

might consider as a kind of polytheism. Mr. Aziza also thinks that Islam, although he admits that there is nothing in the Qoran to support this, is opposed to the art of painting and consequently to any form of 'representation' including that on stage. See M. Aziza, Islam and the Theatre (tr. Dr. Sabban), Kitab al-Hilal, No. 243, April 1971, p. 129 & pp. 11-16.

6- Hassib Kayyali, Your Opinion, Arab Writers' Union Press, Damascus 1981, p. 90.

7- Farhan Bulbol, The Party Took Place at the Square, Maysaloun Press, Damascus, 1981, p. 29.

8- Waleed Ikhlas, A Democratic Soiree on the Stage, Arab Writers' Union Press, Damascus, 1979, p. 17.

9- Ibid. p. 87.

10- Ibid. p. 66.

11- S.A. Wannus, A Soiree for the 5th of June, Dar al-Arab, Beirut, 1980, pp. 120-26.

12- S.A. Wannus, The King is the King, Dar Ibn Rushed, 1977, p. 119.

13- Ali Ukla Arsan, The Palestinian Women, in Collected Works: 1964-88. Vol. 1. Tlas Press, Damascus, 1989, p. 334.

إن المسرح في العالم العربي شكل فني قريب العهد نسبياً. وتختط هذه الدراسة نهوض المسرح وتطوره في سورية. كما تكشف عن اهتمام الكتاب المسرحيين السوريين بالبعد السياسي والاجتماعي في الدرجة الأولى بما يطبع الخاصية الفنية لأعمالهم. وعلى الرغم من المعوقات التي اعترضت المسرح السوري والتي تعود إلى عوامل عديدة، فإن هذا المسرح استشراف إلى تغيرات جوهرية في الشكل والمضمون.

NOTES

1- For more details, see Adnan Bin Dartheel, Syrian Theatre, Damascus, 1971, pp. 19-37. As a tribute to Abu Khaleel al-kubbani the celebrated dramatists S.A. Wannus wrote a whole play entitled A Solree with Abu Khaleel al-Kubbani in which he dramatised the life of this pioneering figure and how he resisted all the difficulties which confronted him while trying to establish a theatre in Damascus. For another pioneer dramatist, the Lebanese Marooan al-naqqash, see Matti Moosa, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 1972, Vol. III, pp. 106-17. It is worth noting that Naqqash is more interested in translation and adaptation rather than in producing original works of his own.

2- The dean of this College, Prof. Ghassan al-Maleh, teacher of drama and literature at Damascus University is a graduate from a British university. He is well known for his enthusiasm for, and interest in, Drama and Theatre. He has published several articles on Syrian drama in Syrian periodicals and edited several books on drama. Since the foundation of the college, prof. Maleh visited Britain several times exploring modern movements and development in the theatre and introducing up to date changes in his College. The College of Dramatic Arts Provides the first serious opportunity in Syria to gain the experience for both the director and actor. It offers training in direction, theatre practice, playwrighting, actions, mime, song, and dance.

3- Dr. Ualbi concludes that lack of freedom in the Abbasiet period did not allow drama to develop then. Actually this may be just one of my reasons. Moreover, there is far less freedom now in the Middle East than at the time of the Abbasiet period, yet theatre is pervasive in the Arab world. The Abbasiet period is perhaps the most liberal and permissive of all Arab history. See Dr. Ahmad Ulabi, 'Dramatic manifestations in Arab history' in Arabic Theatre: Between Translation and Originality, al-Arabi Journal Book, No. 18, 1988, pp. 42-3.

4- It is interesting to note in passing that very recently (Ramadan 1992) Sherihan, the well-known Egyptian actress, is playing on a T.V. show the role of the narrator of Joseph's story dramatically under the title of 'Puzzles'.

