Chapter-V

Analytical Study of Tawfiq al Hakim and Ahmed Shawqi

Al-Dakîm was one of the favourite authors of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had come to power during the revolution of 1952, and he was perhaps the major Egyptian cultural figure in the following decades. The enormous process of social and political change in Egypt provided a rich backdrop for the development of a new tradition of theatre, and the cultural apparatus of the government provided abundant funding for that process. Theatre was apparently regarded as one of the few allowable outlets for the expression of public concerns and doubts that were rigorously controlled elsewhere. In retrospect, the two decades after 1952 have come to be regarded as a kind of “golden era” for not merely Egyptian drama but Arabic drama as a whole. Virtually every aspect of the theatrical community—the cultural apparatus of the state, a relatively large cluster of playwrights, a cadre of producers and directors (many of them trained in Europe and, most notably, the Soviet Union), and a group of well-qualified and involved critics—seemed to be working toward common goals. Beginning in the 1950s and ’60s with Nu’mân Āshîr, who used a series of plays to present the Egyptian public with insightful analyses of its own class structure and values, a series of dramatists, among them Sa’d al-Dîn Wahbah, Mâmûd Diyâb, and Alî Sâlim, penned in the colloquial dialect of Cairo dramatic texts that were highly successful on stage. Another contributor to this rich period in Egyptian theatrical life was Yûsuf Idrîs, whose celebrated play Al-Farâfîr (1964; The Farfoors, or The Flipflap) combined elements of traditional comic forms of dramatic presentation with such Brechtian effects as the presence of an “author” as a stage character and the use of theatre-in-the-round staging.195 Alfred Faraj took a somewhat different course, invoking tales and incidents from history and folklore (and especially from The Thousand and One Nights) in order to illustrate contemporary political and social realities. Faraj chose to follow al-Dakîm in selecting as his language medium a more literary level of Arabic than that adopted by his fellow dramatists and yet one that was readily adaptable to acting onstage. This gave him the additional advantage

of affording his plays a broader audience throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Even within the less-fertile environment of the 1980s and '90s, a younger generation of Egyptian dramatists made notable contributions to the genre. Of these, Muammad Salmawi and Lenin al-Ramlī were the playwrights whose works were most often performed.

These patterns of development in Egypt were echoed elsewhere in the Arab world, albeit within differing time frames. Following the early stages that have been sketched above, further developments were, more often than not, tied to the processes of nation building that followed the achievement of independence during the 1950s and '60s. In Syria Sa'dallāh Wannūs made use of his strong interest in the theory of drama, and particularly in the relationship of stage to audience, to compose a series of works that made important contributions to the development of experimental theatre in the Arab world. Staged in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War of June 1967, *aflat samar min ajl al-khāmis min ḍuzayrān* (1968; “Soirée for the 5th of June”) was a devastating commentary on the Arab defeat and on the Arab leaders who for several days had used the media to claim that victory was at hand (leading, almost automatically, to the play’s being banned). *Mughāmarat ra's al-mamlūk Jābir* (1971; “The Adventure of Mamlūk Jābir’s Head”) and *Al-Malik huwa al-malik* (1977; “The King’s the King”) continued his ongoing experiments with theatre dynamics through what he termed *masra‘ al-tasyīs* (“theatre of politicization”). Because Wannūs was such a crucially important figure, other Syrian and Lebanese dramatists of the latter half of the 20th century operated somewhat in his shadow, but Muammad al-Māḥūṭ, Dīdam Maḍfuḍ, and MAMDūD DADWAN wrote significant plays that were successfully performed at theatre festivals.\(^{196}\)

The lot of the Palestinian literary community, which reflected the turmoil that affected the larger community throughout the second half of the 20th century, was such that the promotion of a dramatic tradition proved extremely difficult and often impossible. However, there were plays that reflected the trials and conflicts that were part of daily life, such as Muammad Baṣṭū’s *Thawrat al-Zanj* (1970; “The Zanj Revolt”) and the poet Samīq al-Qāsim’s *Qaraqāsh* (1970). The tightly controlled circumstances in which the Palestinians lived their lives also led to the appearance of one of the most interesting and creative theatre troupes in the Middle East, the Ḍakawāṭ troupe

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(named for the ِdakawātī, or traditional storyteller), which emerged from an earlier group known as Al-Balālīn (“Balloons”). An itinerant troupe established in 1977, ِdakawātī toured villages and performed its own plays in a variety of public spaces through the turn of the 21st century.

Tunisia and Morocco provide some of the best examples of a thriving theatre tradition. The Tunisian writer ِIzz al-Dīn al-Madanī, one of the most fruitful contributors to the history of modern Arabic drama during the 20th century, composed a series of plays that were both experimental and popular; they included Thawrat ِdāār ib al-imār (1971; “The Donkey Owner’s Revolt”) and Dīwān al-Zanj (1973; “The Zanj Collection”). Moroccan theatre was represented at the turn of the 21st century primarily by the multitaled ِdāyyīb al-jiddīqi, who adapted textual materials culled from the heritage of the past, as in Dīwān Sīdī ِAbd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhib (1966; “The Collection of Sīdī Abd al-Raḥman al-Majdhib”), and produced them with his own troupe, often casting himself in a role in which he would exhibit a unique comic flair.

The theatre movement in Iraq was also constricted by political circumstances, but the dramatic tradition continued even so through the 1990s; an Iraqi play won first prize at the prestigious Tunisian Carthage Festival in 1999, for instance. Most prominent among 20th-century Iraqi playwrights was Yūsuf al-ِAnī, whose Anā ummak yā Shākir (1955; “Shākir, I’m Your Mother”) graphically portrays the misery of the Iraqi people in the period before the downfall of the monarchy in the revolution of 1958. Elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf, theatre remained, where it existed at all, a very young cultural phenomenon, and efforts in the early 21st century to foster a dramatic tradition vied with the popularity of forms of entertainment readily available via television, CDs, DVDs, and the Internet.

Arabic drama seemed likely to remain a problematic genre in the 21st century, but one fulfilling an important cultural function. By daring to raise issues of political and social importance in a public forum and by testing the limits of the local and the pan-Arabic worlds through experiments with language, it showed signs of illustrating many of the larger areas of concern within the Arabic-speaking countries. While the status of drama and its practitioners

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varied widely across the region, it remained an invaluable outlet for popular sentiment and creative energy.197

Regarding Tawfiq al-Hakim it can be stated that his father led him to see a performance of Shuhada' al-Gharam, the Arabic version of Romeo and Juliet, in the provincial town of Dusuq which left indelible mark on his impressionable mind and to which he traces back his interest in the theatre. This memorable experience developed in him a keen interest in the theatre while he was still a schoolboy. After finishing school, he left for Cairo to join the Law College. During his stay in Cairo he kept going to the Opera House whenever he could afford the price of a ticket, to see his favourite Juri ‘Abyad perform the leading role in the Arabic translations of Oedipus Rex, Orthello and Louis XI, from which he says he could recite from memory whole pages to his fellow theatre fans.198

This routine further whetted his interest in drama and the theatre and eventually inspired him to try his hand at play writing in 1918-19. His first venture was Dayf al-Thaqil (The Unwelcome Guest), a satire allegory in which the British occupation of Egypt was specially targeted.

In 1924 he left Egypt for Paris (France) at the behest of his parents in order to pursue higher legal studies. But, instead of taking interest in his studies, he immersed himself totally in acquiring the knowledge of classical and modern European literature in general and that of the French stage in particular. His refined penchant for drama and the theatre led him to embark on his sixth play, ‘Ali Baba, in 1925. He managed to complete it even during his sojourn in Paris in 1926. This play was produced on the stage by the ‘Ukasha Brothers in the same year, while al-Hakim was still in Paris. In France he got influenced by Sophocles, Ibsen, Pirandello, Maeterlinck, Bernard Shaw, Georges Pitoeff, Andre Gide, Wilde, Moliere, Goethe etc.

Though he stayed in France for four years, he could not complete his doctorate in Law because of his deep involvement in theatrical activity. Disgusted at his failure his father ordered him to return to Egypt at once. This unexpected order might have upset al-Hakim no end, but he

198 Ahmad, Maqsood; The Beginnings And Development of Drama in Arabic, New Delhi, 1981, P- 129
had no alternative except to obey it. So, he readily decided to say goodbye to his lovely France and came back home to join his disturbed family in 1928.199

On his return when he took stock of theatrical activity in Egypt, he found that the Egyptian theatre which was once full of activity, was almost dead and several troupes including the Ukasha Brothers had ceased functioning. He also came to know that ‘his close friend Mustafa of Sulayman’s Ring, had deserted play writing and in despair moved to alchemy. According to al-Hakim, there were two reasons for this such as firstly the squabbles had struggle for power between the various political parties, which made politics and political journalism occupy the forefront of people’s attention to the exclusion of the arts and secondly the growing world economic crisis, with its impact on the Egyptian economy.

This was the situation when al-Hakim decided to resume writing plays on his return from France. He wrote five plays one after another. These included Khuruj min al-Janna (Expulsion from Paradise, 1928); Bad al-Mawt or Sirr al-Muntahira (After Death or The Suicide’s Secret, 1929, staged by the National Troupe in 1937) al-Zammar (The Piper, 1932). The first two were in classical or literary Arabic, and the other three were written in the Egyptian colloquial. A Bullet in the Heart was actually written for an amateur society known as the Society for the Promotion of Acting, but unfortunately, that society did not survive long enough to put it on the stage. So, al-Hakim had to content himself with writing plays – often short, one act plays for publication in newspapers.

The above five dramas were followed by the celebrated ‘Ahl al-Kahf (The Sleepers in the Cave) based on the Quranic version of the Christian legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Next to it was Shahrazad which consists of seven scenes and is inspired by the Arabian Nights.

Al-Hakim’s next important play was Muhammad (1936). It is a dramatization of the Prophet’s life. The play which comprises more than ninety scenes, was written only to be read and not to be acted.

In 1939 al-Hakim wrote a three-act play Praxa or The Problem of Government. In it the failure of the democratic government in Egypt was indirectly attacked by the author.

199 ibid, P-131
Al-Hakim’s yet another popular play was *Pygmalion* which was written in 1942.

When Pygmalion marries Galatea, in al-Hakim’s play, the artist in him reasserts and the call to art eclipses the love for his wife. His devotion to art, to the exclusion of all else, including his wife, that may come in the way of his full realization, causes him to neglect Galatea who then falls in love with Narcissus and runs away with him.

*Praxa* was followed by *Sulayman al-Hakim* (*Solomon the Wise*, 1943). The play contains details provided in the Quran about supernatural powers, such as his knowledge of the language of arts and birds like the hoopoe and his command of the genie.

It may also be stated that the play produced by al-Hakim between 1918/19 and 1949 can be divided into two main categories such as social plays and abstract or intellectual plays. In his social plays al-Hakim deals with social themes, criticizes the lives of individuals and satirizes corruption of politics.

It was only the literary strategy of Tawfiq al-Hakim that enabled him to introduce drama as a form of serious literature in Arabic when it was not even considered on a par with poetry or even the newly introduced prose genres such as the novel or the essay. Shawqi’s plays, though interesting, were classified by litterateurs as good poetry and not drama.

Starting from a near vacuum, al-Hakim first developed the art of dialogue in a manner as to make its reading accepted as a part of thought-provoking literature. He then went a step further by employing dialogue in a broader sense than that required by the restraints of the stage— not as a dramatic means but as an end in itself, which he demonstrates with remarkable flair in *Muhammad*, the biography of the Prophet.

In the preface to Muhammad, entitled al-Bayan, he says that he tried to project events as they happened free from the interpretation of biographers and commentators... and decided upon the direct method of the dialogue so that the readers could visualize the events as if they were taking place in their presence without letting any gap, not even the gap of time, to come between them and the events. He therefore lets the historical events speak for themselves.

“All I did was to mould the matter as carefully as a jeweller mounts a precious stone “sans embellishment and in a fine frame that is barely visible but sets off the jewel.”
Perhaps the delicate nature of the biography of the Prophet, which he thought should best be kept out of controversy, induced him to adopt the direct method of the dialogue.

The development of this purely intellectual and objective style enabled al-Hakim to extend it to other plays and even to the short story and the novel. ‘Audat al-Ruh, for example, begins with a dialogue which enables the author to introduce all his characters within a short space.

Yusuf al-Sharuni observes that Arabic plays prior to al-Hakim did not depend basically on the dialogue. Plays of entertainment depended upon jokes and caricatures and on the ability of the players to demonstrate and act and the social plays upon stirring scenes and situations fundamentally melodramatic.

Al-Hakim’s preference for dialogue as the means of portraying events without the writer’s direct intervention was further expanded when he declared that he wrote Ahl al-Khaf, Shaharzad and Pygmalion to be read and not acted. This brings us to his theory about plays for reading only or abstract or intellectual plays which he describes in the preface to Pygmalion.

Muhammad mandur suggests that the idea of staging was, nevertheless, present in al-Hakim’s mind as he divided his plays into acts and scenes and defined the time and place of each action. Al-Hakim, no doubt, was the first Arab playwright to get his plays published before staging them. Otherwise publishers would accept scripts of only such plays as had been successfully staged, e.g. Shawqi’s Majnun Laila and Cleopatra. Al-Hakim thus created a reading public for the drama, independent of, and not necessarily linked to the stage and the precedent set in his case made it possible for dramatist to serialise or publish entire plays before there performances.

