of Islam. She confronts the tyrants who used to take ploy against the Prophet, starting with her husband, Bejad, and the polytheists' leader in Mecca named 'Ekremah ibn Abi Jahl and others. Her brother Abdullah, her father Al-Harith ibn Abdul A'za, and her mother Halimah As-Saadiyah supported and maintained her mission.

Ba-Kathir arrived in Egypt, where he polished his literary background by joining the English Department at Cairo University, from which he ultimately obtained the bachelor's degree in literature in 1939. After that, in 1954, he traveled after receiving a free scholarship to France, and after he effectively finished the scholarship, he returned to live in Egypt, where he married for the second time. He liked and enjoyed life in Egypt, where he saw eminent authors, for instance, Najeeb Mahfouth, Taha Husien, Tawfig Al-Hakeem, and many other pioneers.

In 1955, he moved to work in The Ministry of Culture after working as a teacher for almost fifteen years. Then he shifted to the department of the monitoring of the artistic productions, where he continued working until his demise (Al-Hawari, 2017, p. 235). He was the first author in Egypt

who was given the free fellowship. He got an open fellowship for two years to complete his enormous Islamic poetic legend about the dutiful, obedient, and rightful caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab. This voluminous literary and historical work is composed of nineteen parts.

Ba-Kathir obtained a diploma of teaching from the Teachers' Higher Institution. He stayed in Egypt and worked as a teacher while authoring several fruitful historical and literary works. He enjoyed reading English poetry remarkably free verse, preferring writing in blank verse after acquiring its basis from reading and studying English poetry. "It can be said that he is among the first who started this sort of new poetry" (Munaif, 2006, p. 360). There is a challenging story for such a preference. Al-Khateeb, (2009), sheds light on the way Ba-Kathir mastered blank verse. Ba-Kathir tells about the reason for this occasion, saying that when he was in one of the English classes, the English teacher took a lecture on English blank verse. The teacher said; this sort of poetry did not succeed in any other language as it grew in English. He adds: the French themselves wanted to emulate this type of English verse but failed as is in English; of course, he adds that there is no such thing in this language in Arabic. Ba-Kathir opposed saying: I objected to the teacher's views and told him that every nation has its artistic traditions in its poetry, and it is the tradition of the Arabs to adhere to the one rhythm and rhyme. It is their style of expression and their artistic style. He confirmed that there is nothing to prevent creating such a kind of poetry in the Arabic language because it can deal with linguistic variations that are not available in any other language. The teacher showed his dissatisfaction, which I still remember that he said; nonsense.

Ba-Kathir adds; I went out of class directly to my house. I continued thinking about this verse, but this challenge made me accomplish what I had right away in my mind. I came home during the day and resorted to the nearest thing that helps me emulate this verse. Then I found the English version of Romeo and Juliet. I chose a scene and continued to treat it with such poetry until I made it close to my desire. Then it occurred to me to translate the whole play from the first until the end. After that, I worked on it until I accomplished it; this is the first experience (Al-Khateeb, 2009, pp. 24-25).

Therefore, Ba-Kathir translated a scene from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in Arabic blank verse in which it was a gate for him to the renewal of the new form of Arabic poetry, but he did not finish it. When he finished writing his central play Akhenaten and Nefertiti, he returned to the play Romeo and Juliet and finished it in full with a mixture of the blank verse and free verses. It is a type of poetry that is exempt from restrictions of rhyme, and it is flexible. However, "Shakespeare did not only influence poets of his age who dealt with blank verse and poetic dramas, but also, he greatly influenced poets and dramatists of the twentieth century" (Dahami, 2020a).

Ba-Kathir, in his book *The Art of the Play from My Personal Experiences* (1964), declares that he did not adhere to one specific rhythm in his plays. However, he used the various ones required by the poetic situation, taking into account their compatibility with different expressions. He tried to avoid the continuation of the same rhythm and rhyme as possible so that the play is not

a collection of poems added to each other. He is keen to diversify the rhymes to be more informed in the musical toning (p. 18). As for his play, *The Palace of Howdah*, Ba-Kathir wrote it in lyric poetry. He took great care about it that the play should be suitable for singing (Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-‘Arab, 2004, p. 44; Rābiṭat al-Adab al-Islāmī, 1993, p.2).