5- Mr. M. Aziza includes in his book Islam and Theatre a short Persian play entitled The Suffering of al-Hussein: Ceremony of Mourning which is a combination of a morality and miracle play. Artistically speaking, the play is affected by its religious sermons, direct message, and occasionally by its abstract language; the reason why it did not give urge to other writers to imitate it and develop out of it some kind of sophisticated morality plays initially is probably because the vast majority of the Arab world consist of orthodox Sunni Moslems (fundamentalists) who do not approve of over-glorification of Muhammad's descendants and who think of some parts of the Persian Shiet branch of Islam as a kind of deviation. The play itself makes of al-Hussein a kind of 'saviour' who, like Jesus, is prepared to give his life as atonement for sins of his nation,' something which Sunni Moslems

directions, themes that are true to national life, drawing upon the traditions, history and beliefs of people. The colonial period distorted the roots of such a national theatre and the development of drama in Syria in recent years reveals diverse influences. I believe that it is not yet Syrian. It is derivative, and at best a fragile attempt to find a true voice. Playwrights need not only to assimilate the techniques and craft of world drama but also to go beyond the contradictions of the indigenous and the foreign, the traditional and the modern. Only then will the theatre in Syria find an eager and a faithful audience. It is not yet functional. It does not serve a purpose within the community. If it is to grow, theatre culture needs support and subsidy.

Mr. Lahham, it is worth mentioning, collaborated with a well-known writer from Syria, Mohammed al-Maghout, in the writing of these works, and this gave his plays a sharp and critical outlook and enriched them with a strong element of witticism.

Dureid Lahham's plays which have gained him fame and attracted large audience are The Village of Tishreen, Alienation, Your Health My Country and Anemones. In them he uses many theatre forms: drama, music, song and dance. The dominant theme in these plays is the plight of modern man in his own country: the military defeat, the emergence of a class of opportunities and divided Arab world. These have jointly caused corrupt societies and disillusioned individuals. An atmosphere of uncertainty and fear fills the space where people live.

In addition to the socio-political play we have an attempt at the popular tale which usually has social implications. Mr. Kayyali wrote two such tales, the first The Shepherdess and the Sultan to show that learning some sort of skill is indispensable even for a Sultan, the second The Carpenter's Daughter to demonstrate that being resourceful and diligent can achieve miracles.

The story of the first tale revolves around a Sultan who, while walking, meets in the woods a very beautiful shepherdess. The Sultan immediately falls in love with her and asks her to marry him. She agrees on one condition - the Sultan must learn a manual skill. The Sultan learns carpet-making, marries the shepherdess and takes her to his palace. Time passes and the Sultan goes to walk once more in the woods, but this time he falls into the hands of a butcher who sells human flesh for meat. The captive Sultan offers to make a carpet, so that the butcher can sell it to the Sultan and get a large amount of money for it. The butcher agrees. The Sultan writes on the carpet his address to show his intelligent wife, how he may be rescued.

In the second tale Mr. Kayyali tells us about a carpenter and his wife who do not have children. The wife asks her husband to make a wood doll for her. Soon the doll is changed into a real daughter by genii who make embroidery. The prince, Alaa' al-Din, sees the embroidery and admires the girl. He asks his mother, the Queen, to marry him to the carpenter's daughter. When the daughter comes to the palace as a princess, she remains silent. The prince becomes very sad. Time passes and a jug and a pot come arguing before the princess and talk to her, saying, 'by your father the moon and your mother the sun'. The prince overhears this and comes rushing to his wife repeating the same words. For the first time the princess opens her mouth saying, 'Oh, darling.' The prince and the princess live happily ever after.

The two tales look very like morality plays: their atmosphere is removed from day-to-day concern and they captivate the imagination of children rather than present any serious social issue.

To conclude, many problems hinder the development of the theatre in Syria: lack of suitable buildings, theatrical competence (particularly among actors) and adequate finance. The Syrian dramatists has to learn to cease admiring the theatre from abroad, and find genuine new

way in which Don Quixote address her. The whole group realise the meaning and taste of freedom and of being human. The play ends with a song full of liberal and noble sentiments.

Here we find a political theme dramatised in the form of allegory and within the structure of a play inside another. This may give the writer more freedom to express indirectly his political views. The 'double' imprisonment and trail of Cervantes is an effective device and shows how modern man is alienated in his own environment.