Moreover, when Tawfiq al-Hakim returned from France, he found that some theatrical groups like Al-Akasha and munira al-Mahdia had ceased functioning. He thus wrote for a theatre that did not exist. Scheduled performances, to be staged at fixed times, wear not impending factors.

As the flourishing European theatre was based on firm foundations laid by the Greeks, al-Hakim thought it was necessary to build up the Arab theatre. Which had no tradition or history, on Greek roots. He was especially inspired by Greek tragedies to deal with sus lofty themes as
the predicament of man confronted with forces he neither controls nor understands, raised by the conflict between man and time, man and place and man and art, but in the case of al-Hakim it is man who invariably succumbs.

Audat al shabab (back to youth) deals with the conflict of man versus time. An old man is given his youth, thanks to the progress in medicine. Al-hakim discusses the problems arising from such a change till finally the hero prefers to go back to his old age and retain his place in the group.

In al Rihla ila al-Ghad (journey into tomorrow, 1957) two people take off in a comet to a far-off planet and return back to earth after three centuries. Meanwhile, life has changed on the earth and all is mechanical. The consequences dealt with are many, such as boredom and miser.

Sulaiman al-Hakim (1943) shows that sulaiman for all his wisdom and wealth cannot win the love of the queen of Sheba, Bilqis, even though he calls the extra-terrestrial jinn to help.

Al-malik oudib (king Oedipus, 1949) deals with the concepts of truth and actuality. It is the story of a king wanting to kill his son out of fear and superstition, but the son eventually kills the father and marries his mother in ignorance of the relationship. Truth is overbearing and when the son finds out, he is compelled by remorse to inflict blindness upon himself, sight having failed to help him discern the truth.

The central theme of Ahl al-kahf, al-Hakim’s first abstract play, is time and man’s fight against it. It also deals with death and resurrection. Al-Hakim portrays the conflict of three persons awakening to life after a three hundred years’ sleep in a cave. In the darkness of the cave, Yamlikha and the two ministers marnush and mishliniyya, whom he had conducted there for shelter, wake up after slumber. Yamlikha ventures forth to buy some food and discovers that three centuries have elapsed since he and his companions had gone off to sleep. His strange attire and the unfamiliar coins that he tries to use cause suspicion and the populace follows him to the cave with torches and the scene ends in a blaze of light. The tragedy of the situation dawns on yamlikha with the realization that though the sun is high up, it wends away from the cave and sends no light or heat within.
The shepherd yamlikha, in his simplicity, is more sensitive to the change than the others: he realizes that their world has been dead for centuries, and thus encompasses the tragedy."

What we see is another world. We have no connection with this one... We should not remain here a moment longer."

The home loving mamush is not so easily convinced. In his view life is the dominant factor and the passage of time immaterial. Undaunted, he goes forth to learn that his son has been dead for two hundred years. Liee takes on a new dimension. Devoid of the past, devoid of tie or reason, it ceases to have substance and, delinked from time and age, it fades away.

Mishliniyya resists the submission to fatality. His love for pariska, his own time persecutor's daughter, is now directed to her descendant, whose name and resemblance she bears-the governor's daughter. He now conforms to the changed why of living and is blissfully aware only of the waking moments and not of the long and weary sleep.

But Mishliniyya too despairs of life when Pariska does not express her love for him and prefers to get back to the cave. When Pariska finally makes up her mind that she loves him and joins him, it is too late. Mishliniyya had been without food for a month and though the heart can conquer time, the body cannot.

In dealing with this theme, al-Hakim has put to superb use the interplay of light and darkness, signifying as it were hope and futility, life and death. The dialogues are uniformly good and in certain situations, as in the wooing of pariska by mishliniyya, masterful.

In Ahl al-Kahf, al-Hakim deals not merely with the ordinary changes brought about by the passage of time, but by man's unsuccessful struggle against the most significant aspect of existence; that it is time-bound and its extinction inevitable. It also depicts man's surrender to the seemingly vague but unassailable truth.

In shahaizad, written in 1934 a year after Ahl al-Kahf, al-Hakim raises the question whether it is possible for man to live only for the sake of reason and intellect and dedicate his life to knowledge, away from the call of the heart and body.
The story of shaharzad in Alf Laila wa Laila provided al-Hakim with the base to examine this problem. While many writers have dealt with this story in the light of modern psychology and culture, al-Hakim does not go into the details of the story itself but takes it as a prologue with which the readers are supposed to be familiar.

The play begins with the last stage of shahriyar's cure. The heroine shaharzad, with her tales lasting a thousand and one nights, has wrought a miracle by weaning shahriyar away from his obsession of flesh and blood to a sufic stance which makes him seek knowledge to unravel the secrets of the unknown. He says:

"I am fed up with bodies, fed up with them."

"I do not want to feel, I want to know."

Shahriyar, in his new zeal for knowledge, orders a virgin to be slain, al-though such slayings were practised earlier only to satisfy his lust and pleasure. He professes disdain for the warmth and love of the human flesh and seeks knowledge and wisdom, be it through a magician or an escape from his surroundings. Unable to soar with his fancies, he remains, much to his mortification, suspended between the earth and the sky, the ethereal and the real, jealousy and tolerance, rejection and acceptance and so in a state of confusion and be wilderment. He cries out in anguish:

"Always this earth, nothing but the earth. In this prison which rotates, we do not go forward do not progress or go back, neither rise nor fall. We only go round. Everything goes round."

Does he want to achieve the wisdom that he attributes to shaharzad, which she has acquired within the narrow confines of her domain while it eludes him in his relentless search for it; or the knowledge of the human race or the secrets of the universe that she, not yet twenty, has mastered? Is it that by acquiring this wisdom he wishes to prove his superiority over her black lover with his sensuality or his vazir Qamr, large-hearted and generous, who loves her?

Shahriyar in his own fashion answers these queries and yet hit goal remains to be properly identified.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Tawfiq al-Hakim, Shaharzad, P-53
Shaharzad: Do you want to know who I am?

Shahriyar: Yes.

Shaharzad: (smiling) I am a beautiful body. Am I anything but a beautiful body?

Shahriyar: (shouting) Blast the beautiful body.

Shaharzad: I am a great heart. Am I anything but a great heart?

Shahriyar: Blast your heart.

Shaharzad: Can you deny that you loved my body once? And loved me with your heart once, too?

Shahriyar: All that has gone. Gone! (speaking to himself) Today I am a miserable man.

Shaharzad is the heroine of the play that bears her name and is supposed to play in it the most significant role. In a subtle manner and in accordance with the demand of the occasion she shocks, mocks, loves and tantalizes but hardly ever surrenders. She personifies to each one of her lovers a reflection of his own attributes, the sensual, the generous and the wise.

In accordance with al-Hakim’s professed preferences, however, the man Shahriyar assumes the more active part. He, the unhappy one, also reflects all these aspects. Something he is the pure and abstract intellect, something a body wanting to caress, sometimes a heart wanting niche, he hesitates between his ambitions and decree of life.

“What is the use of the rest of my life?” he asks in anguish,

“I have enjoyed everything and forsaken everything.”

Shahriyar’s failure to forsake his human susceptibilities is apparent when upon seeing Shaharzad in the arms of the black lover he wonders if she still loves him. He however, has become wiser; he notices that the pure exterior of Shaharzad’s eye is a deception and hides a hard core. Shahriyar’s mental conflict ends in the victory of life over knowledge.

Another intellectual play Pygmalion, portrays some of al-Hakim’s inner conflicts. At the time of writing it (1942), he was getting on in years and yet was not prepared to admit that he
needed a sympathetic and understanding companion. His antagonism to women was publicised so much that he probably preferred to continue the anti-woman stance. In the name of art and the need of executing it away from the woes of marital ties, al-Hakim could not tolerate their presence in close proximity, 181

In the Greek legend, Pygmalion the sculptor creates a beautiful statue of a woman—Galathea, and falls in love with her beauty. He asks the gods to breathe life into the statue. When his wish is granted Pygmalion marries Galathea.

To the original characters in the Greek play, al-Hakim has added two more, Narcissus and Ismin both from Greek mythology. Narcissus. Narcissus is a conceited youth, forever admiring the reflection of his own beauty in the waters of the pool eventually to be punished for his vanity by being consigned as a flower which can even now be seen by the water-sides Ismin, the other character, is a young woman knows for her virtue.

When Pygmalion marries Galathea, in al-Hakim play, the artist in him reasserts and the call to art eclipses the love for his wife. His devotion to art, to the exclusion of all else, including his wife, that may come in the way of his full realization, causes him to neglect Galathea who then falls in love with Narcissus and runs away with him.

Galathea, in her flight with narcissus, seeks to establish that a woman loves a man and not just the artist whose only concern is his art. 182 she, however, returns to the artist, an adoring wife, but fails to move him. She has shed her frivolity and has come to love the artist in her husband. He symbolizes for her not merely the creator: Do the gods create unblemished and eternal beings of perfect beauty? This adulation and love bore the artist.

In her desire to conform, Galatea performs domestic duties seeing her sweeping the house, the artist in Pygmalion is enraged and his romantic concept of her shattered. He needs the perfection of the image and not the reality of a living being. In his disappointment, he beseeches the gods to make galathea a statue again. Not content with this he has to shatter the statue and to his sadistic satisfaction with the very broom that brought about his rage. Thus al-Hakim underlines the victory of art over life and the dispensability of all that distracts.
Respect for al-Hakim transcends the Arab world. His works have been translated into a number of languages, Western and Eastern, more than the works of any other Arab writer. He is no longer just a literary giant or the greatest Arab dramatist after whom a leading theatre has been named in Cairo; He has become an institution whose literary efforts have become a legend in his lifetime.

Born 1898, al Hakim is the last survivor of the older generation of leading writers, and remains as active as ever, as author, and, in person, as a direct cultural influence. His status as a man of letters, and as a dramatist, in particular, together with his reputation abroad, are briefly discussed in the introduction. After studying in Cairo and Paris He worked as a public prosecutor in the provinces, and as an adviser in the ministry of education, so gaining a wide knowledge of rural and urban Egypt. His first Playlet was originally written in French, when he was a student in Paris. He is voluminous author of novels, short stories, essays, and plays: of the latter, if we enumerate individually his many one-act plays, which are mainly on social Problems, there are over fifty. Apart from the works mentioned in the introduction, his more recent dramatic works include al-Safqa (The Bank of anxiety) (1967), a work in alternate dramatic and narrative sections, that is, in the same form as William Faulkner's Requiem for a nun, for which al Hakim invented the portmanteau Name masriwaya ('masrahiyya,' play,' plus riwaya' 'novel' ), an English equivalent of which would be plovel. His autobiographical work, sijn al 'umr (the prison of age) came out in 1964.

Ughniyat al-mawt (song of death) is the final item (pp.761-85) in a collection of twenty-one short plays forming a large volume entitled Masrah al-mtjtama.201

In the course of the time this volume took to prepare, the two plays of Hakim which are included here, have already appeared elsewhere in different English translations. Song of death appears as 'death song,' translated by G.W.R. Long, with a preface by Anthony McDermott, in new middle east, X1, (June 1972) and as 'the song of death' in fate of a Cockroach: four plays of freedom, translated by Denys Johnson-davies

Here is an example of his drama:

201 Maktabat al-Adab, (Cairo 1950) P.14
SONG OF DEATH

Cast:

ASAKIR: a widowed peasant woman
MABRUKA: her sister-in-law
SIMEIDA: son of Mabruka
ILWAN: son of Asakir

A peasant hut in an upper Egyptian village. ASAKIR and MABRUKA, both dressed in black, are sitting near the entrance, with heads bowed in silence. Close by them a calf and a kid are seen eating herbage and dried clover. The whistle of a train is heard.

MABRUKA. (raising her head). There's the train.

ASAKIR. (without moving). Do you think he has come on it?

MABRUKA. Didn't he say he would, in his letter? Sheikh isnawi, the school teacher, read it out for us yesterday.

ASAKIR. Are you sure you've told no one at all that he's my son?

MABRUKA. Do you think I've gone mad? Your son Ilwan died when he was a mere child of two. He was drowned in the sluice of the water wheel. The whole village knows that.

ASAKIR. But they no longer believe it.

MABRUKA. Who are "they"? The Tahawis?

ASAKIR. Didn't your son Simeida tell you what he heard in the market the other day?

MABRUKA. No, What did he hear?

ASAKIR. He heard someone say to a group of people "Either the Azizes have no more men left among them or else they're concealing man in order to take revenge, a man closer
to the victim Them his nephew Simeida.” And who but a man’s own son can be any closer then his nephew?

**MABRUKA.** Oh yes: Simeida told me about that. If it hadn’t been for this rumor he would never have been able to told up his head in the village.

**ASAKIR.** Well, let them know now that the dead man’s son is still alive. We’ve no fear for him now that he’s grown man. I’m not the one who is afraid now. It’s them that fear keeps awake of a night. Hurry up, train, and ring him soon. I’ve waited a long time—seventeen years, I’ve counted hour by hour. Seventeen whole years and I’ve milked them out of Time’s udders, drop after drop, with all the hard tugging you’d need if you were milking a cow that’s far gone in her age.

**MABRUKA.** (listening to a far-off sound). There’s the train arrived in the station. He’ll find my son Simeida waiting to meet him.