Ba-Kathir has directed three poetic plays, presented various experiences inside them, and opened a new gate for the Arab poetic play. His Arabic play *Romeo and Juliet* is written in verse and has great importance for critics, readers, and students because Ba-Kathir, the poet-dramatist, directed it after a sort of challenge. In writing his dramas, he deals with ancient themes but made the texts of his plays suit his goals and introduces them to tackle the social and political problems that the Arabic nation suffers from, particularly in his country of residence, Egypt.

Ba-Kathir's life was full of intellectual and literary contributions. He left the Arabic nation with a wide range of creative and literary texts divided between drama, novels, poetry, and other academic and critical essays. However, it is noticeable that he began his literary career with poetry writing before moving on to link poetry with drama to create poetic dramas. He also skillfully wrote prose dramas, as well as translating texts from foreign languages he was fluent in. Nevertheless, the dramas, both kinds, the poetic and prose, shaped the literary field in which Ba-Kathir excelled. He published two collections of seven texts in his lifetime, ‘From Above Seven Heavens’ (Ba-Kathir, 1989), and the epic called ‘This is How God Met Omar’.

Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir knew many languages such as English and French besides his native language, Arabic. He composed many poetic plays, such as *The Tragedy of Oedipus* that was interpreted into English. *The Chain and Forgiveness* [Al-Selsilah wal-Ghfran 1951] “makes a much more straitforward [straightforward] religious statement, presenting a parbale [parable] set in medieval Egypt illustrating how an act of forgiveness breaks the chain of evil. Arab scholars have called this the first allegorical play in Arabic literature” (Carlson, 2019, p. 46). In addition, he wrote *The Secret of the Ruler by the Command of Allah*. It is a tragic play that tells the story of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah and the secret of his claim to divinity. The play was written and published in 1947 and was performed on the stage several times. The dramatist shared many social and artistic and social conferences. He was a member of the Story Club and was rewarded with a prize from the Ministry of Knowledge in 1949 because of the successful poetic play *The Chain and Forgiveness* (1951). After a prosperous literary life, Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir died in 1969 owing to a heart attack. He was buried in the family graveyard of his second wife.

Ba-Kathir singled out the Palestinian issue in a large part of his plays, whether poetic or prose, long or short, before or after the catastrophe of 1948 because the case was a stream of blood in his veins. He used to publish a short play every week to reach fifty short plays and five extensive plays. Ba-Kathir was the first writer to deal with the question of Palestine, dramatically, on the Arab theater and drama with his long play *The New Shylock* 1944 [شيلوك الجديد], which is divided

into two parts, the Problem and The Solution. Because of such division, he was the first who divided the play into two parts, known as a double play (Saqr, 1991, p. 167; Albīr, 1970).

The dramatist has left dozens of poetic plays of different sizes, contents, and directions. They are predominantly Arabic and Islamic because they are Arabic, as many other non-dramatic works dominate it. Such works made him a pioneer in Arabic literature in general. Najeeb Al-Kailani (1987), has emphasized that “Ba-Kathir is a distinct school in most of his dramatic and theatrical productions, which bears the Islamic imprint; he is a school that has not yet taken his right by analysis, investigation, and study” (Al-Kailani, 1987, p. 47).

3. Examples of the Poetic Drama of Ba-Kathir

Ba-Kathir realized the importance of combining drama and poetry, as the theater pioneers have done since the earliest times. He believes that there is a relationship of organic syndrome throughout history between drama and poetry. The first dramas on the theater were written in verse, and the early poems written on wooden plates were dramatic, or, say, they were poetic or verse with a dramatic vision. Although drama originated in the temple as religious and legend, poetry was its foundation of tragedy as it was with the ancient Greeks and Egyptians.

Bakathir had a distinct preference for subjects drawn from history, myth, and legend as well as folklore, a preference for which he tried to find an aesthetic justification. Even when he wished to comment on the modern world, he often found it easier to use the past as a metaphor for the present. His passionate commitment to Islam made him turn naturally to Islamic and Arab history, but his treatment of myth and legend embraced a wider field, including ancient Egyptian and Greek themes (Badawi, 2004, p. 117).