In How did you Drop the Sword? Mr. Mamdouh Udwan deals with the political 'revolution' of Abu Zar alGhafari, one of the close followers of Prophet Muhammad, in an attempt to establish justice for the poor. The author sees in Abu Zar a faithful and an honest man but unfortunately he appealed to the wrong people, tho those greedy who did not in the least care for the poor. Consequently Abu Zar failed in his mission of persuading the rich to be charitable to the poor and he, furthermore, did not infiltrate through the classes of the poor to organise them and urge them to mount a revolution. The author contends that Abu Zar should have used the sword, the forceful agent which is the metaphor of the play, to support this mission. Mr. Udwan seems to be convinced that the rich of al-Jahilieh (the pre-Islamaic period) embraced Islam out of hypocrisy in order to change it into a state, rather than a religion which calls for justice. He uses the style of a play within another so that the past will have a bearing on the present. The conclusion of the play is that time has not changed: the rich are the same any time, anywhere.

The play itself is overtly didactic and its main message is very direct. At the end of the play Abu Zar is made into a modern man and one character addresses the audience with the following message:

Dear Gentlemen, The story has not ended yet!
It is you who should decide its conclusion.
Abu Zar is among you
If he comes to you do not let him down.
Make sure you stand by him.
Should he ever be killed let there be among you thousands of Abu Zar.

The appearance of the group of Dureid Lahham, late in the seventies, marks an important phase in Syrian socio-political drama. Mr. Lahham is probably one of very few academicians who work for the theatre. Early in his life, he was a student of physics; but later he found that the stage is his true vocation, and rightly so. He is very well known through his television productions, his cinema film making and theatre appearances. His fame has now ranged wide and he is best known for some distinctive works in which he combines the comic and tragic. The major themes of these works - injustice, opportunism, corruption, immorality and imported vice in the new consumer society, the Arab individual inside a divided nation - to mention but a few, are the themes which reflect the ideals and manners in addition to the major conflicts and issues which helped mould the Syrian national character.

and the young, a generation without land, without roots and without history. Within the second generation, there are dismay, bitterness and anger. At one point, the two generations come together, fighting for survival. Realising that several governments have deceived them, they decide to adopt armed struggle as the only way of liberation and getting back to their homeland, Palestine.

As a play The Palestinian Women is not particularly successful because it openly and directly presents a case and advocates armed struggle as the only solution for the Palestine question:

Hassan: Follow the only road
The road of people is one
The road of unity
The road of revolution
The road of young generation
The road of a giant commando
Oh, comrades
Our road is as clear as the morning ... (13)

Mr. Arsan uses a poetic language which to some, is hardly suitable for the stage:

Masu'd: Waves get angry from time to time
The sea throws odd forms
Behind the waves lies a hurricane
And dubious stories ... (14)

This kind of language makes the play more suited to be read rather than acted, and if at all it has to be used then individualistic not political themes will perhaps be more adequate.

The appeal of this play is certainly related to the audience's guaranteed sympathy for the Palestinian plight and their support of armed struggle against the Israelis.

Mr. Mamdouh Udwan introduces another political theme in an unpublished play, Don Quixote. In this play we meet several characters among whom we distinguish a politician, a whore, a rapist and a thief, all gathered in a prison cell. Cervantes joins this group in the prison, accused of being a writer who defends the rights of the depraved and the poor. The prisoners do not understand the reason for Cervantes being sent to prison and they persecute him. Defending himself, Cervantes tells the prisoners, his present Jurors, about his writings and beliefs. By telling this story, Cervantes finds it important to act it. He asks the other prisoners to enact scenes from Don Quixote's encounters—that with the whore of the windmill and that of his attempt to stop the government from demolishing a children's playground. The prisoners, now actors, begin to understand the reasoning behind their imprisonment and Dolsina, the whore, is bemused by the kind and human

In another play, The King is the King, Mr. Wannus presents another political theme. The play revolves around a tale from the Arabian Nights. It tells the story of a king who feels bored. He walks disguised in the streets of the city. He meets an idiot who dreams of becoming a king so he can have revenge on his enemies. The king is pleased with this idea. He manages a trick and makes the idiot the king. When the idiot becomes king, he denies any previous knowledge of his family, or the real king, and becomes a tyrant. The true king is shocked and goes mad. The play analyses the structure of the tyrannical military regimes in the area and exposes their dictatorial attitudes toward the rule of their countries. The idiot is previously an ordinary man but when he becomes king he behaves with the mentality of a tyrant and forgets his true role. Instead of giving freedom to and providing chances for the people to be dignified and free, he becomes an even greater evil than the previous king. Mr. Wannus appears to be blaming and attacking the ruling class and exposing its responsibility for the defeat.

