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Literature on the Development of
Arabic Drama

تأثير الأدب الأوروبي أو الغربي على تطور
الدراما العربية

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the impact of European or West literature on the development of Arabic dramas in the twentieth century. Arabic drama like other has been influenced by Western culture. Therefore it is important to focus on how the term drama comes into being as a modern aspect during the second half of twentieth century. This paper also will reveal the development of Arabic drama by benefitting from the tenets of the European theatre. The term “drama” has attracted many writers during the twentieth century to depict the reality in the dramatic way.

Arab drama or theatre like other fields of Arab modern life has been influenced by Western or European culture. It is a fact that Arabs like many different nations have taken the dramatic experience from the Western culture. It is also undeniable that they have attempted to imitate the West style but they decided to adopt any part of characteristics from the Western literature and invented the rest themselves. Arab dramatists have believed that the Arabic culture has its exclusion components. They have produced and performed many great masterpieces and they have enhanced the Arabic literature with special plays in the world drama.

Key words: Arabic drama, European literature, modern age, Arabic theatre

ملخص البحث:

الهدف من هذا البحث هو إظهار تأثير الأدب الأوروبي أو الغربي على تطور الدراما العربية في القرن العشرين. الدراما العربية مثل غيرها قد تأثرت بالثقافة الغربية. لذلك من المهم التركيز على كيفية ظهور مصطلح الدراما كجانب حديث خلال النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين. ستكشف هذه الدراسة أيضا عن تطور الدراما العربية من خلال الاستفادة من مبادئ المسرح الأوروبي. اجتذب هذا المصطلح (دراما) العديد من الكتاب خلال القرن العشرين لتصوير الواقع بطريقة دراماتيكية.

تأثرت الدراما أو المسرح العربي مثل أي مجال آخر من مجالات الحياة العربية الحديثة بالثقافة الغربية أو الأوروبية. إنها حقيقة أن العرب مثل العديد من الدول المختلفة أخذوا التجربة الدرامية من الثقافة الغربية. ولا يمكن إنكار أنهم حاولوا تقليد النمط الغربي لكنهم قرروا تبني أي جزء من الخصائص من الأدب الغربي واختراع الباقي بأنفسهم. يعتقد المسرحيون العرب أن الثقافة العربية لها مكونات الاستبعاد. لقد أنتجوا وأدوا العديد من الروائع الادبيه العظيمة. لقد عززوا الأدب العربي بمسرحيات خاصة بين الدراما العالمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدراما العربية ، الأدب الأوروبي ، العصر الحديث ، المسرح العربي

INTRODUCTION:

Abrams has defined drama as a story written to be performed or it is a composition in prose or verse written to be performed (2005, p.84). Harold Bloom in his book *Dramatists and Drama* has considered that both is and is not a literary genre, because it is composed necessarily for performance (2005, p.1). Drama is written to be performed while a story written to be read. It is not made of words alone, but sights, sounds, motion, noise and silence (Drukman, 1993, p.9). Drama consists of sounds and sights to help audience to react completely with scene. Drama as a literary term has depicted and revealed the aspects of modern period by many dramatists such as Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw and Anton Chekhov. It has showed the human experience in an innovative way. It also illustrated the essential truths and values of modern man in the world. Modern dramatists have also benefited from the tenets of modern drama to show the concept of familial relationship.

No doubt, drama is a popular art where playwrights recount the human condition in the modern world in different subjects like hopelessness, absurdity, murder and bitter reality of modern society. Dramatists tried to wake community up by revealing the disharmony of society in the modern world. They portrayed the nature of familial relationship in the modern society like Sam Shepard (1943-2017), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) and Eugen O'Neill (1888-1953).