Ba-Kathir is associated with poetic drama more than other fields of literature in which he has been involved. He has dealt with various aspects of dramas such as historical, lyrical, political, social, and other poetic plays, although most of them are short in size. The numerous productions of the poet-dramatist Ba-Kathir is unmanageable to be studied in a paper like this. However, they need to be examined and analyzed in more than research or even a book. Nonetheless, this article will deal with three plays of Ba-Kathir, showing and illustrating his skillful power in this field as a pioneer of Arabic literature in the modern age.

3.1. Hammam in the Land of Al-Ahgaf (1934)

The poet-playwright Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir is one of the pioneers who called for the reform of society through literature. It is evident in the play Hammam in the Land of Al-Ahgaf. It deals with one of the most critical issues for which he devoted his life, pen, and knowledge. The examiner of Ba-Kathir's literary works, especially the play in question, will realize that the play Hammam in the Land of Al-Ahgaf is a reflection of a small part of the life of the poet-playwright Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir.

His displeasure with the life he experienced in Hadramout inspired him to produce Hammam's poetic play in the Land of Al-Ahgaf, which illustrates the natural life in underdeveloped Hadramout and people's ignorance and illiteracy, particularly women. When he watched and read Shawgi's plays, Ba-Kathir wanted to emulate him but with his new color, expressing the pain inside him, for the most part, after his wife's death and his region's miserable state, Hadramout. Consequently, he wrote this poetic play, which he called Hammam in the Land of Al-Ahgaf (همام في بلاد الاحقاف *Hammam fi Belad Al-Ahgaf*), during his stay in the city of Taif date 1934, where he used to spend summer among the writers and the literary figures of Al-Hijaz (Ghuneem, 2018, p. 333).

Ba-Kathir has written this play, Hammam in the Land of Al-Ahgaf, without sufficient familiarity with the basis and origins of drama, so he did not consider it a successful play but instead called it a poem that contained a single theme. As critics state, it did not meet successful drama requirements, such as the construction, the action, and characters. However, it has opened a new door for Ba-Kathir to write more full-fledged dramas containing all the drama elements. Ba-Kathir published his first play in the magazine Excerpt (Al Mugtadaf المقطف) in 1934.

In the play Hammam in the Land of Al-Ahgaf, Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir presents his society's conditions in three acts. In the first act, he deals with his father's state and the domination of backward traditional ideas that are behind the veil of religion, classic science, and the tyrannous dominant rule. The play depicts the reality of the region of Hadramout, which is the country of Al-Ahgaf that made the mind ignorant, and the woman is inexperienced. Education proceeds in a way that depends on memorization without thinking or contemplating. Therefore, many social diseases are spread, including gluttony, greediness, voraciousness, money love, and its preference over everything.

Example of the verse that illustrates Ba-Kathir's goal in describing the undeveloped region Hadramout and his wish to help in its development and enlightenment. The verse lines are said in a dialogue between Hammam and his sister:

أخي ما بك اليوم؟ اني ارا ك قليل النشاط كثير الضجر
أأنت مريض وقيت الشر ر، وبلغك الله طول العمر

Brother, what is wrong with you today? I see you as a less active and very bored
Are you unwell? Evils are prevented, and may God reward you long life

Her brother Hammam responds:

أي إن بي مرضاً في الفوا د يا زهرُ ينذرني بالخطر
ولا تجهلين ماذا بصلو ك مما بدا منه أو ما استتر (Ba-Kathir, 1934, p. 12)

That is, I have a condition in the heart, O blossom, that warns me of danger
You do know what your brother is busy with, you know what appears or that is hidden

Some verses of the reply of his sister Zahra shows the artisanship of the poet. As it is the nature of the majority of the verse in the play, lines show operative and compelling rhythm. She says:

ولا تجعل لياس اليك سبيلا ففي الياس فوت الوطر
فأحرى بغيرك أن يستريح إلى الياس. لا بد أن تنتصر

Do not make despair a way for you; in grief, a loss of purpose
Others should rely on despondency. You should win.

After his sister consoles, pleases him, and motivates him in order to stand and not to despair of what is going on, he feels better in his mood and concern. He then responds to his sister in the same poetic way that is exquisitely rhymed and contemplated. He says:

أزهراء لا عدمتك الدنيا ر، حديثك يقشع عنى الكدر
لانت العزاء إذا ما أتيت وانت الهناء وانت الحبر
فأين الكتاب؟ أما تقرئين؟

Oh Zahra, may you are protected to serve the land; your speech dispels the sadness
You are the solace when you attend, and you are the happiness
Where is the book? Won't you read?

