

Vol 6 Issue 7 April 2017

ISSN No : 2249-894X

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*Monthly Multidisciplinary  
Research Journal*

*Review Of  
Research Journal*

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## USE OF POETIC VERSES IN ALI AHMAD BAKATHIR'S DRAMA

**Abdul Kuddus**

Ph.D. Research Scholar, JJT University, Jhunjhu, Rajasthan.

### ABSTRACT

**I**n the countable sense, a verse is formally a single metrical line in a poetic composition. However, verse has come to represent any division or grouping of words in a poetic composition, with groupings traditionally having been referred to as stanzas. It has arranged with a metrical rhythm which is able to be used for the various levels of speech. The neo-classical poet Ahmad Shawqi Bek was by no means the first to use verse in Arabic drama. Shawqi turned to use verse in drama much later in his career, during the last four years of his life when his reputation as a supreme Arabic poet was still at its highest, both in Egypt and in the whole Arab world, whereas Ali Ahmad



Bakthir was also a well-known dramatist of the Arab world. He also came across the plays of Ahmad Shawqi in Hijaz and was immediately attracted to his arrangement of poetry. It was Shawqi's influence that led him to write his first verse drama, 'Humam aw Fi Bilad al-Ahqaf' (In the Land of the Dunes). Another one is 'Rumiyu wa Julyit' translated from Shakespeare's drama 'Romeo and Juliet' which is an experimental type of Arabic verse, al-shi'r al-mursal (blank verse), a metrical form which became the principal style of 'modernist' Arabic verse after the Second World War. His most famous verse drama is 'Ikhnatun wa Nafirtiti' ('Akhenaton and Nefertiti'). Besides these dramas 'Al-watn al-akbar' (The great Home) is also the famous drama where he use verses of poetry.

**KEYWORDS:** Metrical, Rhythm, Verse, Reputation, Supreme.

### INTRODUCTION :-

Ali Ahmad Bakathir (1910-1969) was one of Egypt's most famous playwrights during the forties and fifties. His ability to create enormous works proves his rich awareness not only of the Arabic and Islamic literature but also of the universal cultures and civilisations. From his early life, Bakathir is affected by his surroundings. Bakathir has been influenced by Shakespeare in different ways: first, by translating Romeo and Juliet and Twelfth Night; second, by using Shakespeare's way in dramatic manipulation as in Ikhnaton and Nefertiti.

Ali Ahmad Bakthir was born in Indonesia in December 21st, 1910 for Yemeni parents from Hadramout. He came back to his homeland Hadramout when he was 10 years old together with his father. He settled in Seiyoun, a city in Hadramout with his half brothers and sisters and studied Islamic theology and sciences and

Arabic language. The society of Seiyoun, especially the family of Bakathir, was fond of poetry and this is one of the reasons that encouraged Bakathir to compose poetry early at the age of thirteen. His father died in February 3rd, 1925 while Ali Ahmad Bakathir was at the age of fifteen and he composed an elegy poem for the death of his father of more than seventy lines. He studied and worked in some educational institutions in Seiyoun and participated in some cultural and educational activities. After the death of his beloved wife, Bakathir was full of sorrow and sadness so he left to Aden in 1932. He stayed in Aden for few months where he met the famous poet Mohammad Loqman and he composed some poems which were collected and published later entitled the Magic of Aden and the Pride of Yemen. Then, Bakathir left Aden to Somalia, Ethiopia and after that travelled to Hijazz' Saudi Arabia' where he wrote his first poetic social play Humam aw fi Al-Ahqaf and composed some poems later collected and published. Bakathir left Saudi Arabia to Egypt and settled there to study English literature at Fuad the First University' now Cairo University'. In 1936, during his study in the university, he translated Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet into Arabic in the form of free verses and two years later he wrote his poetic play in the form of free verses Ikhnatun wa Nefertiti. After graduating from the university, Bakathir worked as an English teacher for fourteen years then he was transferred to the ministry of Althaqafahwa Al-Irshad Al-Qawmi 'ministry of culture where he worked till he dies in November 10th, 1969. Bakathir got married to an Egyptian lady in 1943 and got the Egyptian citizenship in August 22nd, 1952. Bakathir wrote six novels, more than sixty plays, four collections of poetry, a short story, literary translation and critical articles.