**ASAKIR.** (as if taking to herself). That’s right.

**MABRUKA.** (turning to her). What’s matter with you, Asakir? You’re Trembling.

**ASAKIR.** (as if to herself). Simeida’s song will tell me

**MABRUKA.** Tell you.

**ASAKIR.** That he’s come.

**MABRUKA.** Did you tell my son to sing as a sing that Ilwan was here?

**ASAKIR.** Yes, as soon as they set foot across the village bounds.

**MUBRUKA.** Patience, Asakir. Be patient. The worst is over now.

**ASAKIR.** It’s not fear nor weakness that I’m feeling now.

**MABRUKA.** The fearsome days have now gone. Gone for ever, they are. I shan’t ever forget the day when you hid your son Ilwan--- and he a mere child of two then--- hid him in the flour basket and carried him all the way to Cairo, and gave him into the care of that kinsman of
yours, the flour merchant who kept shop in the spice-dealer's row near the mosque of our blessed
Hussein.

ASAKIR. Bring him up as a butcher, I said to him. Let him learn to use the knife like a
master.

MABRUKA. But he never did as you asked him.

ASAKIR. He did that! Soon as he was seven years old he place him in a butcher's shop.
But run away, he did some time later.

MABRUKA. And went into the Holy al-Azhar as a student.

ASAKIR. That's it When I visited him last year I saw him in his gown and turban looking
most dignified. I said to him: If only your father could have seen you looking like that, he'd
have been mighty proud. But they didn't spare him to enjoy watching his son grow up.

MABRUKA. Wouldn't it have been better if he'd stayed an in the butcher's shop?

ASAKIR. What makes you say that, Mabruka?

MABRUKA. I don't know. It's only a thought that came into my head.

ASAKIR. I reckon I know your thought.

MABRUKA. What is it, then, Asakir?

ASAKIR. It grieves you to see my son in gown and turban while yours goes on wearing
his woolly skull cap and his smock.

MABRUKA. By the memory of the dear departed, I give you my oath, nothing of the
kind was in my mind.

ASAKIR. Why then don't you like Ilwan to be at the Holy al-Azhar?

MABRUKA. I give you oath, it isn't that I don't like it, it's just that I'm afraid...

ASAKIR. Afraid.
MABRUKA. That he might not be such a master at wielding his knife.

ASAKIR. Set your mind at rest, Mabruka. When you see Ilwan now, a full-grown man, you’ll realize that he has the lean strong-thewed arm of the Aziz family.

MABRUKA. (listening to the train whistle). The train’s moving out of the station now.

ASAKIR. Let it go where it will, so long as it’s brought us Ilwan to force the murderer’s soul out of his body, and to leave him for the farm dogs in scattered gobbets of flesh.

MABRUKA. What if he hasn’t come?

ASAKIR. Why do you say that, mabruka?

MABRUKA. I don't know. Just a feeling I've got.

ASAKIR. What would stop him coming?

MABRUKA. What would drive him to leave Cairo and the city life and the holy al-Azhar and come to this--?

ASAKIR. This is where he was born, where blood is calling out to him.

MABRUKA. Our village is a long, long way away from Clairol can blood make it self heard as for as the cities?

ASAKIR. Do you really think he hasn't come?

MABRUKA. I know no more about it than you do.

ASAKIR. And what about the letter that the schoolmaster read out to us?

MABRUKA. Don't you recall his words: 'I hope to come if my circumstances allow it.' who knows whether or not his circumstances have allowed it?

ASAKIR. Don't dampen my spirits, Mabruka. Don't dash my hope. I've just heard the train whistle turning into trills* of joy in my heart, announcing that the end is near of this long mourning. Ilwan, not come? What would become of me if that were true? and how much longer would I have to wait then?
MABRUKA. The station isn't so far from here, nor the main road. If he'd arrived, Simeida would be singing now.

ASAKIR. Perhaps they're taking their time, chatting. After all, they haven't seen each other for more than three years... Since your son was in Cairo last during the fair of the blessed Hussein.

MABRUKA. If he'd come my son's heart would have brimmed over with joy and he'd have started his singing even before he'd reached the main road.

ASAKIR. Perhaps he's forgotten to sing.

MABRUKA. It's impossible: he can't forget.

ASAKIR. (listening). I can hear no one singing.

Ahmed Shawqi (1868–1932) was an Egyptian Arabic pronunciation: nicknamed Amir al-Sho'araa (which literary means the prince of poets), was one of the greatest Arabic poets laureate, an Egyptian poet and dramatist who pioneered the modern Egyptian literary movement, most notably introducing the genre of poetic epics to the Arabic literary tradition. On the paternal side he was of Circassian, Greek and Kurdish descent, and on the maternal side of Turkish and Greek descent.

Raised in a privileged setting, his family was prominent and well-connected with the court of the Khedive of Egypt. Upon graduating from high school, he attended law school, obtaining a degree in translation. Shawqi was then offered a job in the court of the Khedive Abbas II, which he immediately accepted.

After a year working in the court of the Khedive, Shawqi was sent to continue his studies in Law at the Universities of Montpellier and Paris for three years. While in France, he was heavily influenced by the works of French playwrights, most notably Molière and Racine. He returned to Egypt in 1894, and remained a prominent member of Arab literary culture until the British forced him into exile in southern Spain, Andalusia, in 1914. Shawqi remained there until 1920, when he returned to Egypt. In 1927 he was crowned by his peers Amir al-Sho'araa’ (literally, "the Prince of Poets") in recognition of his considerable contributions to the literary field.
He used to live in 'Karmet Ibn Hani' or Ibn Harii’s Vineyard at Al-Matariyyah area near the palace of the Khedive Abbas II at Saray El-Qobba until he was exiled. After returning to Egypt he built a new house at Giza which he named the new Karmet Ibn Hani.[5] He met Mohammed Abdel Wahab, and introduced him for the first time to art, making him his protégé as he gave him a suite in his house. The house later on became Ahmed Shawki Museum and Mohammed Abdel Wahab became one of the most famous Egyptian composers.

Shawqi’s work can be categorized into three main periods during his career. The first coincides with the period during which he occupied a position at the court of the Khedive, consisting of eulogies to the Khedive: praising him or supporting his policy. The second comprised the period of his exile in Spain. During this period, his feeling of nostalgia and sense of alienation directed his poetic talent to patriotic poems on Egypt as well as the Arab world and panarabism. The third stage occurred after his return from exile, during that period he became preoccupied with the glorious history of Ancient Egypt and Islam. This was the period during which he wrote his religious poems, in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. The maturation of his poetic style was also reflected in his plays, the most notable of which were published during this period.

The aristocratic poet of Cairo, Ahmad Shawqi was a mixture of Arab, Turkish, Circassian, Kurdish and Greek lineage. His education was secular and European as opposed to the traditional schooling of Al-Azhar. He joined the Law School and graduated in 1887 from its department of translation with a mastery in French.

Royal patronage governed Shawqi’s life for almost half a century. First the Khedive Tawfiq appointed him at the palace secretariat and later sent him to study law and literature in France, where he spent six years. Shawqi travelled widely in Europe acquiring all aspects of its culture. “I found from the first day the light that should illuminate my path,” he said, referring to this period.

Back in Cairo, Shawqi enjoyed the confidence of Tawfiq with great skill. He became the chief spokesman of the next Khedive, ‘Abbas II, gaining an envious position of authority. He married a rich woman and lived a luxurious life which is reflected in his wine and love poems.
When Abbas II was deposed, Shawqi, because of his involvement with the palace, was asked to leave Egypt. He went to Barcelona in 1914 and lived there throughout the war.

Exile weighed heavily on Shawqi. He missed the protection of the palace and its carefree life. Most of all, he missed Egypt. For the first time he had to face pecuniary problems and it was wartime too. He saw human cares and suffering—things unknown to him earlier.

The period of exile (1914-1919) also put an end to his ties with the court. When Shawqi returned to Cairo, the country was in the grip of the 1919 revolution. He responded to the mood of the nation and turning away from the themes that pleased the rulers, he took up the cause of the common man.

The period from 1919 to 1932 was highly productive for Shawqi, whose house at Giza glittered with intellectuals and where great singers like Abdul Wahhab set verses to music. Famous poets from all over the world visited him including Tagore in 1926.

When Shawqi’s diwan was reprinted in 1927, he was acclaimed *Amir al-shu ’ura* {Prince of poets} by a general consensus of eminent poets.

A prolific poet, Ahmad Shawqi has written more than any of his contemporaries. His diwan entitled *al-Shawaqiyyat* was published in two volumes in 1898. The third and fourth volumes appeared posthumously.

The bulk of Shawqi’s verse consists of social poetry and includes eulogies, elegies, descriptions and occasional poetry. Shawqi also wrote verse plays numbering six, of which the more famous are: *Masra ‘Kilubatra* {The fall of Cleopatra} and *Majnun Layla*.

Shawqi’s chief impulse to write poetry came from Arab sources. Inspired by his professor, the poet al-Shaykh Muhammad al-Baysuni, Shawqi wrote his first poem when he was fourteen. It was an eulogy to Tawfiq and earned him a place at the palace.

Shawqi’s main guide was al-Barudi whom he followed closely in style. He also read with reverence the works of classical poet. He had a close affinity to Al-Mutanabbi, the poet laureate of the Hamdanid prince Saif-ad-Dowla, and the greatest Arab eulogist. He praised his patron in the same way and used similar constructions.
The other 'Abbasid poets who fascinated Shawqi were Abu Nawas, Abu Firas and al-Buhturi. The impact of Abu Nawas is clearly seen in Shawqi's wine poems, use of lighter metres and short verses. Al-Buhturi's influence was perhaps greater. Shawqi says he made conscious efforts to copy the rhyme and metre of al-Buhturi, so much so that it became second nature to him. Whenever the wind rustled or the water flowed, he would hear al-Buhturi's tune accompanying it.

Shawqi's travels abroad stirred his imagination with their variegated scenes and are reflected in his poems on natural and monumental splendours as in Bois de Boulogne.

Though the influence of French literature was weaker than that of Arabic, it could not fail to leave an indelible mark on the poet's compositions. It is felt in the fables modelled on La Fontaine in verse form, and in short descriptions within poems, as well as in verse about modern inventions. Some echoes of the French romanticists; Alfred de Musset and Lamartine are also perceptible. But the most important influence is that of Victor Hugo.

La Legende des Siecles of Hugo inspired Shawqi to compose an equally immense fresco on Egyptian history called Kibar al-Hawadith fi Wadi 'l-Nil {Great Historical Events of the Nile Valley}, which he recited at the Conference of Orientalists in Geneva in 1894. In the same strain he wrote his famous series on the Pharaohs, and even extended Hugo's style to Islamic themes, e.g. al-Hamziyyat al-Nabawiyyu.

Shawqi's tenure at the Palace necessarily affected not only the form of his poetry, {eulogies and occasional poetry}, but also the content. Shawqi, who wrote "on every new moon and each royal birthday." Had also to speak on the more serious business of Anglo-Egyptian relations, conforming of course to the views of his royal patron. Insulated from the pulse of the people, he was reticent on most public issues. A case in point is his short poem on Dinshaway,3 which he wrote a year after the event that shattered every patriotic Egyptian.4

Exile in Spain saw the waning of al-Mutanabbi's influence, since Shawqi had no need then to write eulogies Shawqi also had the time to devote himself to the study of Arab classics generally and Andalusian poetry in particular.5 His famous poem on the lost paradise of Egypt is reminiscent of Ibn Zaydun's nostalgia for home and agony at the separation from princess Wallada whom he loved.
The turning point in shawqi’s poetical career occurred on this return to Egypt, when, emboldened by his freedom from the palace, he was able to express the travails of his nation in fiery patriotic poems.

But although Shawqi found more individual liberty in the 1920s than ever before, he was increasingly assailed by critics such as al-Mazini, al-‘Aqqad and Taha Husayn for carrying on a blind tradition and not daring to innovate. Shawqi, who was meticulous about his verse, took extra pains and carved out almost flawless verses that charmed the majority of his readers.

Like the neo-classicists, al-Barudi and Hafiz Ibrahim, Shawqi also projects his new ideas and contemporary values in the framework of the Arabic qasida. His compositions are in the best tradition of Abbasid poetry, characterised by an elegance of form {al-rasana} and purity of style {al-jazala}. His constructions are powerful and smooth flowing.

Shawqi selects his words with care. Realizing that the vocabulary that had emerged during the renaissance fell short of his poetic requirements, Shawqi revived a number of forgotten words from old Arabic and employed them in new shades and meanings.8

His verse is melodious, perhaps the most musical of modern Arabic. With a refined taste and “an inner ear” he renders each whisper and movement in beautiful tonal nuances,9 e.g. Bosphorus Before You.

Shawqi uses long sonorous metres for poems on political themes, but it is in the shorter metres that he is most effective, e.g. Athr al-balfi l-bal, a description of a ball in the Abidin Palace.

Like the Abbasid poets, Shawqi pays attention to the impact of the opening lines on the readers, especially in elegies and the historical series, e.g. the beginning of his most beautiful poem, “The Nile.”

Shawqi’s forte is imagery. He draws freely from the vast repertoire of similes and metaphors of classical poetry and deploys them such as an artist would use lines and colours in a painting. An example of his superb skill is his poem on the palace at Aswan, Qasr Anas al-Wajud.