Ba-Kathir called for women's education, and they have an active role in the fields of life, in the sense that women should be as pro-Islam as men should. Women, as Ba-Kathir believes, can support men by word and action even if they are forced to take up arms.

Zahra has the ability to take out advocacy and outreach classes for Hadramout women (Al-Ahgaf). She succeeded in her quest, even attracting women from the anti-reformist class, and she is based on her call for the Islamic science of Qur'an and As-Sunnah. Ba-Kathir, through the mouthpiece Zahra, stands against many superstitions and the minds of the agitators of the preachers and the people of sectarian fanaticism.

His sister, Zahra, responds as if she understood his goal that useful science is one of the reasons for the progress and development of nations, saying:

بلى! ذا الكتاب معي قد حضر كتاب كريم خليف به
(بلوغ المرام) و (سبل السلا) بأن يكتبوه بنور البصر
أحاديث طه وآي الكتا (م) عليه تحجل منه الغرر
وأقوال مجتهدي الصحب والأئم ب تألؤ فيها خلال السطر
فيأخذ منها الفتى ماصفا لة من كل حبر أبر
ويترك منها الفتى ما كدر

Yes! The book is with me
It is a generous book deserves to be written with the light of the sight
(Reaching the Goals) and (the Paths of Peace) upon it hop the false
The talks of Taha (the Prophet) and verses of the book (Qur'an) glistening in it through the lines
The sayings of the companions and the diligent imams from every righteous pilot
The schoolboy takes from it everything that is useful and leaves the unhelpful.

The writer intervenes to add an essential explanation of what Zahra read and describes the hero of the play as improving in his condition. Then, Hammam shows a smile for what he saw from his sister's intelligence and acumen about the importance of sound science away from shadows and mental deviation. On the other hand, Ba-Kathir points to Zahra's understanding of the prominence of useful science and learning it. She also helps her brother in critical and valuable thinking. She adds:

فلا سلمت كتب الجامدين ولا فاز قارئها بالوטר
صحائف لا روح فيها ولا يجول بها ذكر خير البشر
يصور فيها محال الأمور، ويترك فيها مهم الصور (Ba-Kathir, 1934, p. 13)

The books of the rigid were not delivered, nor did their readers win a fortune
Sheets have no soul, nor the good of mankind was mentioned
They depict impossible substances and leave the most important lessons.

Hammam is content and happy because of the talks of his mature and fruitful sister. Her speech can be considered food for the mind and soul with its logic. Hammam then asks his sister to read him a chapter of the book because of its great benefits. After his sister has finished reading, and in the same poetic style and the charming and smooth flexibility of the rhythm, he asks his sister to help him in his humanitarian mission by saying:

صار فرضا عليك أن تتشري هـ ذا الهدى في جماعة النسوان
فهدي الشعب من هدى أمهم ات الشعب في كل موطن وزمان
وبنات الأحقاف أولى بأن يحذق بن شتى العلوم والعرفان

It became obligatory for you to spread this guidance among the group of women
The guidance of the nation is the result of the guidance of mothers in every place and time
And the girls of Al-Ahgaf are first to be proficient in various sciences and knowledge.

Zahra responds positively to her brother, confirming that she will stand by him in his noble quest, with the same delicate poetic rhythm. She chants:

لتطب يا همام نفسا فما تر جو سأسعى فيه بغير توان
Oh, Humam, let a breath solace you; I will strive for it without delay.

He thanks her for her efforts and for standing with her brother. Hammam, then, provides her with some advice in her task inviting the women of Al-Ahgaf to follow her, so he says, directing and advising his sister:

بارك الله في الصغار ففهيّن قبول للحق إما دعينا
إنما الشرّ في العجائز يجمد ن جمود الحصى فلا يهتدينا! (Ba-Kathir, 1934, p. 14)

God bless the little ones, for they accept the truth when it is called
Rather, evil is in the elderly; they are frozen like the pebbles, so they are not guided.