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

Use of poetic verse in Arabic drama was introduced in modern Arabic literature through the works of the prince of poets, Ahmad Shawqi. The culmination of the neoclassical verses which are used in five versified plays written by Shawqi in the last two decades of his life. In fact, he had made an attempt to write a verse play as early as 1893, when he published the first version of his Ali-Bey al-Kabir, however he completely revised this play. Ahmad Shawqi was a prolific poet, he has written more than any of his successive writers in the field of verse drama and poetry. He is the pioneer of modern Arabic verse dramas.

There are six plays of Ali Ahmad Bakathir where he uses poetic verses. They are Humam Aw fi bilad Al-Ahqaf, Rumiya wa Julyit, Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti, Al-watn al-akbar, Qasr al-hudz and A'ashiq min hadramaut. Among these drama Humam Aw fi bilad Al-Ahqaf, Rumiya wa Julyit, and Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti are most famous. The aim of his writing this kind of dramas is to discover the possibilities for poetry in Arabic drama. For this reason, comments here will be concentrated on Bakathir's evolution of al shi'r al Mursal, blank verse, his perfection of it in Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti and his discarding it for prose after the same play. While the aim stated above was not a conscious one in the writing of Humam, it is deliberate in the other two plays, the translation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti. This aim is nowhere stated explicitly in the critical writings of Bakathir. But when one realises that he wrote Humam Aw fi bilad Al-Ahqaf under the influence of Ahmad Shauqi, did the translation of Romeo and Juliet as a result of 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. Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti is the triumph of this search.

### Use of Poetic Verses in the Dramas of Ali Ahmad Bakathir

The first drama of Bakathir where he uses poetic verse was Humam Aw fi bilad Al-Ahqaf. It was published in Cairo in 1934, but it has been written in al-Tayf two years before this time. In a long introduction, Bakathir introduces to his Egyptian audience the country of his youth, Hadramawt. The plot of the play is weak. It hinges

on the restless character of the hero, Humam. He is a member of a group of young men and women who declare that 'the old must die and the new must live'<sup>1</sup>. They are opposed by a group of older men led by Wali Allah. This opposition manifests itself in Humam's wish to marry his fiancée, Husna. He is forced to flee the country when he can no longer live with this opposition. He returns secretly and marries Husna, 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.

Humam Aw fi bilad Al-Ahqaf is like a series of poems rather than a play. There are places where only one character speaks in a whole scene. This is in Act VI, scene ii, a part of which is quoted below to illustrate the chance this play offers Bakathir 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. His poetic play Humam Aw fi bilad Al-Ahqaf was inspired by his dissatisfaction with life in underdeveloped Hadramawt and the ignorance of Arab women; on his own admission it could only loosely be called drama, as it was deficient in action, characterization and dialogue. Here are some lines from his verse used in the drama Humam Aw fi bilad Al-Ahqaf:

تجعلها الرياح في  
تلعابها أهدافها انهن يبين  
أو كقرون حاتم لآل  
أرض علي قرني هفي مليز عمون<sup>2</sup>

From the above lines Bakathir uses here 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 license.

Another drama of Ali Ahmad Bakathir was Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti which is considered as poetic drama where he uses blank verses in this drama. This play takes its story from that of the heretic king Amenophis IV (1370-1352 B.C.) who is better known as Akhnatun. He tried to challenge the power of the priests of Amun-Ra but failed in his attempt.<sup>3</sup> The historical characters are reproduced in the play with little or no alternations. There is Amenophis III, the father of Akhnatun, 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 Akhnatun's main support in his struggle. If Akhnatun had listened to Horemhab about using force to subdue the opposition of the priests of Amun-Ra to his revolution, he could have carried it through. But violence was against his ideal of peace of love.

The play is in four Acts, each act having its own title which is discussed briefly as follows:

Act I is entitled 'The resurrection' which deals with the substitution of Akhnatun's beloved Nifirtiti for his dead wife Tadu. When Akhnatun has been mourning his dead wife for sometime then his mother gets a girl brought from the priests of Amun-Ra to resurrect her with music and songs. Nifirtiti comes to his life and Akhnatun takes her for his dead Tadu. Act II of this drama is entitled as Faith, Akhnatun and his girlfriend are very much in love and they are soon able to drop the pretence that Nifirtiti is Tadu resurrected. Then Akhnatun starts to talk about moving his capital from Thebes in order to escape the immediate influence of the priests of Amun-Ra and to develop his own religious idea.