Like A Soiree for the 5th of June the plot of The King is the King is quite intricate and shows the dilemma of Syrian writers in tackling sensitive political issues: they have to resort to myth and symbol in order to be able to criticise their regimes. In a way this is fortunate for art because playwrights are urged to adopt indirect ways in order to convey their message. However, in spite of using the myth of the Arabian Nights it is not difficult for the intelligent reader to understand the implications of the play; moreover there are certain passages which directly remind one of the present political situation in the Middle East. Again the play is popular because it allows people to express themselves if only indirectly and show their resentment of the principle 'power corrupts' which is particularly pervasive in the Arab world. The following passage which is direct and rather obtrusive, if only because of its exaggeration, reveals how sadistic rulers become when they assume power:

The King: From now on ... the king is the one who does the execution.

The Executioner: I will not under any circumstance allow your majesty to pollute your fingers with blood.

The King: There is nothing like blood which purifies kings. I shall bathe in blood which is going to be henceforward my own special perfume. (12)

The Palestinian Women by Ali Aklah Arsan presents a political theme through historical exposition of the Palestinian problem. The play spans the period from the time of the British occupation of Palestine until the 1960's. The play begins with the 1916 Arab Revolution led by King Faysal, then follows up with the massacre of Dayr Yassin, when thousands of innocent Palestinian and their children were killed in cold blood. Then follows the 1948 war after which Israel strengthened its rule over Palestine and the Palestinians began to leave their land. In a scene set twenty years later we meet the Palestinians in the camps and under tents in several Arab countries. Two generations are presented: the old, conquered and driven out, living on the memories of the past,

here the ordinary peasants are the characters. The playwright listens to what goes on very attentively, taking notes on what he should have written about war in his original play. Several peasants participate in the action of the play. They reveal their secret and profound, sufferings which resulted from various social and economic influences. Several folk dances and songs are used throughout the play which succeeds in telling us what the people want to say about the defeat, not what the defeated military regime boasted to be the case. The play was presented in Damascus in 1971 and toured many cities in Syria.

This play is more sophisticated and complex than many others especially in the construction of its plot and the consciousness it reveals about the relationship between reality and illusion. The author creates certain devices to connect the audience with the stage maintaining at the same time Brecht's idea that there should not be total involvement between actor and text on the one hand and between audience and the show on the other. Meanwhile he enacts the same war episodes that the playwright and director discussed at the outset, enabling the audience to see from their own perspective the events which are being discussed. The play is certainly daring and one reason for its popularity is that it enables people to find an echo to what they feel within but cannot openly express. However, it sometimes directly discusses certain political issues, which are now outdated anyway, without giving top priority to presenting an artistic world of drama, a world where an illusion of reality takes the upper hand. True, Mr. Wannus uses many devices which reveal his ability to manipulate highly complex situations in drama which are not very common even in the Western tradition. All the same the reader is sometimes drawn to ordinary reality by didactic passages like the following:

A spectator: The essential question is that an aggressive enemy had declared war against us and invaded our land, and found no resistance whatsoever. The people escaped without any sense of shame. It is easy to avoid responsibility. However, they are responsible; everybody is ... It is the land of people who do not want to trouble themselves about anything, people who do not realise any sense of danger. Our land has been usurped, yet our land response is to cry and claim that we did not know, we did not understand. (11)

Although one may understand that Mr. Wannus is committed to the idea of 'politicising' theatre yet one can hardly excuse a prominent writer like him for not being fully able to dramatise some of his ideas persuasively. The essential issue is not the subject matter; it is not whether a writer is committed to a particular idea or not, although this has to be taken into consideration. It is actually the question of his ability to dramatise this idea convincingly. The above quotation is a typical example of a political speech whose content can be elaborated on and presented dramatically rather than said directly and obtrusively. Indeed the whole play is a dramatisation of the content of this quotation which makes it unnecessary to be presented in this direct manner.