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Describing the ruins Shawqi starts with a general view of the palace, half sunk in water, but which holds itself together through sheer fright and terror. He depicts the carving as if the sculptor had etched them only the day before. The paint is shining and lustrous as oil, and the lines have the grace of gazelles. The sacrificial objects seen to be moving to the high altar; and the priests perform their rituals in the fragrance of musk.

These picturesque details are evident in the poems: "The Sphinx," "The Nile," "Andalusia," "Damascus" and "Zahla" which are also coloured with imaginative and historical flashbacks.

Shawqi's technique as a minute craftsman can be seen in his poems about nature, which he also projects with similes and images of classical poetry. The extract forms part of an ode dedicated to the English novelist, Hall Caine.

And the cypress in his ample robes displays his leg like a gay, pretty girl,

And the slender-statured palm-tree is turbaned and adorns itself with belts and sash

Like the daughters of Pharaoh watching processions under sun-shades on a sunbaked day.

And you may behold heaven's plain like a wall of marble set in order with marvelous tablets,

The clouds therein like fat ostriches kneeling, the others circling on wing,

And the sun brighter than a bride, veiled on the day of the wedding-procession in a veil of shining gold.

And the water in the valley appears like conduits of quick silver, or flung down sword-blades.

Fine thoughts and feelings are portrayed with great sensitivity in the poems Shawqi wrote in exile, on his daughter Amina, on his cat and his lost youth. These lines are from the poem quoted above.12

In spring and its beauty I recall the time of youth and its frolicsome young steed.
According to Shawqi, “if poetry is not recollection or sentiment of wisdom, then it is merely form and metre.”202 This is his conception in a nutshell and he concentrated on these three themes.

In al-Shawqiyyat, the whole movement of history is reflected as if in a grandiose mirror.203

Hall Caine! Egypt is a story with which the hand of writers and commentators is never done.

Thereof (is a record) of papyrus, and Psalm, and Torah, and Koran, and Gospel.

And Mena, and Cambyses. And Alexander, and the two Caesars, and Salah {al-Din} the Great.

Thoses men and ages are a treasury: so stir your imagination, and it will bring the key.

The horizon of the land, with you {dwelling} in its quarters, is adorned with stars and lamps.

According to Umar al-Dasuqi, Shawqi preceded Muhammad Husayn Haykal in glorifying the Pharaohnic legacy of Egypt, the Pyramids.” Shawqi does not neglect history. His poems on Andalusia, Rome, Paris, Tokyo and Napoleon reveal his concern for great historical events. His dramatic compositions were also inspired by history. Masra Klabatra {The Fall of Cleopatra}, ‘Ali Bay al-Kabir are taken from the Egyptian past while ‘Antara, Majnun Laila and Amira al-Andalus from the history of the Arabs.

Kibar al-Hawadith fi Wadi‘l-Nil, in a hundred and fifty verses is a panorama of Egypt since the age of Ramses to the sons of Muhammad ‘Ali. It depicts the civilizations and faiths that swept over Egypt such as the Pharaohs, Persian rule, Alexander, the Romans; Moses, Jesus and Islam, the Ayyubis and Salahaddin; The Ottomans, Napoleon and the digging of the Suez Canal.

Like the Pharaohnic series, Kibar al-Hawadith combines Shawqi’s historic perspective with the second characteristic of his verse: al-‘atifa, {sentiment}. It is also

203 As quoted by Mounah A. Khouri, Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt, p-152
suffused with what he calls wisdom, *al-hikma*. The poet is filled with pride and feels stimulated as Egypt passes through different phases of heights and glory, but is broken-hearted in times of darkness and injustice. Such verses are like songs. Misfortune however does not last forever and time must bring better conditions so that the nation can wipe out dishonour and neglect.

Shawqi’s poetry is surcharged with national sentiment as is evident from his poems on the contemporary issues, composed in the second stage of his poetic career. He calls on his countrymen to remove backwardness and dishonour and to struggle against imperialism. His live for his country is brought out in his many poems about nationalism. He describes the Arab world as an organic whole, a human body where every part feels the pain or calamity that may strike one corner. The poem on the French bombing in Damascus is one of his most relevant patriotic poems.

The second elegy to Musafir Kamil composed in 1924, contrasts sharply with the first written in 1910, when Shawqi avoided controversial issues and harped only on the personal greatness of the leader. Shawqi call on the warring political factions to unite. His plea for solidarity and tolerance makes it one of his most moving poems.

Shedding the restraint of the earlier period in later years, Shawqi reacted sensitively to the political situation. His response was also immediate to current events. Daud Barakat, the then editor of *al-Ahram* said “if an incident took place in the morning, Shawqi’s poem about it was broadcast by the evening.”

Would never find the likes of that great Saturday.

Tomorrow, Parliament will spread its canopy,

A shady shelter o’er the happy Nile ‘twill be.

Shawqi was also proud of his Islamic heritage and composed many poems on Islam. The most famous are; al-Hamziyya al-Nabawiya mentioned earlier, and al-Burda (The Prophet’s Mantle), which is the best one composed after that of its famous originator al-Bu’siri.
Shawqi also wrote on national and world leaders. He composed for instance, a poem on Mahatma Gandhi when he passed through Egypt on his way to the Round Table Conference in 1931.

Those who defended truth in knowledge, for it bore Dire punishment with steadfastness, they are no more! Socrates raised the cup, though with sure fate 'twas filled, To loving lips, desiring only to be killed. They offered him his life, life with stupidity,
But he, refusing, chose death with nobility.

Those who are brave of heart are of a common kind,
But rarely do you find men who are brave of mind!

Through the very qualities that made him popular, that is the conservative appeal of his neo-classical verse, Shawqi came to be criticised more than any other poet of modern times. His failure to innovate in a period of momentous changes, his overwhelmingly impersonal note and even his half-hearted attempts to introduce ideas from French literature were the points most often raised by his opponents. But Shawqi, the perfectionist, by force of his almost flawless compositions, their sonorous magnificence and stimulating ideals, was able to withstand the test of time and emerged as the first great poet of modern times and continues to be the most quoted.

Shawqi ‘Abd al-Hakim (Shawqi Abdul’ Hakim)is a playwright, critic and journalist. His dramatic work first attracted attention in 1964 with the double bill at Masrah al-jayb (the pocket Theater) of his Shafiqa wa Mitwalli (Shafiqa and Mitwally) and al-Mustakhabbi (The Hidden One). Other dramatic works of his are al-Malik Macruf (King Marouf) and a valume of short plays named after its first item, Malik ‘Ajuz (An Aged King), (1965): this volume includes al-Mustakhabbi and Shafiqa wa Mitwalli as well as al-Shababik (The Windows), Rajul acma (A Blind Man), and al- Kalam (Words), and has a Preface by Yahya Haqqi which forms a general introduction to the playwright.

Abdul Hakim often takes his subjects from folktale and popular narrative, giving them his distinctive poetic coloring, and using a non-realistic technique. He employs the same experimental manner in his novels, Ahzan Nuh (The Sorrowsof Noah,1964) and Damm Ibn yacqub (The Blood of Ibn yacqub) (1967) In the latter, four interconnected stories are combined:
they in elude one which deals with the life of a wandering country entertainers, such as is Hassan in the present play. The modernism of treatment is combined with an exact depiction of typically Egyptian rural and provincial life.

Hasan wa Na‘ima (Hassan and Naima) is based on ballad accounts of a murder which took place in Upper Egypt in the late 1940s. The young singer Hassan is killed by a fairly prosperous peasant family who consider that an entertainer is beneath their dignity as a suitor for their daughter. One ballad version, by Ibrahim Sulayman, has been published in a chapbook version in Cairo; there is another in the repertoire of the singer Shawqi al-Qinnawi. A radio serial by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Khamisi, based on the story, was broadcast in 1958, and its script published by the Rose al-Youssef Press in 1960. On it was based a film produced in 1959. These versions were given a happy ending, with the hero and heroine getting married.

Though Ahmad Shawqi contributed greatly to the development of verse drama, he can by no means be regarded as its originator in Arabic, because in this respect some attempts had already been made by his predecessors like Marun al-Naqqash (1817-1855), Salim al-Naqqash (1849-1884) and al-Qabbani (1833-1902) in the nineteenth century. The works produced by these playwrights were in a mixture of verse and rhyming prose. Moreover, their verse, as Badawi maintains, was of indifferent quality and was often meant not only to be sung on the stage.204

Shawqi was the first in modern Arabic literature to write poetic plays. He wrote five tragedies:

- Majnun Laila (literally "The Mad about Layla"), his first play.
- The Death of Cleopatra
- 'Antara
- Ali bek el-Kabeer
- Qambeez (Cambyses II), 1931

and two comedies:

- Es-Set Huda (Madam Huda)
- El-Bakhila (the Miser)

in addition to a prose play: the Princess of Andalusia.

Novels

Shawqi wrote several novels. A few survived among which:

- The Last Pharaoh, translated by Poet Ahmed Seddik

Here is an example of his drama:

**HASSAN AND NAIMA**

**A PLAY ON A FOLK THEME**

A CHORUS of PEASANT WOMEN squatting on either side of the stage throughout the play.

The interior of NAIMA’S house, about twenty years after the betrayal and murder of Hassan on this very spot. The curtain rises to reveal the hall* of one of those decrepit two-storey village houses with mud brick pillars, which are found standing out taller than the clusters of low-lying peasant huts which usually surround them. The plaster is inevitably flaking off, the panes of glass in the upper sections of the windows are broken; the hall is again. There are the usual sitting rooms with their wooden benches and adobe platforms, covered with rush mats or sheep’s fleeces. Slightly to right, a staircase with a wooden hand rail leads up to the first floor, where NAIMA has her room. Next to the stairs a mud structure serves as a stand for two old water jars which are surrounded by some again cacti. Here and there are household utensils, other adobe platforms, and some faded books.

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* It should be realized that this is a spacious room surrounded by the other rooms of the ground floor, which open on to it, and containing the staircase.
To right the entrance to the mother’s half-darkened room; to left the entrance to the father’s room; at the rear, a vestibule or corridor leads to the broad, solidly bolted outer door of the house; this opens on the lane in which the house stands.

A CHORUS of PEASANT WOMEN is seated throughout the play, divided between the two sides of the stage, squatting upon the floor.

As the lights fade up dimly, the MOTHER saunters on. A woman in her fifties—brisk, alert, restless—she contemplates her surroundings briefly as if looking for something, pauses, makes for the stairs, attempting to catch hold of a large duckling; she lunges at it briefly, and then stops, lost in thought.

MOTHER (to herself). Todays a feast day (sighs) and people are celebrating outside. (Pause.) And we should be celebrating too, (grasps and the duck absent]ly) if only she’d let us be today... let us forget him and just live. (Starts slightly.) They say the village has been put to shame, and that there’s strange folk about.

{NAIMA appears, descending the stairs. She is tall with severe features and piercing eyes. She sees her MOTHER and stiffens.}

NAIMA. What do you mean to do?

MOTHER. {startled, then carelessly}. I’ll kill it.

NAIMA. As you did once before.

MOTHER. {startled}. It has to be killed.

NAIMA. Kill him, then.

MOTHER. We have to eat to live: everybody does. (Pause.) Today’s the feast.

NAIMA. {bitterly}. The feast...

MOTHER. Come and lend a hand. Hold it with me; help me.

NAIMA. Me? Kill him with you? Hold him with you? You want me to lend a hand? {Flustered, she recalls the past.} With him resisting, who never hurt’ anybody- didn’t know what
evil was. \{Pointing.\} Hands grappling with him, and feet trampling all over him, kicking the breath out of him, treachery everywhere, and \{piercingly\} blood all over the ground, \{faces bewildered MOTHER\} blood everywhere.

1 MOTHER. \{taken aback, weakly\}. I’m talking about the duck... that’s in my hand.

CHORUS. She’s talking about the duck, and Naima’s talking about Hassan; each of them talking about what’s inside her.

NAIMA. \{vaguely\}. I remember him before my very eyes.

MOTHER. \{appeals to her\}. Well, help me then hold it with me; \{tenderly\} you’re my daughter, after all.

NAIMA. \{recoiling from her\}. What do you want from me? What do you want me to do?

MOTHER. Just set a light there, to the firewood.

NAIMA. Set light there, did you say?

MOTHER. \{calmly\}. Yes, light the fire and give me a hand; \{Approaches her.\} hold it with me: then knives are hanging on the wall.

NAIMA. \{defiant\}. And even if we killed it I can see him staggering about headless, see his murderers, with their knives. \{More quietly, facing MOTHER.\} They felled him, and they held her away.

MOTHER. \{alarmed\}. Hold it with me, hold it.

NAIMA. D’you want me to join my hand to yours, and get his blood on my clothes, here, \{Looks about her.\} all over the place, on the walls, by the stairs?

MOTHER. \{to herself\}. There weren’t any walls, \{Turns.\} or were there? \{Tries to remember.\} I can’t remember. I can’t remember very well ... what happened.

CHORUS. Nothing is ever forgotten. It all remains here, in the earth, even treachery.
NAIMA. Just remember, and in a little while you’ll hear him, in your ears, as he writhes about on the ground, in front of you, \textit{insistently} here, beneath your feet, on the very spot where you’re standing. It was at night.

MOTHER. \{to herself\}. It was at daybreak.