The conversation between the hero and his sister illustrates Hammam's quest and shows directly from the very beginning the aim of the dramatist in writing this poetic play. Moreover, what is appealing is the amazing Arabic verse implemented in the lines of the play, which clearly indicates that the dramatist is a great poet. Furthermore, the writer made a direct and unambiguous indication of one of the greatest encyclopedically religious and educational books in Yemen and Arabia. The book is *The Paths of Peace: Explanations for Reaching the Goals* (سبل السلام شرح بلوغ المرام) (2011), written by Muhammad ibn Ismail As-San'ani (1059-1182 A.H. / 1687-1768). Al-Ameer As-San'ani is a historian, a poet, and a great writer from Sana'a. He is one of the late imams of Yemen, who is estimated among the few liberal diligent, hardworking, and assiduous Yemeni intellectuals who followed the evidence from the Qur'an and As-Sunnah. As-San'ani was born in Kohlan (كحلان), near Sana'a.

In the second act, Ba-Kathir depicts other diseases such as bribery, kissing the hand of the sheikh, and visiting the places where invalid rituals are held that have nothing to do with religion. The character Hammam takes advantage of the ideas of sheikh Mohammed Abdo and Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani to get rid of such false deeds. He wants to educate women and empower them with the means of education. He invites people to his social invitation, and his sister comes forward to help him with his mission, addressing women's meetings. Hammam addresses men to his reformation notions and finds supporters from both genders.

Here, a love story arises between Hammam and Husn, so people get angry at Hammam and his beloved, so he has no way but to emigrate, and his friend A'mer is traveling with him. Hammam returns from his travels after two years and is married to Husn in a celebration of singing, joy, and delight. The dramatist portrays with many images of the wedding ceremony in his region. The play does not end in this happy scene as is illustrated by the third act, but rather the dramatist brings another love story between Muhammad the friend of Hammam, with the girl A'lawiah. The marriage between them does not occur because the people of Muhammad do not marry their children outside their family. The people of this area do not propose the engagement to A'lawiah because she is poor. Then Muhammad gets sad, which leads him to illness as well as A'lawiah. Hammam travels at that time to Mecca to do the rituals of pilgrimage (Hajj) without taking his wife with him because she was also sick. In Makkah, he receives a telegram telling him the death of his wife Husn; thus, he stands in front of the Al-Ka'bah and recites these verses:

إن عظمت مصيبتني وخطبي فالله يرعاني وهو حسبي
يا رب انت الواحد القهار وانت ذو الرحمة والجبار
تفجرت من نورك الانوار وقصرت عن كنهك الأفكار
يا رب لا نقض لما ابرمتا فرضني رب بما حكمتا
لعلني أجهل ما علمتا من صالح لي في الذي اقمتا
يا رب الهمني العزاء الشافي واضمد جروحي منك بالاطاف
وأتني عزائم الاسلاف فانت لي الكافي ونعم الكافي
وأولني مناي في الدارين و(حُسنا) اجمع بينها وبينني
في دار خلد بين جنتين اقرر بذلك عينها وعيني

(Ba-Kathir, 1934, pp. 111-112)

If my misfortune is great, Allah will take care of me, and he is my suffice
 O Lord, you are the one, the subduer, and you are the one with mercy and mighty
 The lights exploded from your enlightenment and fell short of your thoughtfulness
 O Lord, no objection to what you decided, so, make me satisfied, Lord, with what you have decided
 Possibly, I am ignorant of what you learned, what is right for me in what I have established
 Oh Lord, inspire me with healing consolation and bandage my wounds with Your kindness
 Bestow me the will of the ancestors, for you, are the most sufficient, how fair the recompense!
 And donate me my wish in the two worlds, and gather me with Husn
 In a house immortalized between two gardens, that her eye and mine to be delighted

The play is ended with a distinguished and stunning verse full of profound connotative metaphors and imaginative symbols. It opens a new gate for the dramatist to initiate other plays after acquiring sufficient experience and knowledge on drama and theater. Another poetic and dramatic work is Qasr Al-Howdah.

3.2. Palace of Howdah (1944)

Qasr Al-Howdah is a historical musical play that talks about the nobility of the commander in God's rulings, the Fatimid Caliph, through a love story like the one mentioned among the Bedouins. It is written in a style similar to the level of Lubna and Qais, and several other stories. As for the development of Qasr Al Howdah, it is the love story of Salma and her cousin Ibn Mayah.