Act III is entitled in the city of Horizon-Akhitatun, It is the name of new capital which Akhnatun sets up. This part of the play is the most dramatic in its movement and succession of action. Here Bakathir shows his writing skill by using the economy of language and action which is hardly equaled any of his other plays.

Act IV is entitled as Death; The act opens with Akhnatun on his death-bed. It's too late now he realizes

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, Bakathir says that he quoting from what is written in letters of gold at Akhnatun's feet in his place of burial.

Bakathir uses his poetic verse in Act I where he used the blank verses. These lines are used as irregular mode.

طالما كلت تتسني قظ في الاسرار فتكتمل فسها  
و تقب ل ما بين عيني في رفق حتي لا توقظني  
و اسراقها الطر فحين افحين فلمح فيشفتها ارتعش اصبي  
-و قد اختل سداحلوي من مخد عجدته السيطا<sup>4</sup>

(As long as she wakes up in silence, she humbles herself  
And my eye is twitching so that it does not awaken me  
And threw it out at one time, and there was a saliva in my lip  
And he stole the candy from his grandmother's room)

Rumiyu wa Julyi is another important drama of Ali Ahmad Bakathir, although Romeo and Juliet originally written by William Shakespeare early in his career but it has translated by renowned Arabic dramatist Ali Ahmad Bakathir. The translation of Bakathir of this drama can be placed in the second period of translation form in Arabic literature. The first period of the translation form of Shakespeare's drama Romeo and Juliet in the form of Arabic was started with second half of the 19th century by Najib Al-Haddad which was marked defective. On the other hand Ali Ahmad Bakathir uses the five single root meters, thus producing a mixture of blank run on verse and free verse where the paragraph and the lines are the unit of sense.

It is story about two young star-crossed lovers whose deaths ultimately reconcile their feuding families. Romeo and Juliet belong to a tradition of tragic romances stretching back to antiquity. Shakespeare's use of his poetic dramatic structure are translated by Bakathir which are especially effects such as switching between comedy and tragedy to heighten tension, his expansion of minor characters, and his use of sub-plots to embellish the story that has been praised as an early sign of his dramatic skill. The play ascribes different poetic forms to different characters, sometimes changing the form as the character develops. Romeo, for example, grows more adept at the sonnet over the course of the play.

Here some blank verses which are translated from the English by Bakathir such as:

سداق سداحلويث علي كميلي جاز ما استطعت  
فلمي يد قمن عمرن فسي ملي اذن لي ان اطي ل  
روي و الذل كلناوي قد كان لجوي تبعلوا  
-وهي - تلاكالمية - كل تلهز و جا مخلصه<sup>5</sup>

I will be brief, for my short date of breath  
Is not as long as is tedious tale.  
Romeo, there dead, was husband to that Juliet  
And she, there dead, that Romeo's faithful wife.

Here, Bakathir uses the five single foot meters through the above mentioned lines, thus he produced a mixture of blank run-on verse and free verse where the paragraph, and not the line is the unit of sense.

### Criticism on uses of Poetic Verse in Bakathir's Drama

The great critic of the Arab S. Moreh criticizes the blank verses used in the dramas of Ali Ahmad Bakathir. According to him, Bakathir was the only dramatist who applied one metre in verse throughout his work with

regular length of lines. After his experimenting with al-nazm al murshal al muntaliq wa'l nazm al-hurr through his translation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Bakathir arrived at the conclusion that line of two hemistiches with their prescribed number of feet and the methods of mixing meters are not the ideal techniques in drama. Therefore, in his original works *Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti* published in 1938, he employed only one metre with an irregular number of feet in the lines. Yet he still called this method of versification *shir al-murshal* because it was rhymless.

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion about the uses of poetic verses in the particular dramas of Ali Ahmad Bakathir, we have conclude that though he was famous in writing the prose drama although he had a well try to write verse drama to contribute Arabic literature through a different way of writing. Perhaps most important to Bakathir was his desire for realism in his plays. In coming to this decision Bakathir recognizes the use of poetry for drama by the great English dramatist, Shakespeare and more recently W.B. Yeats. According to Bakathir, no playwright of any note has successfully use poetry for drama except Yeats. With this reasoning Bakathir concluded that poetry may be used for opera but it has to be abandoned when it comes to realistic drama.

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