Lecturer: It is said that cheating in the proportion of iron and cement will provide a better income?! Come on tell us about it. It is also said that cheating in iron and cement causes the murder of some people ...

Contractor: I am an honest and God fearing man. I pay taxation and I never miss Friday prayer and listen to the sermon submissively. Tell him, 'What is my fault if a building has collapsed!' (10)

Since 1967 one can safely say that the theatre public has vastly increased. It is now more judicious in its response to the plays it watches, believing that a play can cut through a culturally multistratified public and reach all people including the labourers and the peasants. One can also observe that the theatrical movement has developed and a new trend has emerged. This trend can be called political theatre. The military defeat of 1967 had a tremendous effect. Earlier, I have contented that most of the theatres in Syria were founded after 1967. The Theatre Group, The Theatre of Thorns, The Theatre of Youth, The Theatre of the Union of students, and the Theatre of people, to mention but a few, started their first performances well after 1967. At the end of 1973, Syria became a centre of theatrical activities, with annual theatrical festivals taking place at different cities and in the capital, Damascus.

Despite the fact that the political theatre is sometimes associated with Realism, we can trace the theme of politics as a reaction to the military defeat of 1967 and a rejection of it. The authorities in Syria were clearly blamed in A Soiree for the 5th of June, a play by Saad Allah Wannus. So is the case in The Flood, a play by Ali Kanaan. Ali Aklah Arsan, in The Prison Cell No. 95, and Mamduh Adwan in The Persecution of the Man who did not Fight wrote on the same theme. The military regime in Syria, before 1967, was overtly accused by these dramatists as being antagonistic to the people. Thus, the oppressed people stood helpless and indifferent to the war: they were already lost and demoralised. In several plays, however, an analysis of the social economic structures of Syrian society is attempted. The Dervishes' Search for Truth, a play by Mustapha al-Hallaq, and A Soiree for the 5th of June, both attempt an explanation of the defeat, examining the social and economic powers within society.

In A Soiree for the 5th of June, Mr. Wannus describes the miserable situation of Syrian society before the 1967 war. The play begins with playwright and director on stage. They are discussing the possibility of presenting a play about war. On the opening night, the playwright confesses that his play is a mixture of melodrama and pretence of heroism which has never found expression in the war. He refuses to present the play, because it is filled with pretence and fake incidents. The director is now very embarrassed. Searching for a solution to the problem, he promises the audience an evening of folk dance, song and music. As soon as the stage is prepared for this folk evening, a peasant among the audience stands and asks the playwright a question about war. This question leads to more questions and various comments and arguments among the audience itself. A play within the original play but

the will of good. Evil and myself are staunch enemies and I always triumph over it. That is the secret of my existence. (7)

A third playwright who deals with social issues is Mr. Waleed Ikhlas who has the potentiality of being a distinguished dramatist except when he goes overenthusiastic to preach and to present a social case directly. In his A Democratic Solree on Stage we are introduced to a group of people who are apparently the product of the period that followed the Independence. Among the characters are a medical practitioner, a lawyer, a civil engineer, a university lecturer and a building contractor. The relationship between these characters is gradually heightened, throughout the play, and their detachment from society is particularly emphasised. The practitioner fails to treat a sick woman, mainly because she is poor and cannot afford high fees, an action which results in her death. The contractor builds houses which soon fall apart on their residents. The engineer and the contractor deceive the community by providing the roofs and with in sufficient iron or cement. An immoral sexual relationship grows between the practitioner's wife and the university lecturer. The play continues to reveal the sickness and corruption of society, or rather post Independence society. The university lecturer addresses the audience just before the curtain comes down:

I am a university teacher. I have been spoilt by reading and knowledge. I only think of a new and exemplary world, thus I have forgotten everything that goes on around me. (8)

Here the characters are loaded with symbols which are not sufficiently realised. Like The Party Took Place at the Square this play is rather allegorical but the realistic level of allegory is very obtrusive, with little or no attempt at getting deeper inside characters to individualise them and persuade us of their reality. The way the university lecturer adopts to force other characters to confess their crimes at gunpoint is unconvincing. Instead of creating complex situations to reveal the interaction between characters the play presents directly their funny relationships; every character abuses its role and he is just the opposite, in a schematic way, of what he is expected to be. The practitioner, for example, who is supposed to save lives is a merciless killer:

Practitioner: Murderer! ... my mission is to save lives I challenge death.