Many reasons have contributed to appear the drama to the Arab world. Drama and the term theater were not used in Arab world before the coming of Western theater (Amin, 2006, p.80). Drama was called *lu'bat* (play) or *masrahiyyat* (drama) in the nine-

teenth century (Amin, 2006, p.80). Arab drama or theater like other fields of Arab modern life have been influenced by Western or European culture (Staif, 1985, p.109). Lebanese writer Marwan al-Naqqash (1817-1855) was the first who used the term drama in the Arab homeland (Cachia, 1982, p.11). He has written many plays which were acted at theatre. Egyptian writer Ya'qub Sanu' (1839-1912) was the first one in Egypt who established a theatre in his country (Muhsin, 1979, p.20).

It is clearly that modern Arabic drama came from the Western culture (Badawi, 1979, p.11). The Arabic writers were inspired by the European culture. In Egypt, Shadow dramas continued to be acted in the seventeenth century (Badawi, 1979, p.13). Most plays in Egypt were written in colloquial Egyptian language. These popular plays continued to supply entertainment and these works gradually were showed in the cinema in the beginning of the twentieth century. These different elements of traditional Arabic drama have contributed the development of modern Arabic drama. Al-Naqqash Marwan and Sannu' Ya'qub were attracted to opera more than anything else. Music and singing stayed important elements in the Arabic theater. Indeed, all these techniques of Arabic theater were followed by early dramatists of European theater. Arabic drama has depicted the political and social environment of Arabic world (Badawi, 1979, p.14).

Tawfiq al-Hakim, who had also received his study in France, has contributed the renaissance of modern Arabic drama (Long, 1969, p.69). Marwan al-Naqqash (1817-1855) was the first of Arabic dramatists who also contributed the forming of Arabic modern drama. Some critics like Badawi 1979 considered him the true father of modern Arabic drama. Translation has helped the Arabic dramatists

in adaptation of Western drama (p.15). Western drama has spiritually contributed forming Arabic drama. Sunnu' has written his plays in the Egyptian colloquial language. He was very famous for his writings about comedies of intrigue and manners. He was influenced by French dramatists Molière (1622-1673). He wanted to treat the aspects or problems of Egyptian life in that time (Badwi,1979,p.17).

Some critics like Luis Awad (1915-1990) has considered Tawfiq al-Hakim as the founder of theater and drama in Arabic world (Badwi,1979,p.8). He was a great playwright in Arabic world. He revealed in his play the difficulties of modern dramatists as result of the absence of theater and drama in Arabic literature. He says "confronts a void or near void consisting of a few insignificant attempts which are not yet deeply rooted in his language or literature" (Badawi,1979,p.8). He tried to fill the gap of the absence of drama in Arabic literature. Western travellers have provided the Arabic world with all types of shadow plays from all parts of European culture especially during the Western colonial period. No doubt, in ancient Arabic literature there was no types of drama except ta'ziyah (a passion play) which is related with the death of al-Hussain (prophet's grandson) (Badawi,1979,p.8). We can say that Sunnu', Al-Hakim and Qabbani were considered the founder of the Arab drama.

In addition the Arabic institution for translation, writing and publication has introduced the European and Western drama to the Arab reader (Madoor, 1960,p.21). Arab playwrights like other writers in the world have tried to convey all kinds of drama in their Arabic world. Consciously or unconsciously, the Arab dramatists have tried to put their style to depict the situation in their Arabic world. Although they borrowed the dramatic experience from the Western

world, they have attempted to arabicize their experience to be accepted in Arabic world. The scholar and playwrights were influenced by the European and Western literature. They were interested in the new genre. So many Arabic theatres were built and many dramas were written. This period was called literary Arabic renaissance.

The plays were acted in Arabic language by the early period of the twentieth century. They were classical plays like plays of Shakespeare and Sophocles. Arab dramatists like other dramatists have attempted to create special trends for their Arabic theatre. They tried to convey their contemporary problems of the Arab world by using their genre of the literature (drama). No doubt, there is not any play in the Arab world until the end of the world war. We can say that history has started with these names like Ahmed Shauqi (1868-1932) in Egypt and Al-Naqqash (1817-1855) in Lebanon (Long,1979,p.68).These periods were covered by these dramatic works of those two pioneers.