NAIMA. There wasn’t a sound. Only he was screaming, and gnawing at the earth, \textit{Walks round her, and faces her.} and the blood reached your clothes.

MOTHER. \{frightened\}. Here? \{Inspects her clothes.\} No, not here; \{Pauses.\} I took it off, took it right off and threw it away, there. \{Pauses.\} No, I burnt it with kerosene; \{Remembers.\} no, not with kerosene. I snatched off that shiny black frock and shove it down the oven’s gullet as far as my arm could reach. \{To NAIMA\} You’re the one, Naima, who brings it out, to dress me in it, every time you see me face to face. \{To herself\} Should I have kept it? Hardly reasonable to let it touch my body again? With the blood on it, that reached as far as me. \{sadly\} It soaked me, covered my clothes; it reached as far as here. \{She pauses center stage. A flickering light falls on her. She inspects her clothing, sniffing at it.\} Oh, my dear, did you

expect me to wear it next to my skin again, and walk about the world in it? \{She smoothes her dress down about her.\} Why, I stumbled on the stairs then, and don’t seem to have got up and stood on my own two feet since. \{She raises her head slowly to face NAIMA.\} And you saw me, Naima, your eyes ripped right through me like a saw, as you stood there on the stairs. \{A long pause. NAIMA’S FATHER disheveled, stooping, hurries in bare-foot from his darkened room wearing his striped robe and long baggy trousers.\}

FATHER. Are you talking about what happened?

NAIMA. That blood-soaked day...

MOTHER. Yes, we were talking...

FATHER. \{turns about, retreating, distracted\}. That singer lad?

NAIMA. Yes.

FATHER. Lying there on the ground. And he’d rushed into it of his own accord.
NAIMA. Yes- of his own will.*

MOTHER. With that appetite he had.

NAIMA. {approaches him and asks}. Did you see him? With your own eyes, did you see him, as he shook his own head off, like a butchered ox?

FATHER. {recoils, muttering}. I didn’t see him. And nothing reached me. {His expressionless voice rises.} I was over by the door, {pauses, turns to NAIMA, angrily} and anyway, it’s a very old business, {gesticulates} it happened a long time ago; {sharply} isn’t it ever going to come to an end? To disappear, to vanish from before over eyes? {He feels at his own hands.} Nothing remains. The palm trees fall. Even houses crumble and become the dust we tread on, as we walk along- and people too- everything goes, never to be seen any more, to be forgotten, the good and the bad; we just throw it all over our shoulders- throw it as far as we can.

CHORUS. {scoffing}. Throw it way? Wish we could. Is there anything we do in this world, that we can just throw away?

NAIMA. {sharply}. Throw it away where? Where? Tell me.

FATHER. Just throw it away.

MOTHER. {to herself, rear stage}. I threw it away, I never wore it again; {hurries down center and then stands rooted} into the oven’s gullet.

NAIMA. {to her MOTHER}. The blood?

MOTHER. {to herself}. Is that reasonable, to wear it next to my skin? All bloody?

NAIMA. {to her FATHER}. The blood …

FATHER. {increasingly disturbed}. Naima, lay off.

MOTHER. {to herself}. This is frightening.

NAIMA. All we do is remember, fetch out what’s past and pick at it.
FATHER. {remembering}. I didn’t see him. I caught myself in time; {theatrically} I covered up my eyes with both hands as I stood behind the door. And after that I collapsed against the dooe {Sharply.} I couldn’t get up on my feet.

MOTHER. It was the dress I was married in.

FATHER. I simply couldn’t; {to himself} how could I?

NAIMA. {muttering}. All we do is remember.

MOTHER. It was the last time, {to herself} and I just couldn’t after that.

NAIMA. {pointing to them}. Both of you.

CHORUS. {emphatic}. Both of them, your mother and father.

FATHER. {more cheerful}. I was speaking for myself, and {to MOTHER} everyone should speak for himself. Life’s like that...nobody should stand on anybody else’s shoulders. Yes, that means everybody should stand on his own two feet, pick himself up-and go. {He laughs and claps his hands like a child.} It’s a stout fellow who can go. Step out and go ... without collapsing, like a wall ... and merging into the dust. {He subsides suddenly.} Yes, that’s what it’s like.

MOTHER. I never asked you to carry me. {Pause.} Nobody carries anybody in this world of ours.

NAIMA. {suddenly}. It’s only me that’s carrying him, and carrying on ever since.

FATHER. Oh, we’re all carrying. {Laughs.} It’s not just you alone that’s got him round your neck. {Focular, imitating his daughter.} Only me. {Runs towards her.} Why only you alone?

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* In one ballad account, Hassan, risking a hostile reception, courteously escorts Naima home in the morning, after she has thrust herself uninvited into his house: he and his mother have tactfully made her spend the night with the latter.

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NAIMA. I’ve been slaughtered. And I’ve done nothing to deserve it. {Somewhat bewildered} Have I done anything?

MOTHER. {stop still}. You were there. {Determined.} You were.

NAIMA. {starts defending herself}. I wasn’t even near him. Didn’t touch him. Never put my hand on him. Not on a single hair, not on a thread of his clothes.

FATHER. {goads her}. But you were with us, you’ve a hand in what happened. You have, you have, you have.

{MOTHER hastens towards the stairs. Lighting intensity is doubled over the stairs. They appear decrepit, worn.}

MOTHER. You were standing here. {With sudden intensity.} I saw you standing here, with your hand on the banisters, with the whole thing going on before you, before you eyes, the whole thing-which we all did. Each of us had a hand in it. {She identifies those who were present.} Me, and you, and you {Pauses.} all of us, all of those living in this house. All of those breathing here. {Sharply} All of us, {to NAIMA} and you with us.

FATHER. With us.

NAIMA. {countering}. With us? Me with you, in what you did? {Checks herself.} You mean that because I was there, and saw ... I should have put my eyes out, blinded myself, thrown dust into them, so as not to see?

MOTHER. You were there, Naima, you were present.

CHORUS. She was there, with the murder taking place before her very eyes. Her eyes were bulging, her lashes glowing red as the oven’s mouth.

FATHER. {strikes fist to palm}. With us Leading us.

NAIMA. {angrily}. You did it. Together you did it, standing shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand. {Grows more aware.} I mean then. And you’re still doing it, everyday, at every sunrise
you do it, at every instant, every time the sky clouds over, every time we speak to each other, and come face to face. \{Points to her FATHER who is childishly outraged.\} Together, shoulder to shoulder, ever since that day, you’ve been at it \{Faces the stair.\} while I’ve been standing here, at the top, out of it.

**CHORUS.** Nobody can stand apart from what’s happening, from a crime that’s being committed.

**FATHER.** \{suddenly aware.\} There’s no ‘at the top’ nor ‘at the bottom’. We’re all together, \{accusing\} and you weren’t crying, nor upset, nor even sad, up on the stairs there.

**MOTHER.** \{vacant as if in a trance, but remembering.\} I can’t understand how you could be without tears in your terror, \{She makes for the stairs... like a sleepwalker.\} standing there, and seeing him, with your eyes starting out. \{She grows tense.\} Looking down on your father and me, as we tried to shake out the blood from our old clothes, and rushed about bumping into the walls.

**FATHER.** \{blustering.\} With the singer lad lying there behind us,

Hagar, choking with his own blood.

**NAIMA** (haughty, from the top of the stairs). I was up here.

**CHORUS.** At the top of the stairs.

**MOTHER.** And we’re here at the bottom, at your feet, you mother and your father (entreat ing) who brought you up and cradled you here. We used to play with you, and run beside you in the alley, outside, after people had gone to bed, on moonlit nights (Her tone changes.) when you used to leave us and go out into the open. And we’d fetch you from the end of the lane, with you kicking away, and your voice carrying for miles around and everybody hearing you; (more sharply) hearing you everywhere, all over the village—here, there, everywhere, hearing you. As you roamed about the plantations and the village, singing with him. Everybody saw you and pointed, Naima. They saw you; there’s not one that didn’t.

**CHORUS.** We all saw her, that Naima; saw her crawling on all four, and saw her laughing with the world and hugging it.

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FATHER (in a normal voice). I was at a saint’s day celebration once and saw them; it was al-Qurani’s day—with my own eyes.

NAIMA. You haven’t forgotten, either of you—my father and mother—(Contemplates them.) Since you locked up the house and hid yourselves inside? In the dark crannies inside, (shrieks) dark, dark. (A deep silence.)

FATHER (to the Mother). Once, we went to a saint’s celebration, me and my nephews; it was late at night: (He slackens gradually.) we stayed behind with the few who were watching the last of the dancing, at the end of the night.

NAIMA (interrupts him, to croon to herself). Days come, and die, and each of us locks himself in, and every day a blaze flares up: (emphatic) it’s never been put out and died into ashes—never. (She contemplates them.)

MOTHER. Don’t look at me like that, as if you wanted to consume me with your eves. No don’t look at me. Keep away from me. There’s your father, go to him. That’s enough now, enough. (Defensive.)

Why, I’ve gone nub since that day; I’ve gone like he did when he convulsed all over the place, with his blood on our clothes. (Sniffs at her clothes.) Why, I can’t bear my own clothes since then.

NAIMA (bears upon her). You can tear off your clothes and burn them. Throw them on the fire, into the flames, as much as you like—but you’ll still go or gnawing at yourself, in the dark that’s in there throughout the house... (With something of the intonation of a keening woman) In every corner, the stores, the doors, the walls and the rice silos, the old boxes, the clothes everything that’s touched by hand or us foot, everything our eyes light on. (Turn.) And each of us keeps looking inside of us. (Confined) I knew that’s why I didn’t cry. (Asks herself.) And why should I cry?

CHORUS. Some people cry and cry and can’t be heard.
FATHER (as though to provoke her). But what happened reached you and drenched you. (Laughs uproariously.) You’re just as soaked as we are: (Background music suggesting rain and dipping water.)

The water’s reached your feet and there’s no escaping it, the river we’ve all there of us fallen into; a deluge, with neither beginning nor end. (His eyes glitter.) there’s no getting away from it, not so much as a hair crack we could slip through (dreamily) to the free air; the sweet night air—(to the MOTHER) remember? – That we used to breathe, in the old days, you and I, (painting to NAIMA) before she was born, in the old days. Before we drowned. Before that business with the singer. (His voice rises.) Before the flood had overtaken us, Hagar (Retreats to tear stage, muttering.) years and years ago.

NAIMA. He can’t get away from himself anywhere.

MOTHER (comes to herself. Corners NAIMA). Tell me Naima? How could you stand there at the top of the stairs with your hand on the banisters with not a tear in either eye—(emphatic) not a tear?

CHORUS. Some people cry and cry without shedding a tear.

NAIMA (facing her). Why should I cry, as long as I can bear to look at myself?

FATHER. You were with us. And you used to live him like the pupils of happen at your own eyes: and it’s with your own eyes that you saw it happen at your very feet. (Brushes his palm together.)

CHORUS. She was there. We saw her with our own eyes, the ones the worms will devour (Silence).

NAIMA. Oh, yes I was there! And it took place before my eyes. (Makes for the stairs; a follow-spot moves with her. She runs quickly halfway up the stairs, and stands in her old stance.) I was present.

MOTHER (climbs up her, adjusts her stance, climbs down one step, contemplates her briefly. recoils. retreats). No, no those aren’t your eyes. Never. Not those, (points as she come down stairs) I remember them.
FATHER. (Retreats towards the door). I stood at a distance. By the door, contemplates the tail clothes). And nothing reached me.

MOTHER (inspects her clothes). I’m the one who got soaked.

CHORUS. They’re all soaked, the people in this house.

NAIMA. I was here, up here and watching you.

FATHER (accusing). You were present and looking on, dry-eyed; brewing up the evil that’s consuming you, worms festering in every part of you: in your eyes, your lashes, and the dry roof of your mouth.

NAIMA (overcome with laughter, yet holding her stance on the stairs.) Hah, are you ready? (Challenging) Shall we go over it again, face to face? With each of the three of us judging himself—no judge from outside here. Ready?

CHORUS. Grinding, grinding, grinding, and away: at every sunrise; at every laying down of the head.

MOTHER (cowering where she stands, looks up to NAIMA, beseeching). No more, Naima, no more: we can’t stand it. (Looks for something, till she finds the bound duck.) Why I’ve forgotten what I meant to do (Appeals to her). We must live, live the like living folk: why, we’ve become rusty, like old brass; we see nothing of the world, nor smell the sweet breeze that lifts up the spirit, the sick man’s spirit, and makes it well again (overcome by joy). Why, there are people

Outside, outside this house, staying up late. Outside the house and the shops, till daybreak. And there are girls dancing, and singing and getting married, nice and safe; and the lanes seem to widen and quicken with children. (To the FATHER). We’ve forgotten all that. We can barely remember it all, it’s been an ago; (to NAIMA) we neither see people, nor do people want to see us—after what happened.

CHORUS. We do see: our eyes wide open to what happens, to the slayers and the slain.
NAIMA (motionless). We see people, and people see us; (moves toward her MOTHER) even if you went out every evening, staying up till down and talking to people, and living side by side with them, you’d still be looking at yourself wherever you walked, seeing yourself and what your hands have done—as you stood here with the meat chopper in your hands and the blood on your clothes.

FATHER. What would you have had me do? Listen wherever I go to the scandals you’ve caused, Naima? Every inch of the way, wherever I set foot.

NAIMA. You’re saying I’m the cause of it all.