Lecturer: And you challenge the poor as well! ... (9)

Furthermore the conflict in the play is superficial and presented in a simplistic way:

do with the plight of old age in which case our judgment will not only be absolute condemnation but some human sympathy despite everything.

In another play, The Bet, Mr. Kayyali presents women as evil and corrupt. A man about forty remains celibate because his mother does not want him to get married. She wants him to stay with her at home. But a girl, living in the vicinity, embarks on a bet with one of her friends that she will lure this young man into marrying her. She visits the mother and offers domestic help. Time passes and the girl becomes a regular visitor to the mother and the son. She cleans the house for them, does the washing up, and occasionally cooks the food. She takes special care of the man, tidying his bedroom, ironing his shirts and treating him with the endearment proper to a husband. The man falls in love with her and despite his mother's opinion, decides to marry her. His mother tries to dissuade him saying that the girl descends from a disreputable family and that she herself is notorious. But the son ignores what his mother says, considering it as gossip. He marries the girl. The girl has now won the bet and actually reveals what she has hidden for a long time. Towards the end of the play, the husband discovers one night that his wife is in bed with one of her customers. The play ends with their divorce and the sad consequences of their relationship. The playwright appears to be attacking the structure of the society through mother, son and wife.

In the field of purely social drama we have another writer who is preoccupied with issue related to reform in a blatant way. Mr. Farhan Bulbul tackles social problems in almost all his plays, particularly The Party Took Place at the Square. Here the playwright introduces four types - a boss, a social reformer, a poet and a group of poverty stricken citizens. The boss reveals in his drink and money, the later he gleans from the contributions of the poor. The social reformer spends most of his time speaking against evil and corruption but hardly ever takes any action. The poet is a dreamer who spends most of his time in a gloomy and dirty city pub. The poor citizens spend theirs in the dirty streets of the city. Class struggle is implied but not developed. The play is an exposition of the social situation in the period that followed hard on Independence.

In any dramatic work of art we usually expect two forces playing against each other; the forces are either external, as is the case with an individual fighting society, or more effectively internal, concerned with the inner conflict of man. To make the play successful and conflict intense the two forces have to be almost equal; if one overpowers the other the element of conflict, the spirit of any play, is bound to diminish. In The Party Took Place at the Square the writer magnifies the power of the boss to the extent of making all the other forces opposing him look dwarfish. Neither does Mr. Bulbul compensate for the loss of balance by internalising any one character; everything is treated superficially and only from the outside. The dialogue is quite artificial and openly didactic:

The Reformer: I know my job quite well ... My life has been a struggle against corruption. I have vowed to subjugate evil for

There is no depth or any sense of real dilemma in dealing with the class problems being presented. The young man takes his decision to break with the girl he loves almost mechanically without any attempt on the part of the author to 'internalise' his characters or to depict the soul-searching agonies of such a situation.

In his second play Your Opinion Mr. Kayyali presents a family situation. A girl is married to a drink addict. The father of the girl, a conservative does not approve of this marriage and asks his daughter to quit her husband and come back home. The wife asks her mother about her opinion:

Daughter: Should I go on preparing drinks for him?

Mother: Yes, do.

Daughter: What shall I do if he asks me to have a drink with him?

Mother: No, not this.

Daughter: What should I do if he insists?

Mother: It is prohibited in God's law, my daughter, you know that.

Daughter: Yes, I know, but what could I do if he threatened to divorce me?

Mother: In this case, have a hundred drinks with him, my daughter. (6)

This kind of dialogue is very direct and makes characters appear just like puppets. The mother mechanically changes her opinion, motivated by pragmatic considerations. There is not the slightest attempt at leading the audience to what Cloeridge calls the artistic world of 'willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.' A greater writer might develop such a scene into a highly complicated situation whereby the reader does not have to recall his religion or his life into play. Again there is no sense of dilemma or any process of internalisation. The daughter presents her problem in the way she does a mathematical formula and the mother responds equally superficially. Artificiality is felt everywhere.