Palace of Howdah is the third poetic play, which saw the light in 1944 that Ba-Kathir was inspired by much of the Fatimid history in Egypt. He selected a social story of passion between Salma and her cousin Ibn Mayah. Salma and Ibn Mayah grew up in the country, and they exchanged virtual love. Before the nest of the marriage brought them together, destiny wanted Salma to meet the Caliph who loved her as her beauty captivated him. He could no longer tolerate sleep and would not know life a taste unless he won her to be among his wives. Therefore, the Caliph, disguised, went to the tent of Sheikh Ammar bin Saad, Salma's father, on the road to the Upper Egypt desert.

In the first act, the playwright ingeniously introduces the play's conflict when love arises among lovers. An element of competition is seen when the Fatimid Caliph, The Commander of the Rulings of Allah, meets Salma and discloses his love for her disguised in his messenger's clothing. Still, Salma rejects his love because she genuinely loves her cousin. When the messenger could not convince her, he tries to tempt her for himself as though he is a messenger of the Caliph even though he is the Caliph himself:

القادم : عشت يا سلمى طليقة لست للمدن صديقة
 لاتحبين مغانيها ولا الدور الأنيفة

سلمى: لطف الله بحالك قد فهمت الآن قصدي
 القادم: كيف لا أفهم ذلك والذي عندك عندي
 أنا من رأيك يا سلمى و ميلى مثل ميلك
 أه لو تسمح لي الأيام يا سلمى بنيلك
 أنت لي لست لغيري و أنا لست لغيرك
 إن لي قلبا كقلبك
 سلمى: عجباً ... هل أنت مجنون؟
 القادم: نعم يا نور عيني

أنا مجنون بحبك (Ba-Kathir, 1978, pp. 20-21)

The comer: Lived o Salma free, cities have no friends
 You do not like its songs nor the elegant houses
 Salma: May Allah be kind to you. You have now seen what I mean
 The comer: How do I not understand? What you have I have
 My opinion is like yours, Salma; my tendency is like yours
 Oh, if days allow me, Salma, to have you
 You are mine, not for others, and I am yours
 I have a heart like yours
 Salma: well ... are you senseless?
 The comer: Yes, the light of my eyes
 I am unwise in your love

The messenger approaches and tries to kiss her, so Salma screams, and her cousin and father come; she tells them what happened. Ibn Mayah and Salma's father know that the one wearing the messenger's clothes is not a messenger, but he is the Caliph himself. Ibn Mayah sadly leaves them. Salma's father regrets what happened with the Caliph and apologizes to him. Then he goes to his daughter and consults with her about the request of the Caliph. As for Ibn Mayah, he leaves the country as well as Salma to the Caliph. Salma grieves deeply for the absent lover. Nonetheless, the Caliph knows her love for her cousin, Ibn Mayah.

Act two events occur on the island of Fustat (Al Rawthah) in the Al-Houdaj Palace that the Caliph built for his sweetheart wife. It is located on the Nile from one side, and around it, the Arab tents were struck, showing the simple life in the countryside. Before his travel, Ibn Mayah comes to say goodbye to his beloved niece, as it is not permissible for him to wander in the desert without saying goodbye. Salma, accompanied by a servant, is terrified to see him in the palace; her servant withdraws to the balcony, leaving the two relatives alone. The Caliph arrives suddenly and indicates to the servant to be silent and stay in her place. The Caliph remained in his position with the girl-servant listening to two lovers' speech, realizing the relationship between Salma and her cousin Ibn Mayah.

The Caliph hears his wife Salma blaming her cousin, who came to her at night, he did not go to her in broad daylight, and he heard her reproach him because he left her and left for

the desert. She told him that if he stayed beside her, she would hold on to him, showing that Salma did not agree to marry the Caliph, and she is not happy with this marriage, despite the comfort the Caliph provided to her. The Caliph did not leave anything to bring happiness to her. He also made the whole island her own, built the wonderful palace there, and struck tents around it to make her feel that she is among her people. Then she groans because she is unjust to her loving husband, that Salma did not repay him with the same love, so she feels unfaithful to him. The Caliph enters the room, stands before him; the two lovers are shocked, they try to explain the situation, but the Caliph orders him to be taken to prison, and he leaves her in her palace to cry for her cousin, herself, and bad luck.