Morocco,Tunisia and Algeria have also contributed the development of Arab drama, but the step of this development has been slow. There were many reasons behind this pace of development like language use, educational policy and political dimension. Many writers have used their contributions in their popular drama by using their dialect of the region (Allen, 2000, p.212). One of those writers was Tunisian dramatist Izz al-din al-madani (1938) who has contributed the field of drama by writing series of plays that carried popular revolutionary theme like his drama Thaurat sahib al-himar [The donkey owner's revolt] 1971 (Allen,2000,p.213).

While in Iraq the theatre tradition has also reached its greatness

especially with pioneering efforts of Haqqi al-shibli(1913-1985) who established a theatre troupe in 1927. Yusuf al-Ani(1927) has also considered as a great figure in Iraqi theatre in the modern period. He also has used his colloquial dialect in his play Ana ummak ya Shakir [I am your mother, Shakir] 1955(Allen,2000,p.213).All these pioneering works of Arab drama in different regions have ensured that this genre has developed in its own right. These plays have generally become available in the Arab world, but in many regions or areas these plays include texts written in the colloquial language or dialect(Allen,2000,p.214).Adaptation and 'Arabicisation' have mainly contributed transferring many elements of Western drama to Arabic drama. This kind of contribution has given us a new style of local themes (Allen,2000,p.193).

Roger Allen in his book An Introduction to Arabic literature has revealed that pre-modern Arabic literature did not provide us with any kind of drama that has any link with Western traditions (2000, p.195). writers have struggled to achieve this kind of literature as Arabic drama by using its techniques and its language to portray the circumstances of Arab social and political life. They also tried to carry Arabic drama to outside Arab world but the problem of language has prevented them. Translation has resolved this issue after serious efforts.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING:

The French theory is one of the movements that deal with concept of influences and sources. It also concentrates on the links be-

tween cultures in different literature. It is very important to reveal the history of any literature to give us the historical links between different cultures. The scholars highlighted that the literature cannot come alone without any influences. This interaction in the literature helps the people or human to realize the literature and notice its reflect in the other cultures (Shamsuddin, 2012, p.211). French theory or school depends on the literary history to reveal the relations between different literatures. According to this theory literature can grow or gain particular colour during transferring across literatures (Enani,2005,p.11). Scholars or critics assert that the literature cannot work alone without any internal or external aspects with other literatures (Shamsuddin, 2012, p.2).Therefore this study will talk about the similarities and influences in Arab drama.

As comparative studies gained importance in the modern era, due to the close relationship between the various modern literature after the cultural, scientific and civilization connections between the different nations. peoples were discontinued, thanks to the development of modern media that possesses special importance and the communication between the literature was able to fill the gap between nations, especially the theatre.

Western drama especially after the two world wars came to reveal the suffering of Western man who felt disappointed in the values of community. It has made the new meaning of life. It has made the new meaning of life and showed the reasons behind the sickness of that time (Eva, 1962, p.113). It was indeed the Arab dramatists have imitated the Western tradition because they have studied this style. Therefore the plays performed in Arab world in the beginning of the twentieth century. This kind of technique that

came from Western world naturally led to the spread of theatrical experience among Arab people in different areas.

Drama in the modern world has really become the representative of revealing the reality of the modern age (David, 1970, p.79). It became a distinctive new genre in literature. Dramatists started to show their description of the social issue and gave their special opinions. Malcolm Goldstein in his article "The playwright of the 1930s" says that:

As usual, the theatre responded to the appeal for forthright action to relieve economic pressure and the threat of war was commendably strong(Downer, 1967, p.29).

They began to provide more highlighting to the internal reality of the human being (Downer, 1967, p.32). They also have tried to dramatize the social reality of the modern man in his society to reveal the influence of his suffering after the Second World War. Consequently, the subject of alienation became mainly the centre of the twentieth century. Froman explains this:

Not only the economic, but also the personal relations between men have this character of alienation; instead of relations between human beings, they assume the character of relations between things. But perhaps the most important and the most devastating instance of this spirit of instrumentality and alienation is the individual's relationship to his own self. Man does not only sell commodities, he sells himself and feels himself to be a commodity ... the businessman, the physician, the clerical employee, sell their "personality."(Bigisby,1982,p.18).