MOTHER. Yes, you’re the cause. You’ve put a bitter taste in our mouth for a whole lifetime. You’re the one who’s closed up the house and ripped it apart till there’s nothing left. The inhabitants have been dead a long time now, and had their fill of death. (Throws the duck as far as she can).

CHORUS (voices intermingled). She dream, and lives, breathing the air of the past, the sweet and the foul. You’ll see: she’ll see Hassan. Remember? She was sick with love; he used to serenade her everywhere; she was in the bloom of her youth, was youth itself, the very blessing of youth.

NAIMA (daydreaming: background music suggests a saint’s day celebration, brass castanets, and the voice of a singer chanting). I wanted to go on breathing that air that you talk about, night and day. To lave and to sing and to marry—like every other girl; (pause) and it was at a saint’s day and he was singing; and I felt he was singing from his heart, saying what he felt inside him; and I found myself walking beside him, keeping place with, and went to him.

(The upper part of Hassan’s body appears in a circle of light. NAIMA approaches him. The sound of the celebration rise briefly)

HASSAN (in a subdued voice). Do you really want to come with me?

NAIMA (with downcast eyes). Yes, Hassan...

HASSAN. I saw it in your eyes.
NAIMA. My name’s Naima.

HASSAN (dreamily). Naima.

NAIMA. And our village is called Mansheya.

HASSAN. What bout your people? Your father and your mother?

NAIMA. I’ll go back, and tell them, see what they say.

HASSAN. And if they say no, refuse to marry you to a poverty stricken singer like myself—singing to the tune of a reed pipe, singing out of my misery, Naima?

NAIMA. I’ll stay with you all my life, Hassan, and die with you.

HASSAN. I’m the one that’ll die, because of you Naima.

NAIMA (recoils). No, no Hassan. (The sounds of celebration get louder. HASSAN disappears; NAIMA returns to stage front).

NAIMA. And I came and told you. I crawled, grasped your hands to entreat you, on my knees ion the dust you tread on— the dust.

FATHER (disturbed). But that was long ago, very long ago, and it’s over.

NAIMA (firm). Nothing’s over. It can’t be forgotten.

MOTHER. We take it out day and turn it over, each of us climbing on to the other’s shoulders and treading him underfoot.

FATHER. Drowned.

NAIMA. Nobody’s drowned you; nothing’s put you under lick and key. And if you’ve drowned, it was after you’d killed him, as he sang. (Pause.) You’re the ones who’ve drowned yourselves.

MOTHER (fierce). And you’re with us: all of us, all three of us.

NAIMA. That’s how I want it.
FATHER. A liar, all your life.

NAIMA. I want you to drown with each sunrise. I want you to forget the sun that fills the streets and pierces though people’s clothing.

MOTHER (intense). She waits on evil and goes out to meet it; (remember and scurries towards the stairs.) that’s what I saw in her eyes, with her open hand on the banisters.

FATHER. Let’s look each other in the face. We’re all going to die and have our fill of death. So, it’s only death, being inside the house.

NAIMA. I’m not going to die.

MOTHER. We’re all going to die, we are dying. Nobody’s eternal, not even those outside the house, nor the tall palms, nor the sycamores, nor the birds soaring into the vault of the sky. (Threatening) And you’ll be with us. FATHER (prepares to enter his room). She’ll go before us, Hanger: she’s the cause, (as he leaves) she’s the one who brought him here, and brought remorse into the house. (Exit)MOTHER (frightened, runs the door of the FATHER’S room). Are you going to bed leaving me here, (painting to NAIMA) leaving me to her alone?

FATHER’S VOICE (from inside, irritated). I can’t any more… you must shift for yourself. (Silence)

MOTHER (looks at the duck she had cast away). It would have been nice to kill the duck

MOTHER (looks at the duck she had cast away). It would have been nice to kill the duck and to celebrate the feast by having it for supper like living folk; (Contemplates NAIMA who is getting ready for bed and unplaits her hair. The lights dim. She appeals to her). That’s enough for today Naima, enough.

NAIMA. I’ve not done anything. I’m only defending myself against you.

CHORUS. They’re out of breath and gnawing at the ground. They’re devouring each other inside the house, with no one to see.

MOTHER (sighing). We too are defending ourselves. (Pulling her together). The point is that each of us accuses the other to his face and dumps his burden on the other’s back; (herself)
it’s a heavy load, Very heavy and we’ve been carrying it for a long time. And we’ve gone grey, your father and I, (Approaches her, threateningly) and for you too, (Looks her up and down), it’s all over. Over and done with. (Regretful). There’s nothing left of you: (Grasps NAMIA’S ankles). Your legs have shriveled, they’ve become skinny; (Rises to her knees and feels her over) and your finger, there’s nothing left of it, (faces her), even your breasts. Naima’s breasts... they’re drooping. (Whispers in her ear). Listen to me, daughter, look at your hair in the mirror. Look at yourself! (Steps back from her). Why, you used to be a real fine lady. Your hair used to be jet, jet black loveliness. Not an eye could stand to look at you once, when you were still young, before you’d become burdened and sad, (her voice rises). And I saw you here on the stairs (herself) and you seemed to be making of him, showing him off, wanting him.

FIRST HALF-CHORUS. Naima was making much of him.... Cosseting him.

SECOND HALF-CHORUS. Naima had known him.

NAIMA. I knew him.

MOTHER. Why did you reach out to him with your hands, hug him?

NAIMA. If you do something, you do it with your hands.

MOTHER. I wish they’d been cut off, had never reached out, (Contemplates her own hands). But your father—it was your father put me up to it.

FATHER. (From within his room). Are you turning against me? (Pauses absent-mindedly). I can’t bear myself.

MOTHER. He wants to run away, to sleep; wants to close his eyes...

NAIMA. There’s no running away through the door’s open.

MOTHER (sighs). Why don’t we go out like everybody else? (Appealing to them). It’s what everybody does. In their blood-stained clothes. But they meet, everywhere and make their way. NAIMA. If you can go, go. There’s the door. (Points to the door)

MOTHER. Go. (Turn about herself) go wherever? (To NAIMA). The world’s full of ways, (sighs) but where?
CHORUS. They don't know which way to go and the world's full of ways.

NAIMA. The whole world's yours.

MOTHER. We should keep together the three of us.

CHORUS. The killers and the slain.

NAIMA (ironic). The three of us, the killer and the slain.

MOTHER. Hand in hand, let's just leave this village altogether.

NAIMA. What about people outside. Outside the village?

CHORUS. The people outside—the people. Us...

MOTHER. Nobody's seen anything. We don't owe anybody anything, (pause) but there's strange folk about.

FATHER'S VOICE (from within, muttering). I wish that were true.

MOTHER. You're dreaming.

NAIMA. He wants to get up and go.

MOTHER. Old age has got us all.

NAIMA (with a touch of vanity). I'm still young, Yesterday's little girl.


NAIMA. You're the ones that buried me.

FATHER'S VOICE (from within, scoffing). I was out of it.

NAIMA. And I did nothing to harm you. I didn't lock you in as you say I did. There's the world, wide open to whoever wants to walk in it, shoulder his load and go. (Makes for the outer door and manipulates it, opens it wide to reveal the lane. This lets in noise outside).
FATHER (hurries out joyfully). You’ve opened the door? (To the MOTHER). Let’s go outside.

(A moment of silence until the itinerant PEDDLER appears. She has an ugly wrinkled face and wears a number of rings and bracelets. Her henna-dyed hair shows under her black headdress. She unloads her goods).

PEDDLER (her foot on the threshold of the outer door). Lord Protector.* anybody there?

(The mother and the father are started. They exchange rapid glances and rush off stage, each one to his room).

NAIMA. Who’s there?

PEDDLER. What did they run away for?

NAIMA. They saw you. Who are you?

PEDDLER (advances with her load). I’m a stranger here. I travel about the village and when I saw the house open, with people talking inside, I came in to see.

NAIMA. What’s inside can’t be seen; (pause), come along, come in.

PEDDLER (advances further with her load. Stands at a distance from NAIMA, scrutinizes her at length, then, speaking hesitantly, as she alternately advances a foot and retreats again). Tell me my child, tell me and I’ll tell you; unburden yourself and I’ll do the same.

NAIMA. I’ve nothing to say, (pause) but they have.

PEDDLER. (Keeps trying to conceal a part of herself). There’s no one on the face of the earth who isn’t carrying some burden inside himself, in a hidden place.

NAIMA. Are you talking about things they repent of... things that have happened?

PEDDLER. Yes.

NAIMA. I’ve nothing.

(*) Traditional ejaculatory prayer of stranger entering a household.
PEDDLER (covers up her mouth with her as she laughs). You've nothing?

NAIMA. No.

PEDDLER. You mean you weren't there... watching.

NAIMA. I was, and saw. But I had no hand in it. And here's my hand.

(Shows PEDDLER her hand)

PEDDLER. But you did see who had a hand in it.

NAIMA. Do you want me to have been blinded, so as not to see?

PEDDLER (amicably). No, only to have stopped it.

NAIMA (defeated). I couldn't.

PEDDLER (aggressive). You needn't have kept quiet.

NAIMA (approaches to inspect the PEDDLER closely and walk round her). I didn't keep quiet and I've had to stay with them, so that they'd see me every day... See what they've done; at every sunrise... see themselves.

PEDDLER (catching her by surprise). And is that enough?

NAIMA. It's all I can do.

(Pause)

PEDDLER. Why, you must have licked it up a long time ago.

NAIMA. Nobody locked it up. This is the way they want it.

PEDDLER. But you must have stifled.

NAIMA. They have.

PEDDLER (astonished). But you saw what happened. That means you're involved.

NAIMA (downcast). I saw...
PEDDLER (walks about her). Then you shouldn’t have kept quiet.

NAIMA (submissive). If the dead man came to meet Death on his own two feet and accepted what was done to him, what was I to do?

MOTHER (rushes out of her room). No, never. Don’t listen to her. Don’t believe her. She was there, just as this house was and the stairs and these crumbling walls flaking away day by day. (Stumbles, suddenly stops her movement and talk, contemplates the PEDDLER, then, sharply) and who are you? Where are you from?

PEDDLER (taken aback: expects more; retreats). I... I’m also involved in what happened.

MOTHER (pulling herself together). Who are you? What brought you here? Into this house at night! (Scrutinizes her). You’re not from these parts.

PEDDLER (her sharp voice smacking of artifice; there is a slight trembling in her right hand which grasps a cane made from the spine of a palm frond). I’m just a beggar woman. I wander round the village. I’m looking for something I’ve lost. (Stutters), I can’t remember it very well, (confidently) but I’m going to find it.

NAIMA. So you’ve lost something too, have you, stranger?

PEDDLER. Yes, a long time ago: years ago. And I want to know who’s responsible.

MOTHER. (Retreats. Shouts aggressively). There’s nothing in our house. (Points to the open outer door). Look outside: the world’s a big place.

NAIMA (to her MOTHER). Why should she outside? Is there anything to hide here?

PEDDLER. I’ve looked outside a long time: all my life I’ve looked.

NAIMA. Then you must look here, inside. (A pause), come in.

PEDDLER (keeping the side of her face covered). Never mind: you want to go to bed.

MOTHER. Liar! Night and day! You don’t sleep at all, sleep never even lays a finger tip on your eyelids; (pause). You’re my daughter and I know you. (THREE GIRLS peep round the
outer door. They creep in and exchange apprehensive glances: a stranger smile light up their faces).

**NAIMA.** (Haughtily, to her MOTHER). You say you know one? Me, I'm as much a stranger to you as this woman here, (points to the PEDDLER), and I'm not even looking outside for what I've lost, as she's doing; (suddenly more lively) what's outside is useless, it's good for nothing. (Pause), But real death is when one of us is dead standing up on his feet. I mean, he'd be eating and talking to people and yet be long dead and replete with death.**PEDDLER** (clears her throat and conceals the side of her face: then, to herself). She's a bonfire.

**MOTHER** (to PEDDLER). She's my daughter, out of my own belly. ( Strikes her stomach with the flat of her head. Her glance falls upon the GIRLS who have crept in; she stops short to scream at them). Who are you? (Retreats a step). Who let you in here? Who are you? (TO NAIMA). What's going on? What's happening? (Shakes her). What are you standing like that for? Naima, my girl, my own, answer me! Answer your mother who brought you up. (Kneels at her feet). Look behind you, there's people there from outside. We're living in the street, it seems. (Rises to her feet slowly and her face clears slightly). Why, our door's open—and there are ways outside.

**FATHER** (comes out, dazed). Who? Who is it? (Stops and pointing to the PEDDLER). Who? Tell me.

**MOTHER** (level-headed). She opened the door, (points) your daughter. She says that night and day she's asleep. Do you hear that? Night and day.

**FATHER.** I don't understand anything: and night's fallen and it's dark in the alley, (Cowers against the wall) and there's a stranger in the house.

**MOTHER** (to NAIMA). I know what you're brewing up. I know what it is.

**NAIMA.** I'm not brewing up anything: I'm not going to harm you.

**FATHER.** (With malice). You.

**NAIMA.** I'm with you night and day. That's enough for me.
MOTHER. You snap at us like a goose, night and day you’re still not content.

PEDDLER. Are you frightened of something?

NAIMA. I’m not afraid.

MOTHER (accusingly). You’re the one who opened the door. You’re the cause, from first to last.