In the second act, we find that Salma arrives at the Caliph's palace that becomes her residence. Ibn Mayah comes to visit Salma secretly at night, hoping not to meet or see the Caliph but the Caliph sees him from behind the door. In his meeting with Salma, Ibn Mayah does not see the Caliph, showing his fondness for Salma, telling her that he fled the country for her to live a happy life. The Caliph suddenly appears and orders that Ibn Mayah be imprisoned for five months. As a reaction of Salma, she grieves him and cries for her loneliness. The second act tends to be followed by the third, which begins with Salma's father's arrival on the order of the Caliph. Salma's father comes to know that the Caliph has divorced Salma. Ibn Mayah is brought from prison, the Caliph gives him a dowry for marrying Salma twenty thousand dinars, and the Caliph requests the sheikh to make the engagement of marriage between Ibn Mayah and Salma. After marriage, they return home to Upper Egypt, in which several ceremonies of the wedding are held, telling that the play comes to an end. Salma and some girls sing chants and songs showing happiness and pray for the righteous Caliph.

In the third act, in Al-Houdj Palace itself, accidents happen five months after Ibn Mayah's imprisonment. Sheikh Ammar comes from the desert of Upper Egypt in response to the call of the Caliph. Salma welcomes him, but he sees her pale face asking her about her life; she does not respond, only cries. After a talk for a while, the Caliph comes, and Salma withdraws to her room; Sheikh Ammar asks his brother-in-law, the Caliph, if Salma has wronged him to discipline her. The Caliph tells him about Ibn Mayah's visit to her in the dead of night. The father revolts and asks the Caliph to slaughter him and Salma together in order to wash away the shame that they denigrated him at the end of his life. Then, the Caliph orders the bringing of Ibn Mayah. In the meantime, Sheikh Ammar has leaped on Salma, dragging her by her hair to where the Caliph sits. When Ibn Mayah is brought, Sheikh Ammar draws his dagger and jumps on him to slaughter, but the Caliph orders him to return to his seat. The Caliph says that it is not permissible to kill a person sheltered by the Caliph. So, Sheikh Ammar was surprised by the noble behavior of the Caliph. The Caliph then describes the situation he saw between the two lovers saying:

إن سلمى لم تخن زوجاً، ولا والله لم تفضح أباً

إنها أطهر من ذلك أخلاقاً، وأسمى أدباً (Ba-Kathir, 1978, p. 76)

Salma has not betrayed a husband, nor, by God, divulged a father

She is purer than that by virtue and bears utmost morals

Then the Caliph says that he divorced Salma from that moment in which Ibn Mayah was imprisoned, and Salma's timing after divorce is completed a month ago. The Caliph married Salma to Ibn Mayah, and he paid twenty thousand dowries for her. Thus, Salma returns to the desert with her husband Ibn Mayah so that they live a beloved happy couple in the bowels of the desert.

Thus, it appears that the play's theme is social, and there are similarities with what Ahamd Shawgi has written, like *Majnun Laila* and other Arab poet-dramatists and his book. It is the issue of love that possesses the hearts of the lovers, so they sacrifice everything for the beloved's sake. Ibn Mayah, as it is understood of the play, risks his life for the sake of a farewell look to his beloved. Salma sacrifices money, prestige, and comfortable living in a mythical palace for the sake of her cousin and lover, Ibn Mayah. It seems that the dramatist has dealt with an important issue as close as to the martyrs of virtual or platonic love. It is a love protected by chaste and virtue.

4. Discussion and Argument

As stated by Julie Scott Meisami, "Bakathir's work is of uneven quality. Many of his plays lack dramatic qualities, and his work suffers from a narrowness of vision associated with the author's passionate belief in Islam and his anti-Marxist stance" (Meisami, 1998, p. 129). Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir says in presenting the play, *Qasr Al-Howdah*, he tried his best, in this poetic play, to fulfill two characteristics that are indispensable for successful musical plays.

The first is adopting its language so that the ordinary audience could understand it without difficulty while preserving the radiance and poetic splendor. In this point, Ba-Kathir reminds us of the same ideas of T. S. Eliot on the poetic drama in which he wanted the language to be poetic and to be appropriate to drama. "It is the power of the dramatic verse that gives the play its unique unity and intensity. The language is the verse, which is the action, which is the theme, which is the atmosphere, which is the meaning; in other words, we have here an impressive realization of the dramatic potentials which Eliot, in his critical works, has claimed for verse" (Dahami, 2017, p. 52). The second is his way of choosing the weights and rhymes appropriate to the different narrating situations. He also tried to make them prevail in using verbal and abstracted musicality that helps the composer reach the goal of composing it.