As a result, playwright began to adopt any movement which aims

to show the suffering for problems of people in an innovative way. Therefore, the style of modern drama has become more effective to show all aspects of reality. Critics today explained this point that the modern drama used many techniques and theories to give its task (Cowell, 1967, p.2). Drama in modern age became an art of social rite to interpret the issues of the people. It remains central in literature especially in the modern age through its modern theatre (Cowell, 1967, p.52). Many dramatists like Arthur Miller (1915-2005) considered drama as basically an investigation of people and social justice (Cowell, 1967, p.59).

The most important theme of his writing was the effect of modernism which concentrates on human being's suffering. People started to listen to the writer's or dramatist's views who began explained solution to his problem. Playwrights like Miller who began to provide a new spirit of sympathy to the modern man. His writing has concentrated on the fundamental problems of modern man (Cowell, 1967, p.79). This subject has become a distinctive element of his dramatic writing. Miller has mentioned this point when he was writing his play *After the Fall*, he said:

I am trying to define what a human being should be, how he can survive in today's society without having to appear to be a different person from what he basically is (Moss,1980,p.9).

On the other hand, Arabreaders began to read this kind of writing by benefiting from translation (Mendoor, 1960, p.21). In addition, Arab dramatists wrote number of plays which were obviously imitations of Western dramatists (Muhsin,1979,p.53).

Arabic dramas were introduced by the same technique of us-

ing modernism as a new style during 1960s. Soon, this new trend found its way to the Arabic dramas (Hayat, 1983, p.19). Many political or social scenes in the Arabic or Islamic society were not different from the situation in the West. Arab man has suffered from the same problems of modernism. Among the pioneers who have tried to convey this new trend to the Arab literature was Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987). He wrote his masterpiece drama *Yatali 'al-shajarah* (The tree Climber) 1962.

In this way, the writer's or dramatist's job is to reveal the suffering of his society because he is a society member. The accurate or proper drama is to show the possibility of communication to his readers. However, the reader who does not see any positive situation in his modern life wants to find moral idealism in a real story. Dramatists should take his responsibility for his readers. The material system or modernism has prevented the people to find meaning in their life. Here, the drama comes to reveal the injustice of this system. It also depicted the necessity to refuse this kind of life or system.

Gradually, many influential forces in Arab society began to appear revealing the beginning of modern age like technology and materialism. These factors has resulted in many aspects like poverty and suffering in this modern age. These circumstances also make the writing or literature only a hope for meaning in the life (Ibtisam, 1998, p.46). Consequently, the drama as a new genre in Arabic literature has described this period of instability. The play of that age has dealt with these problems reflecting the environment of the twentieth century.

Arabic or Western society has received much social or political

instability that left its depressing on the people. The modern generation was obviously disappointed and aimless. Modern human being has attempted to achieve his aim in this dispersed world. Therefore Arab or Western dramatists have to give their treatment to this kind of life (Bigisby, 1982, 17). Many dramatic writing have discussed these important points in this modern critical life to reveal the confusion and disorder to the ordinary man. Arthur Miller highlights this point in an interview:

What bothers everybody in this country is frustration. You are surrounded with what you think is opportunity. But you cannot grab into it. In other countries there is no opportunity, so there is just a general feeling of fatality (Moss, 1989, p.118).

Arab intellectuals has benefited from all West techniques and styles to describe the situation in their community. Al-Hakim claims that:

Our goal is to borrow from other sources, to understand and assimilate and then to introduce to the people an art that has the stamp of our values . . . similar to what the Arab philosophers did when they dealt with Plato and Aristotle (as cited in Said, 1990, p.16).

Arab dramatists have faced this problem that the new generation thinks really of an unusual way. Logically the modern generation has a sense of modernism. Therefore, the writers or dramatists should write in a way that should be fit with the sense of this new generation. They should depict the errors of the political or social institution. They should reveal the situation which man has become victim to the modern life. The new Arabic man should adopt that the new Arab man should accept this reality and how to deal with this new life.