In a third play; I Created Your Love, Mr. Kayyali depicts an old headmistress at her school. She keeps on buying sophisticated dresses, having her hair cut superciliously in different styles, putting on make-up and trying to look younger than she really is. She hopes to attract one of the male teachers in the school. Failing to do so, the headmistress lodges in a complaint to the inspector accusing the man of an illicit relationship with one of the young students. The jealousy of the headmistress causes many troubles; she is presented as a figure for or condemnation of women.

Although the writer here convinces us partly of the three dimensionality of his characters yet one feels that he misses the chance of developing the figure of the headmistress into a complex character which may be suffering from some psychological bloc. We also need to know more about the real motivation of her action, something perhaps to

circumstances to those of Europe, it is perfectly conceivable, that it might have developed the art of drama alongside its various manifestations of culture and progress in different fields. Perhaps the tribal system of Beduin life in addition to the fact that Islam is looked at as a serious religion which may frown on art forms that do not directly contribute to promoting moral life are the two reasons which had largely hindered the emergence and development of drama in Moslem countries. (5)

The existence of the theatre in Syria and the popular enthusiasm for it are probably indicative of an original existence of the theatre in the Syrian tradition. The influence of the Turkish, and later the French, occupation of Syria cannot be ignored here. People in Syria spent centuries resisting the Turkish and French occupations, and during these periods the theatre was not altogether absent from Syria despite the fact that it was a borrowed, not a native form. Roman theatres exist in Syria, for example, at Bosra, Jablah, Palmyra, Chyrus and Shahba. However, a comprehensive history of the theatre in Syria is yet to be written. The Syrians have not yet recovered from consecutive struggles for liberation and from devastating wars. The original cultural and theatrical activities have been veiled and ignored by the colonisers. The colonialists deliberately destroyed the traditions of indigenous culture which waited long for revival.

On June 5th, 1987 war broke out between Israel and three Arab countries, in which the Arab sustained a crushing defeat. Six years later, another war broke out. These wars and their consequences in different areas have kindled a spark in the minds of several Syrian playwrights who have recovered from the shock of occupation and ensuing conflicts, both internal and external. Many of them are still obsessed by this shock and are unable to draw their material from Syrian sources despite their rich history. Several performances presented by the Omayyad Group for popular Arts reflect the wealth and variety of Syrian folklore, dance, music, song and costumes.

Recent playwrighting in Syria after 1967, falls into two broad categories: popular and political. Under popular drama can be included plays about social problems, social change, family problems and popular tales. The second category includes the political and propaganda play.

Mr. Hasib Kayyali tries to trace the development of Syrian society from the time of independence in 1946 until the present day concentrating on traditional regressive values which impede the practice of free and uninhibited life.

In The Fiancee Mr. Kayyali presents a girl working as an operator. She meets a young man of rank and falls in love with him. In order to match him socially she pretends to be a university graduate who occupies an important job in the Ministry. The young man is attracted to the girl and decides to marry her but when he later discover the truth about her social position he breaks his promise. The play ends in clashes and love has failed to rescue a relationship. Social circumstances, the author contends, are stronger than emotional bonds.

religious rituals and in several parts have their own religious dances. It suffices to mention the religious festivals inside mosques during the sacred feasts of Ramadan, Al-Adha and the birth of Prophet Muhammad. Arabic-Islamic civilisation abounds in various manifestations of sculpture, art, music, dance and specially folklore. But it requires much research in order to point out why these religious festivals did not express themselves in dramatic forms. (3)

Moreover, there are many stories in the Qoran which are lively and dramatic in form. The stories of Adam and Eve's temptation and descent from paradise, of Joseph with the brothers (4), of Mary and Annunciation, of King Solomon and his miraculous ability to speak with animals, and many other situation which are potentially dramatic, being enacted in the form of dialogue. The lengthy dialogue between God and Moses on the one hand and Moses and Pharaoh on the other is typical of many Qoranic scenes that very much look like drama:

Call to mind when thy Lord called Moses and directed him: Go to the wrong-doing people, the people of Pharaoh, and remind them: Will you not be righteous? He pleaded: Lord, I fear lest they should reject me; and I may feel oppressed and tongue-tied, so appoint Aaron also along with me ... His Lord reassured him: That shall not be. Go, both of you with Our Signs. We are with you, hearing your prayers. So, go to Pharaoh, and say to him: We are the Messengers of the Lord of the worlds, and our message is: Send the children of Israel with us. Pharaoh said to Moses: Did we not bring thee among us as a child, and thou didst spend many years of thy life among us?