NAIMA. Do you want me to close it?

PEDDLER. I’m off right away.

MOTHER. Why go? Is there anything wrong?

FATHER. This house is closed, like every other house. What happens inside it has happened and goes on happening everywhere; (pause) it’s just that we bicker morning, noon and night. (Stops). We’re like that; (to the GIRLS) even people outside can hear us, often—and the children. (Points to smiling GIRLS).

NAIMA (defending her home in the same way as her FATHER has done). Yes, there are lots of people snapping at each other, night and day, at every blink of an eyelash. And living together, with nobody knowing the slayer from the slain.

MOTHER (to NAIMA). What are you saying?

FATHER. She’s just repeating the same old story, this squabble of ours; (TO MOTHER) have you forgotten it, Hanger? It’s still with us.

PEDDLER. Why don’t you forget what’s past and live with each other, as a family, as they do in every house one comes across as one makes one’s way about the world; house which are closed and open, darkened and lit, with no evil in them. (Approaches NAIMA with tenderness). Were you there?

NAIMA (retreats slightly). Do you really want to know?

MOTHER (haughty). She’s vagrant, a beggar.
FATHER. Give her something to eat and shut the door. Calm down: we should all close our doors and go to sleep. (Pause).

NAIMA. We get up in the morning, picking up where we left off, and go to bed, (mocking) and next day we're face to face again.

MOTHER (alarmed and astonished). We get up at the crack of dawn pick up the pieces of the past—won't the past ever stop? Has it no end? It's something like life: you can't tell where it starts and where it ends. Day in day out and we just fulfill—(Screeches) is there to be no rest?

NAIMA. Better clear the strangers out, then; the leave the strangers to themselves and lock oneself in behind one's door. (Sharply, facing her MOTHER). What are we to do? What is it you want to do? Why, you've made me lose my way, made me wear your old clothes.

MOTHER (reasoning). We used to stick together, we three, One family. (Corners her and talks at her). You're our daughter.

PEDDLER (intervenes). Obey your mother and father, who brought you up.

FATHER. So let's close the door and sit here, face to face. Is that what you want?

MOTHER (quickly cutting in). And why close the door in the face of visitors, (emphatically, as she makes for the outer door) why should our door shut out visitors? (TO NAIMA). Aren't there people in this world who quarrel with each other? (Pause). It's not as if we're strangers to each other. (Moves with her body to mark out a tight circle, center stage, in the middle of which she stands with the three others spaced apart along its circumference; she mutters inflammatory, incomprehensible words to herself which the others are meant to overhear). He was standing about here and we were here (TO NAIMA). And you stood there watching, with us; the three of us and you saw the head fall off, into the dust (faces NAIMA). That means you were with us, (emphatic) one of us, your eyes side by side with ours.

NAIMA (laughs at length as she contemplates her MOTHER'S bewilderment). So, we're all the same, much of a much ness, with me no different from you!
FATHER (to the GIRLS). Come in; don’t stand away there, on the thrushold! Come in, we’re neighbors, (contemplates them). Why, you’ve certainly grown up—you don’t any of you cuddle up in mother’s lap any longer, do you? (THE GIRLS giggle and creep in cautiously).

FIRST GIRL. We were still young when it all happened.

SECOND GIRL. We were still chewing the hems of our dresses.

THIRD GIRL. We just looked on.

FATHER. Well, there are things one does and then sets aside and moves on.

NAIMA (to GIRLS). To each his own.

PEDDLER. Do introduce us... so that we can get to know each other... properly.

MOTHER (to PEDDLER). This is my daughter. My daughter.

NAIMA. As long as there’s strangers from outside we have to keep quite, shut the door and keep each other’s secrets.

PEDDLER (aggressive). Now I recognize you (Violent). You’re like them

FIRST GIRL. She’s their daughter and a part of them.

SECOND GIRL. She was there; it all took place before her very eyes.

THIRD GIRL. She was with them.

NAIMA (droops). What am I to do with my own father and mother?

MOTHER (laughs and runs to hug NAIMA). That’s how I brought her up and I know her from top to toe; (to PEDDLER) she never cried. (Looks for something then, to GIRL, startling them by striking one cupped palm into the other :) come along. Come in. there’s nothing here to gloat over and tattle to each other about.

FATHER. Come along, now, there’s nothing the house, (the GIRL up stage of him, are busy inspecting the contents of the house). It’s just a house like yours, there’s nothing special
about it, the walls are just walls and the oven’s those are the stairs, (they stand rooted before the staircase with PEDDLER). And upstairs, there’s Naima’s room. Up there.

FIRST GIRL. Overlooking the Nile.

SECOND GIRL. And it’s the Nile that carries a stranger back to his village.

MOTHER (pays attention). Are you looking for something, you girls? I can see your eyes staring (calms dawn suddenly). Can I make you some tea?

FATHER (happy). You’ve forgotten us; woman... must have some tea. Come on, come on; light the fire for the guest, welcome, welcome, and come along now, don’t look so surprised, there’s nothing

Strange here, (to NAIMA) everything’s as it’s always been (Amiably). We’ve got visitors; we’ve got behave decently.

MOTHER. We all belong to each other.

NAIMA. Don’t be afraid: there’s nothing to be afraid of here. Apart from us. (Warns the strangers). Just don’t go near that chest there—keep away from it.

(FATHER and MOTHER freeze in their footsteps).

MOTHER (takes stock of NAIMA for a moment). That’s right; don’t move anything from its place. Everything’s got a lid to it.

(The GIRLS stand still as they contemplate the chest).

FATHER (to the MOTHER). Leave everything as it is. You go and make the tea for the guest. And light the large lamp, the one with the shade over it and I’ll come and wash the glasses. (Follows his wife and busies himself in helping her make the tea at the small mud brick stove).

(NAIMA suddenly remembers the chest: she produces a key and locks it. Her MOTHER catches sight of her just in time, runs to her, hugs and kisses her. She signals to FATHER, who
goes over to the chest and shoves it to the rear. FATHER and MOTHER returns to their work. NAIMA faces the stairs, lost in thought. She climbs the stairs and takes up her old position at the top. The GIRLS surround the PEDDLER, whispering to each other. The FATHER and the MOTHER busy themselves making tea, while keeping a wary eye on NAIMA’S doing. The GIRLS talk to the PEDDLER sporadically, in low voice, as they follow her.)

FIRST GIRL. She’s remembering.

SECOND GIRL. She just doesn’t die.

THIRD GIRL. She can see him.

PEDDLER. As they’re doing.

(Pause).

FIRST GIRL. She’s taking to herself.

SECOND GIRL. What can she do?

THIRD GIRL. She can only dream and go on living.

PEDDLER (accusing). She’s a coward... and dead.

(HASSAN appears out of the darkness at the top of the stairs, his head spotlight. The lighting is dimmed where it falls on the PEDDLER with the GIRL around her. They freeze. The FATHER and the MOTHER, but bent over, more slowly to the rear by oven, remaining throughout aware of NAIMA’S movement)

NAIMA (softly to HASSAN) you knew!

HASSAN (eyes downcast). What could I do?

NAIMA. You’d been drinking and knew.
HASSAN. Yes.

NAIMA. Was there no other way?

HASSAN. There was.

NAIMA. Why then?

HASSAN. Some things are beyond us. One can’t see them; (wondering) what can one do?

Run? Run where? (Stops)

NAIMA. And what am I to do? (HASSAN remains silent). What can I do? (He remains silent). Life’s killing me.

HASSAN (sighing). Hah…!

NAIMA (sharply). They’ve buried me, my father and my mother.

HASSAN (gestures protesting with his hands). Don’t Naima, don’t now that I’m here.

NAIMA (repelling him). Don’t you say? (Screams at him). You’re always saying don’t.

HASSAN (retreats slightly. Threatening). I’m going.

NAIMA (sharply). That’s why you knew you were going to die, could see death with your eyes: walked through village after village to meet it, on your own two feet.

HASSAN (eyes downcast). What could I have done?

NAIMA. Not die!

HASSAN. I’m dead now.

HASSAN. With your father and mother who killed me?

NAIMA. With the ones who killed you.

HASSAN (points). They’ve accused me, drowned me with them.
HASSAN. They die at every sunrise.

NAIMA. I die too with them.

HASSAN. Every one looks to himself.

NAIMA. No one can tell the slayer from the slain.

HASSAN. Let’s not bother about other people; let’s just look to ourselves. (Pause). I knew what was to happen from the moment your people came to our village and came to my house to have me come and sing in your village and I felt that I’d never return. Which is what happened?

NAIMA (gesticulating in his face). So then, you had a hand in what happened!

HASSAN. But I’ve been killed, butchered!

NAIMA. You came to the stranger on your own two feet. And now you want me to keep quite and shield your killers. (Shrieks in his face). Why did you come walking to your death, knowing and seeing that they were plotting together? Why, everybody knew! As you wept, you kept on bleating “Naima” in front of them, in front of my father and mother and my cousins and all those people about you here, at the foot of the stairs, (Points and wheels, talking to herself). And from that day on, I’ve been living with dead people and seeing you. (HASSAN disappears, NAIMA revives somewhat). And here’s People from outside (Points to PEDDLER and GIRLS), come to accuse me (somewhat started) even my father and mother, who killed you, accuse me. They say I was there, in this house (to herself, as she descends the stairs) so that it’s from both inside and out.

(The lighting comes up on PEDDLER and GIRLS)
NAIMA (pulls herself together, regains her earlier demeanor...makes for PEDDLER and GIRLS). What, what are you saying?

PEDDLER (to NAIMA). You say people don’t know each other?

FIRST GIRL. She’s their daughter.

SECOND GIRL. She’s with them.

THIRD GIRL. And they’ve lived face to face all their lives.

FIRST GIRL. With the door closed.

PEDDLER. Why you’re dead, all three of you.

MOTHER (approaches boisterously with the tea, FATHER behind her). She’s my daughter and this is her father.

PEDDLER. We know everything.

NAIMA (to PEDDLER). Can you tell the slayer from the slain?

MOTHER (taken aback, throws the teapot down). What are you talking about?

FATHER (started). Nobody’s said anything. (To MOTHER)

Wake up! It’s an old story. We must shut ourselves in behind our door. (Faces PEDDLER).

Strangers have no business in our house in this place where we lie down together.

(Appeaches NAIMA threateningly). And you, wake up to yourself; (Tenses), there’s strangers in the house. (Apologetic). It’s your father talking to you; (warning her) keeps your eyes open and wake up.

NAIMA (to herself). All my life asleep, all my life dreaming.

PEDDLER. You’ll have to wake up.
MOTHER (accusing). She never sleeps; she’s my daughter and I know her.

FATHER (emphatic). There are people like that in this world, seeing evil, knowing it yet walking out to meet it, to welcome it.

NAIMA. Me?

FATHER. We’re all got a hand in what happened. Even the dead man. (Pause). And you knew. (Gentle). And I warned you, girl. Don’t I tell you many a time—my tongue wore out—and you never listened. (Takes stock of her, from head to toe). But you’ve been that away from the beginning, Naima. You listen only to yourself and nothing outside of that.

NAIMA. I’ve been hearing him, (pause). Since the saint’s day when I saw him...singing.

PEDDLER (draws herself up to face FATHER). And he was the same, (Retreats). We told him often enough... don’t go.’

MOTHER (alarmed). What’s that you’re saying?

FATHER. She’s just a Peddler—daft.

PEDDLER. I’m talking about the strangers.

NAIMA (taken aback). Hassan?

MOTHER (to the PEDLER and GIRLS). Is there anything you want here? (To herself) I must be blind. (Runs to NAIMA). Upstairs with you. Go to sleep. That’s quite enough.

NAIMA (to PEDDLER). You say he was like that too? You knew him?

PEDDLER. Yes, he knew.

FIRST GIRL. And Naima knew.

SECOND GIRL. Was present... and could see.
THIRD GIRL. Their own daughter... of their own flesh and blood.

MOTHER (to the PEDDLER and THREE GIRLS). Are you trying to set this house ablaze?

FATHER. Burn it up... and go?

NAIMA (suddenly to PEDDLER). Who are you, stranger?

PEDDLER (taken aback, recoils). Me? I’m a relative of the victim... the man you a
betrayed in this house. I was brought up with him.

We’re a large family--- most of the village: and they’re looking for him.

MOTHER (withdrawing; to herself). A relative of the dead man? (Seeks the protection of
FATHER). See?

FATHER (to NAIMA). Don’t you recognize me? (To the others), I’m not such a stranger;
I’m the dead man’s cousin; Hassan’s cousin. I’ve been looking for him for ages.

FATHER (to himself, alarmed). What’s going on?

MOTHER (defiant to NAIMA). You’ll disgrace us, me and your father. (Fuming). Have
you finally decided—got it all ready? And forgotten what you’ve done to us over a lifetime?

FIRST GIRL. Make up your mind which way you’re going...

SECOND GIRL. Where you stand?

THIRD GIRL. If you want to survive...

NAIMA (contemplates her parents surreptitiously). They’re dead.

PEDDLER. Have you recognized me?

FATHER. Look at your father, (Appealing). Look at me.

MOTHER (to herself). What about me, after all this (To others). What bitterness we’ve
tasted, bitter-apple—(to herself), whole cupful of it.