Generally, an Arab dramatist has transformed all these essential

techniques of modern West drama into Arab drama. The necessity of these new techniques has become more acceptable to the new generation. Arab drama should seek an innovative explanation of new generation to explain the tragic aspects of the society. Modern Arab man has felt the necessity to be a member in this society. Therefore, he needs to realize the fact through these styles of the new literature.

The Arab dramatists should redefine these Western concepts to be acceptable according to the Arab traditions. Therefore, modern Arab drama or theatre came into being to reflect the suffering of the contemporary life. It should break the rules of the old tradition. It has influenced by the Western school showing the difficulties of the modern Arabic man. It also should create the link between eastern and Western culture. It has benefited from Western texts or theories which are considered as references to the Arab drama.

No doubt, Arab drama has redefined all these West techniques as features of the modern man in the contemporary life. This study aims to highlight the Arab drama in the Arab literature benefiting from the focus on different perspective in Eastern and Western culture. As the idea of modernism is presented clearly in Arab and West drama (Muhsin,1979,p.20).Arab writers have presented the new genre of drama after they have noticed this genre in the West. They were attracted by this modern genre to depict the bitter reality of the society (Muhsin,1979,p.20).

Although, Arab dramatists were motivated by the West techniques, each writer has his local colour. So we can say that the modern drama has produced a generation of dramatists in Eastern and Western society who portrayed the realities in the modern era. The

dramatists from West and East have created a modern theatrical system based on their opinions and visions. Moreover, the drama from East and West has concerned with the external aspects of the reality to diagnose the problems of this modern life.

It was not restricted to one aspect of description, because everything was rapidly changed. Therefore, the man has faced these challenges and needs a relief to face this situation. Dramatist should use modern forms and leave the traditional form to face this disorder. Therefore the appearance of new form was necessary in this condition. This new form was effective because it has broken the old rules as Martin Esslin (1961) in *The Theater of the Absurd* claims that "If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of" (p.34).

Drama as a new genre has tried to illustrate many themes of reality people faced in that time. Arab drama has mixed between Western and Eastern techniques to give another meaning of drama (Al-Hammad, 2006,p06). Arab dramatist based his special style of the Western technique on the Arab tradition. We can say that the historical background of the society especially Arab society has the main role on the writer's technique. This approach is very important when we need to shed light on the literature of any nation. Thus, the examiner of any literary work depends on the social background of the writer. Therefore, the Arab playwrights have adopted the Western technique of drama but they have produced another technique which mixed between Western and Eastern culture.

So, the Arab drama has many elements of Western culture that dealing with the modern problems. Arab dramatists were inspired by

the elements of Western drama. They have reflected these Western techniques in their works as an innovator. They have also presented the miserable situation of the modern Arab man. Many effects have helped Arab dramatist to achieve a new mode in the Arabic modern age. The Arab dramatists have benefited from their contact with Western culture by bringing new methods to the Arab literature. They put their Arabic or Islamic idea to give national spirit to their works.

So Arab drama became very important to the West and many Western critics have borrowed from it (Badawi, 1987, p.7). Arabic drama is also very necessary for literature in general. It became more valuable and distinct only in the 1960s. Gradually, Arabic drama has developed its dramatic writing to become more acceptable according to the West drama. Also, the role of Arabic language has contributed much to the history of Arabic drama (Allen, 2000, p.1). Many dramatists have used formal language and others used regional colloquial Arabic language. The formal language is more acceptable than colloquial because it is more understandable and acceptable.

Arab dramatists have created or produced many plays in different styles and techniques. The most important thing that the Arab dramatists have mixed the Western forms with Eastern culture. They have inspired by the West technique of drama to produce a new genre of literature in Arabic world (Said,1990,p.2). Many Arab dramatists have benefited from their contact with West culture like Tawfiq al- Hakim who was motivated by the France theatre to begin a dramatic writing in Egypt. His play Odipus (1949) was based on Greek myths and his drama The Tree climber (1960) based on theatre of absurd in France. Many critics described Tawfiq al-Hakim as first dramatist who contributed the building the body of play to the Arab world (Said,1990,p.8).