Indeed such a story contains drama in embryonic form. Equally inspiring are those passages in the Qoran which describe the Day of Judgement:

When the sun is veiled, and the stars are dimmed, and the mountains are made to move, and ten-months pregnant she-camels are discarded as a means of transportation and the wild ones are gathered together, and the rivers are diverted, and people are bought together, and when the female infant buried alive is questioned about: for what crime was she killed?
When the earth is shaken violently and brings forth its burdens, and man cries out: What is the matter with it? On that day it will narrate its account, for thy Lord has so directed. On that day people will come forth in diverse groups that they may be shown the consequences of their actions

It is worth noting that the miracle plays in Europe developed in churches out of Biblical stories. Had the Islamic nation had similar

Drama in Syria is in many ways an art form only recently introduced to the public. It started late in the nineteenth century with the work of one of the pioneers of drama in the Arab world: Ahmad Abu Khalil al-Qabbani. Al-Qabbani's principal contribution to the development of the theatre in Syria was the adaptation of his own house in Damascus to suit the requirements of a theatre where he produced adapted plays and took acting roles in them. He wrote a few plays mostly adapted from the Syrian and Arab folklore and from Arabian Nights. In 1871, al-Qabbani produced his first play under the title: The Ungrateful. In 1884, he was forced to flee Syria to Egypt for many reasons mainly that the theatre could not flourish in such a conservative society as the Syrian one; but more particularly in the fanatic Damascus community as it was then. (1)

The first theatrical company was formally established in Syria almost ninety years after al-Qabbani's. A group of intellectuals, artists and officials met in Damascus in 1959 and formed the National Theatre, which was attached to the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance. The National Theatre established itself as a producing company, translating and adapting plays from various European countries. It also started gathering around it a growing number of people interested in the theatre, introducing the Syrian audience to the broader issues and experiences of other peoples in the world. The ambition of this theatrical group reached out rapidly to the production of plays written originally in Arabic. However, the group had been lacking in directors, designers and technicians. But the more problematic factor was the absence of experienced actors and playwrights. Due to the lack of theatre schools and drama centres, this problem prevailed for a long time in Syria. The Universities contributed to the theatrical and dramatic movement but only on historical and academic levels. Students in the Departments of English in Damascus and Aleppo and more recently in Tishreen and Al-baath Universities study plays only in written form. They also consider trends and movements; but they have very little knowledge, if any, of the practical aspects of sound, lighting, costumes and movement. There has never been a separate department for drama or theatre until very recently when the College of Dramatic Arts was established in 1979 in Damascus. This college is affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance. It provides a four-year study and awards B.A. in dramatic Arts. (2)

In this survey, I have tried to indicate that the theatre in Syria exists, despite the fact that it has not developed in the way it should have, bearing in mind that Syria has always been a centre both for the Middle East and the world, of various cultural, literary, political and social activities. This has been evident throughout the centuries, starting with the Arab-Islamic conquest and the time of early rulers of the Omayyad period when Arab civilisation spread far and wide. There is little point in arguing about the reasons for the delay in the development of this art. The religious factor has always been considered by many scholars to be the main reason in its delay; but the religious reason is not the only one. A good understanding and reading of Islam, a reading which is neither prejudiced nor biased, will definitely show that Islam includes some belief in what looks like myth and legend as in the story of the cave people in the Qoran and their miraculous sleep for three hundred and nine year Moslems all over the world have their own

THE BIRTH OF SYRIAN DRAMA

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Drama in the Arab world is relatively a recent art form. This study traces the rise and development of drama in Syria. It reveals that Syrian playwrights are primarily preoccupied with sociopolitical issues, something which affects the artistic quality of their work. Although drama in Syria has been hindered by many factors yet it is expected to spell out substantial changes in form and content.