**PEDDLER** (talking NAIMA by surprise). Are they the ones who killed him?

**NAIMA** (reasoning). He knew and didn’t protest.

**PEDDLER.** And are you going to keep quite?

**FIRST GIRL.** She’s on their side.

**SECOND GIRL.** Their flesh and their blood.

**NAIMA** (to all those about her; tense). Are you all accusing me?

(Halls by PEDDLER and GIRLS). Even you, strangers who’ve seen nothing?

(FATHER and MOTHER cringe fearfully, warily)

**PEDDLER** (sharply). What is it you’re trying to say? Whose side are you on?

**FIRST GIRL.** See—they’re speechless before you.

**SECOND GIRL.** Don’t put up with evil...

**THIRD GIRL.** From your mother and father.

**NAIMA.** He’d want that; (silence) he didn’t like evil.

**PEDDLER.** You’re the only one to have seen it with your own eyes, the only witness against the murderers. And that’s not an evil thing.

**NAIMA** (unconcerned). That’s what he wanted.

**MOTHER** (with a lunatic joy). She’s my daughter – out of my own belly.

**FATHER** (controls himself and speaks to STRANGERS). There’s nothing for you here, you mischief mongers.
(As the three GIRLS appears anxious and perturbed, moving slowly towards the outer door, preparing to leave, the PEDDLER collects her things and wheels round to address NAIMA)

PEDDLER. Everybody told me—told me that you were like them — treacherous, with evil in both your eyes!

THE THREE GIRLS (suddenly noisy, as they continue to move slowly on their way out). We all said so. She’s been protecting them for s long time. She’s like them... their daughter... with evil in her eyes... been like that all her life... shutting herself in... because she’s dead and replace with death... those three never see the sun... not one of them.

(GIRLS go out slamming the door violently. From outside are heard murmuring and the thud of bricks striking the outer door. The murmuring grows louder. A pause)

NAIMA (suddenly attentive, runs to the outer and bolts it, returns to where FATHER and MOTHER stand breathless). So we can remain face to face, winter and summer day after day.

MOTHER (assenting). That’s right; why we’re one flesh and don’t owe anybody anything, (affectionate) and we must forget the past – bury it and look to ourselves. (Moves with a nervous liveliness). Yes, live... (TO FATHER). Live as we used to a long time ago.

FATHER (moves to stand beside NAIMA). Yes and see the world at last. (To himself).

We’ve clean forgotten it.

MOTHER (looks around, wondering). We did something unthinkable. We were forced to it, with rear in our eyes.

FATHER. Yes there’s a thing pushing us that are bigger than we are, that shove us and hurl us on our faces down to the ground.

NAIMA (astonished). Push us?

MOTHER (accusing). You were here, weren’t you, saw it all happening? Here in front of you (Runs towards the stairs) here.
NAIMA. While you stood with the meat-cleaver in your hand.

MOTHER (becomes calm). Me?

NAIMA. You and him... (Points to FATHER)

FATHER (heated). This thing has neither beginning nor end.

MOTHER (to FATHER). Death would be more merciful.

FATHER. I can’t stand any more; (confused) I can’t see my way clear; (muttering) what we go to bed with, we wake up with!

NAIMA (calm). We’ll go on living as we’ve been doing, with our door closed and bolted. We’ll not see the sun. and keep calling each other to account, with each of us speaking for himself of what’s his, inside him, (her tone of voice changes as she moves about them), eating away at him like a maggot in a bit of old cheese.

MOTHER (quite, calm, surrendering). Are we still to go on gnawing at each other, go on taking the dead out of their graves (to NAIM) and have them to stay with us? Go to sleep and wake up with them beside us—(shouts) still?

NAIMA. What can we do? (Backs away). It’s a game we play with each other, the three of us, of our own free will. (Stops). But no, each of us is looking to himself/

FATHER. What can we do? (Pause, affirms). We should—(MOTHER and FATHER moves rapidly, with great tension, their ears constantly alert to the hubbub outside).

MOTHER. We’ll have to find another way out of this.

NAIMA. Go on then! (Pause: unconcerned). I’ve not done anything to you. I’ve given you up to yourself; (Feigns malice) to the judge—who’s inside us, who writes things down on a
tablet and underlines them. (Pause, during which they listen as the hubbub of intermingled voice increases outside).

**FATHER.** We'll have to find a way, bring it to an end, draw a line—

**MOTHER** (to herself). What we take to bed with us, we wake up with.

**FATHER** (faces the outer door). We're... I'm choking; (Inclines his head to look himself over), there's nothing left... nothing!

**MOTHER** (looks herself over as well). What about me? Where's my youth which I buried here, when I did it, (Contemplates her hand), from the moment my hand stretched out against him, (Turn to NAIMA... their eyes meet, the MOTHER runs towards her). I didn't mean—I couldn't help it—I couldn't foresee all this.

**FATHER** (astonished, scoffing). You, crawling at her feet, you, her mother?

**MOTHER** (joins FATHER at the door. They contemplate NAIMA and whisper to each other). It's as if nothing bothering her.

**FATHER.** She's shaming us to death.

**MOTHER.** During us and cutting our throats.

(During this time, NAIMA makes for the chest, loses herself in contemplating it and then opens it and brings out its contents).

**NAIMA.** Where are Hassan's clothes? My husband's - my darling's clothes? Where's his skull-cap?

**MOTHER** (sobbing). She's bringing out the dead; and clothing us with the past, showing us to ourselves, (Shrieks), she's mirror! (Pause as her with FATHER close behind, in a
sudden movement suggestive of a surprise attack, which makes her fall on to the chest). No! No! Anything but this! Enough – enough; let’s put an end to it, enough.

**NAIMA** (weakly). They’re Hassan’s clothes. You killed him in your house, while he was singing.

**FATHER.** (Angrily snatching clothes away from her). These are our clothes. Ours to wear and protect our naked bodies with.

**MOTHER** (retreating towards outer door). To wear just once, not every day, not at every blink of an eye, each time you go for us and shame us to death.

**FATHER** (clutching the old clothes, joins MOTHER). Better to just die and have done.

**MOTHER** (her hand on bolt to outer door). I’m going to open the door to death, to the sun that’s filling the street. (Opens outer door: the PEDESTLER, the GIRLS and a crowd of PREASANTS are revealed; they all fall suddenly silent. The MOTHER and FATHER stand stock still or a moment, and then the crowd makes way for them to exit, MOTHERS shrieks). Come and deliver us from her and her eyes. Come closer, whether you care or not, come.

**FATHER** (raises the clothes above his head). And here are his clothes, the clothes of the murdered stranger. The singer’s clothes. The clothes of Hassan, the man we killed with knives—in the summer, twenty years ago.

**MOTHER.** Killed him and I say, come all of you, deliver us—and listen to what we did: those of you here to tell those who aren’t. (They move, with the crowd following them, till all are out of sight. The lights dim, there is silence for a while.)

**NAIMA.** They’ve run away… (pause, wondering). My father and mother? (Pause). They weren’t able to go on living: they’ve escaped.
(Faces stairs). He said this would happen. He... knew? Knew that each of us knows himself, (Affirms) must know himself, what he’s done and what he’s doing, what’s behind and what’s ahead. (Hears noise outside: a continuous shouting and murmuring, screams of persons of in pain, voices of people running past)

CONFUSED VOICE. No... let them go... use a rope... out of the way, you... out of the way... look out... careful there... tie them up.

(Apprehensive, NAIMA makes for the front door, she meets the three GIRLS who come running, terrified.)

FIRST GIRL. Come along Naima, they’re trying them up.

SECOND GIRL. With ropes.

NAIMA. My mother and father?

THIRD GIRL. Yes, come along.

NAIMA (sudden). What about me? I was there.

MOTHER’S VOICE (from outside, angrily). She was there. It happened before her very eyes.

NAIMA (shrieks). I can’t... never.

(The GIRLS surround her: she looks as though she is drowning in their midst).

FIRST GIRL. You’re innocent.

SECOND GIRL. It’s your own clothes. You’re wearing.

THIRD GIRL. You own clean clothes: the scent of them reached us in the lane.
FIRST GIRL. Right across the village.

NAIMA. My clothes!

FIRST GIRL. There's no soil upon you and there's an end to it.

SECOND GIRL (faces her). And each of us looks into himself.

THIRD GIRL. Wherever he goes, he looks into himself.

NAIMA. I was there, and saw it happen.

FIRST GIRL. It was out of your hands. And those are your own words, Naima.

NAIMA (retreats from them). It was—everything is in our hands. I'm changing with every moment.

SECOND GIRL. We find hands forced and weep.

THIRD GIRL. There are things greater than us and we can't understand them.

FIRST GIRL. And each of us accepts his lot and keeps quite.

NAIMA (wondering). Keeps quit? How keep quite with all that's happening? (Forces them). What is that makes us keep quite and shut the doors and not speak up? Each of us locked up in a dark cranny? And sitting inside eating away at him in the dark?

(Enter THREE VILLANCE CRONES, leaning on each, the first of them shading her eyes).

FIRST OLD WOMAN. We're on your side, Naima. This has gone far enough.

NAIMA (to FIRST OLD WOMAN). I saw what happened. I saw it coming, in their eyes.

SECOND OLD WOMAN. You mean your father and mother?

NAIMA. I mean lots of things—everything—all that's happening.

THIRD OLD WOMAN. It's not in our hands.
NAIMA. You mean our hands are tied, all of us—slayer and slain?

FIRST GIRL. That’s what we’re saying.

SECOND GIRL. And you must listen. You must.

THIRD GIRL. And live with us, out of harm’s way.

NAIMA (to everybody). Is that what you’re saying?

FIRST OLD WOMAN. It’s not we who’re saying it.

SECOND OLD WOMAN. Always sounding in our ears, as long as there are palms to prune.

NAIMA (to all the others). So that’s what killed Hassan years ago. He knew it and could see it. (THE OLD WOMAN laugh). It makes you laugh, does it? (Angry). That’s because you’re earthbound, rickety. And it’s true. That’s it! People cowering against the walls all their lives, taking cover. And surrendering to all that happens, all the miseries that fill the earth.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (astonished). What’s this my child? Why are you suddenly talking off your clothes and throwing them away as far as you can, to stand there undressed, quite naked?

SECOND OLD WOMAN. You’re shameless, Naima.

THIRD OLD WOMAN. Isn’t what’s happened to your mother and father enough, when all’s said?

FIRST GIRL. On account of you.

SECOND GIRL. You whore you (silence).
NAIMA. Me, a whore? (TO SECOND GIRL). Me, a whore? (TO OLD WOMAN). Me?

THE OLD WOMEN (shocked intake of breath. Lips pursed in denial). No, no, no anything but that.

FIRST OLD WOMAN. We’re midwives and we know Naima from top to toe.

SECOND OLD WOMAN (affirms). All her life.

THIRD OLD WOMAN. From the moment she was conceived.

NIAMA (to OLD WOMAN). I’m not talking about that. No, I’m simply angry at myself. (Pause). I was there; (violent) am I to stand still when people kill one another?

THIRD OLD WOMAN. And what could you have done—stop what’s fated?

NAIMA. That sort of thing must end; (pause) it’s an evil thing, fate, a prison. And fate’s no stranger from outside of us: we go to meet it on our own two feet; (pause) and Hassan came to meet death and hugged it, (accusing) and I saw him from the stairs here, (FACES the stairs). Saw him with these very eyes and heard his screams with my ears, as he flailed at the walls, and I didn’t cry because it was fated.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (insists). What could you have done? What would you want to do?

NAIMA. What wasn’t done?

SECOND OLD WOMAN. Forestall fate?

THIRD OLD WOMAN. Escape your lot?

SECOND GIRL. And where would you go? Which way?

NAIMA (climbs three steps and stops). Which way? Which way? The only way is to keep going and not look back at the dead people behind us, nor listen to all they’ve said and say...
it’s fate—written—and accept evil and cleave to the walls and protect each other and hide what’s inside us. (Scrutinizes the faces surrounding her). I can’t live with you, nor with the dead, take evil into my arms and say it’s fate. (Accusing). You’ve all of you accepted evil and the treachery that took place in this village; you’ve closed the doors and the windows and locked yourselves up inside yourselves.

THE THREE GIRLS. We’re with you Naima, with you.

THE OLD WOMAN. You’re beside yourself, Naima, beside yourself.

NAIMA. I’m going out of my mind.

(The OLD WOMEN retreats frightened. The GIRLS surround Naima, breathless; they move behind her and go out slamming the outer door. The OLD WOMEN retire to sit separately in the darkened corner of the stage.)

FIRST OLD WOMAN. Her mother and father—

SECOND OLD WOMAN (pitying). Life is hard.

THIRD OLD WOMAN. Run away from her. Left her the house, and went to meet death.

FIRST OLD WOMAN. Life is hard.

The original play was published by Dar al-jamhuriyya, Cairo, 1964 and with al-Mahzala al-Ardiyya, as no. X of al-Masrahiyya, (March 1966).

The original title in the plural of a word, far fâr, thought up by the author to mean something or someone light, flimsy and fluttering. The equivalent we have given it in English is, we reckon, a word which should convey a similar effect.

This society which comprised most prominent literary figures of that time, played an active
role in promoting Arabic drama.

To sum up, the above mentioned schools, colleges and societies contributed greatly to Arabic literature specially drama, which progressed by leaps and bounds in the years to Come. Tawfiq al-Hakim and Ahmed Shawqi have played an important role in this regard.