Thus, The Arab dramatists have searched for an Arabic drama after borrowing models and styles from the West (Said,1990,p.17). Many aspects have allowed Arab dramatists to write their own Arabic drama like Arabic history, theories, folklore and national literature. All these efforts from Arab dramatists have contributed a new genre of drama to the Arabic world.

CONCLUSION:

It is a fact that Arabs like many different nations have taken the dramatic experience from the Western culture. It is also undeniable that they have attempted to imitate the West style but they decided to adopt any part of characteristics from the Western literature and invented the rest themselves. Arab dramatists have believed that the Arabian culture has its exclusion components. They have produced and performed many great masterpieces and they have enhanced the Arabic literature with special plays among the world drama.

There is also an important issue that the Arab homeland has the same situation with West in that time especially after the world war. The Arabs found themselves in different problems in the political scene. Therefore the Arab dramatists have tried to convey the suffering of their country by using this new genre of literature. The modern problems of the Arab homeland are generally the raw material for the Arabic drama to convey their message. The new genre (drama) is meant to illustrate the pain and suffering of the Arabic man. It is obvious that the Arabic drama tried to create a kind of communication with their readers or audiences. In other word, drama wants to reach to a deeper level of the reader's mind. It used language as a means of communication to show tragic elements of

modern human. The modern Arab drama has dealt with social and political life of the Arab society. Arabic man has faced many challenges during the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore drama gave dramatists the chance to talk freely in their writing about all aspects of life. Arab dramatists used many styles to depict the characteristics of the modern age.

It can be decided that Arab dramatists have produced their writing in drama according to the internal and external influences. Like Western dramatists, Arab dramatists have concentrated on modern problems. Their plays have portrayed the situation in the Arab homeland by using many aspects of Western drama. Therefore we can say that the Arab plays or most of them are mix between Arab and West techniques. Riadh Ismatt (1947) is a Syrian dramatist who wrote *Allathy la ya'ti* (the one who never comes) (1975). He has adopted one of the Western theatre characteristics by using absurd theater in his writing (Aziz, 2007, p.93).

In this drama *Allathy la ya'ti*, there are two men waiting for someone who never comes. It likes many Western absurd dramas like *waiting for Godot* (1953) by Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). Ismat has admitted that he has borrowed the absurd idea in his play from Beckett's *waiting for Godot*:

This play is derived from Samuel Beckett's masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*. In spite of the great similarity between the two plays, this play differs greatly in content. This play can still be classified under the category of the Absurd.

(*Allathy la Ya'ti*, 39)

After all, we can ask this question, are the Arab dramatists an

imitator or an innovators? Arab dramatists should fight the religious and political objections to drama in that time. They have succeeded in talking this issue into their account (Peter, 2015, p.45). No doubt, the development of drama made it more acceptable to the Arab and Islamic community. Drama has succeeded to take its place next to prose and poetry, because drama has portrayed modern suffering in the Arab society in an innovative way.

Therefore we can say that the Arabic or Islamic drama has three distinctive periods:

1- Adaptation of Western mode which is mainly from France like Molière. The Arab dramatists have Arabised these genre by adding Arabic or Islamic mode. They used the main framework of Western drama and put their local or Islamic stories.

2- Translation from Western plays has contributed much to creating the modern Arabic drama.

3- Original literature forms that come from Arabic traditional folklore art. Arab playwrights have put these traditional themes of their country into modern dramatic forms (Peter,2015,p.69).

It was found that Islam is not mainly opposed to theatre or drama but we can say that the Islam has become framework for all political or social issues in our Islamic world. The result of this study also highlights that the Arabic or Islamic drama is not a poor production of Western world but it is a unique and innovative mix of traditions and Western influences.

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