By contemplating the play and its language, we find that the author has managed to adapt the language so that the ordinary audience understands it. The fulfillment of this condition is not easy in a historical, poetic play. Most of those who wrote the historical, poetic, or prose plays have been betrayed by success in adapting the language in works such as *Majnun Laila* and *Antara* by Shawgi, as well as *Qais Lubna* by Aziz Abathah. In such plays, the spectators find it difficult to quickly grasp the meanings and their goals due to the difficulty of the used vocabulary. With this adaptation by Ba-Kathir, his style remains poetic, preserving the level that he settled in the majority of his poetic plays.

The poet variously has colored the meter and rhymes and does not stand in his works with the framework of a single poetic meter and a unified rhyme. Instead, the diversification reached the point of two and three lines in the dialogue of one character, not to mention the division of one verse between the two interlocutors in order to fulfill his aim in choosing the meters and rhymes appropriate to the different positions of the plays. We notice in the following verses between the disguised Caliph and the father of Salma, sheikh Ammar in which the line has been fragmented:

عمار: إنَّ بيتي لهو بيتك.
 القادم: لا تؤاخذني فديتك ما أنا اليوم بضيف.
 عمار: ما تقول؟
 القادم: لا ولكني رسول.
 عمار: رسول إلي؟
 القادم: نعم.
 عمار: مرحباً بك
 خير أتي بك،
 من أرسلك؟
 القادم: ملكك البلاد.
 عمار: يعيش الخليفة.
 القادم: قد قال لي:
 عمار: ما الذي قال لك؟

Ammar: My home is yours.
 The comer: excuse me, today, I am not a guest.
 Ammar: What are you saying?
 The comer: No, I am only a messenger.
 Ammar: A messenger to me?
 The comer: Yes.
 Ammar: You are welcome
 Good bring you,
 Who sent you?
 The comer: the king of the country.
 Ammar: Long live the Caliph.
 The comer: He had told me:
 Ammar: What did he tell you?

However, Ba-Kathir, the pioneer of rhythmical poetry, was able to weave his blank verse as rhythmical that he had previously performed in his play *Romeo and Juliet*. However, the poet is interested in the play's lyrical success because the free verse is more flexible to sing from rhythmical poetry. Nevertheless, it is obviously realized that the poet-dramatist is proficient in his poetic techniques and his theatrical techniques, which has fulfilled his ambition to make suitable

poetic plays with success in poetry and drama. He made the language flexible with meter and rhymes. The dialogues are lively and far from unnecessary filling.

If there is an observation or flaw in this regard, it is the dialogue's failure to draw the characters' physical features; however, the dramatist succeeded in depicting the two dimensions of drama: the psychological and the social. He also succeeded in highlighting the conflict of all kinds between opposing personalities.

Conclusion

The plays of Ba-Kathir, whatever their nature, involve many manifestations of individuality, honesty, and originality to be qualified to obtain recognition and gratitude, ascending Ba-Kathir as one of the prominent Arab pioneers in the field of Arabic literature, particularly poetic drama. What has been presented is very little of the numerous literary productions that Ba-Kathir has produced. The experience of Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir's poetic plays illustrates multi-pictures to form the theatrical script. In the plays of Ba-Kathir, readers and critics find traditional poetry, blank verse, and free verse. Ba-Kathir's plays influenced many Arab writers, so they wrote their plays after benefiting from Ba-Kathir's poetic plays. It has been shown that the poet-dramatist, Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir, used to write his plays and literary works with deep awareness, proving that he is a master of the mechanics and rules of dramatic artistry among the pioneers of Arabic poetic drama in the contemporary age.

Recommendation

Ali Ahmad Ba-Kathir has produced more than seventy literary works in the different genres of literature. Appropriately, it is strongly recommended to continue academic and scientific studies and investigations on the literary works of Ba-Kathir to put him in a real, valid, and honest rank among the best literary figures of the Arabic nation.

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ⁱ After revising some Arabic sources, I found the name is written in two ways but the meaning can be understood differently. Humam and Hammam [هُمام] [هُمام], however, I preferred the second expression because it can be used as a name of a person. The second is used as an adjective more than a noun.