

Monodrama and Self- Reconstruction: Exploration of Form in Selected Arab Plays

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Abstract

This research attempts to explore the importance of monodrama as an extended monologue that opens a discovery journey of a man's solitary existence in the twenty-first century. The form offers subsequent polyvocal variations, which explores a set of questions inherent in estrangement, isolationism, and failure to articulate one's thoughts. Hence, those themes are usually projected in, seemingly, fragmented forms. Dramatic episodes characterized by fragmentation, yet ironically laden with symbolic meanings, draw on mythical, historical and imaginary figures. The resulting combination demonstrates more than just a private experience, but a universal dilemma of alienation and confusion. Inspired by Hamlet's debate of man's inner struggle between "What the flesh is heir to" and "of what we suffer" internally, the paper attempts to investigate the selected Arab dramatist's use of monodrama. The inner struggle in each monologue resembles core thematic trends, which extend to the twenty-first century, performed by actors who open a series of multi-roles that reflect on life, history, culture and other identity factors. Therefore, the paper will be paying extra attention to the weaving of multi-voices and consciousness within a monologue of a single character that embodies all. The main goal is to convey an internal conflict, or a journey to self-discovery, representing the 'everyman' reflection on his use of theatrical devices. By intermixing reality and the subconscious, the performer and the audience become pulled into inner realms of the unconscious, giving self- evaluation a more interesting dimension. This will further help reveal the monologue's significance in treating psychological and social complexities through a concentrated dose of self-reflection in a dream-like framework.

Keywords: Monodrama, Monologue, Realms of the Subconscious

1. Introduction

When discussing the Arab contemporary drama, one will not help but notice a revitalization of the time-old relationship between art and reality. An interesting vantage point to look at the form of Arab mono-drama is to see it as a shaping agent, which also encompasses content unification as a desirable vision. In other words, the relationship between form and content unification becomes a goal in and of itself in the process of making, not just a natural end result that happened by chance. Thus, form in these plays exists as an equal to the artist's moral vision, which becomes a way of ordering life's experience. This research study explores selected plays by Arab writers, within specific social, economic, and historical contexts. Tracing the historical, social, and economic context of each author's life is important in understanding how they helped shape and construct a pre-determined moral vision of the play. The study advocates pluralism as a relevant approach to help understand the dramatic text, author, and audience as a complex network making up a unified whole. Meanwhile, contemporary developments and transformations combined with the attempt of tracing origins will be taken into consideration whilst forming an analysis on each play. To cater to these intricate relationships, the study will also keep in mind the hypothesis that these plays are a clear demonstration of the outdated concept of form and content as inseparable.

The following plays— *The Alley: A Monodrama for Actress* by Samia Bakri, *Actress J's Burial Night* by Jamal Hamdan, and *Reflections of a Garbage Collector* by Mamdouh Udwan, (Jayyusi, 2003) are all forms of monodrama and make up the main case studies for the paper. Each play is stamped with both specificity and universality, which communicate with the local needs of the audience and also relates to the external dilemma of the world. More importantly, the three plays are united by an interesting form of a single performer and a single vision. The choice of

plays is inspired by the value of theatrical performance within the region as an essential element in making social and political statements. Besides, theater is counted as an essential form of entertainment in the Arab region.

The following reading of each play will demonstrate how each writer adopts the form as best suited to his/her vision. To understand this transgression of form, a brief look at the development of drama in the Arab region is worthwhile. The focus is on the analysis of the aesthetic devices (i.e. symbolism, imagery, ideas, and repetition) which are selected to elucidate the theme in each of the plays under scrutiny. The study accepts these devices as an inner effect determined by the joint ethical and esthetical ends of these authors. Simultaneously, the style of each monologue becomes determined by external causes pertaining to the socio-historical and psycho-biographical factors. As a result, a cyclical relationship is formed between the external causes and the content of the monologue in which one shapes the other.

The first section will go into a literature review, which includes previous discussions on the definition of postmodern drama and the placement of "I." The second section explores *al-Hakawati* as the origins of Arab theater. The third section of the paper is dedicated to provide a brief definition of monodrama. The fourth section is divided into three parts and dives into each of the selected Arab plays while focusing on the form, content, moral vision, and the journey of self-discovery. Finally, the last section is dedicated to formulate the concluding statements to summarize the bottom line and the main issues of the paper.

2. Postmodern Drama, Origins of Drama, and the Placement of "I" (Literature Review)

This section exemplifies how traditional drama is a main factor which helps shape postmodern drama. Acknowledging the shared characteristics between traditional and postmodern drama makes it easier to apprehend the placement of "I" within a single play. In other words, continuity in the evolution of theater is not only existent, but is a main factor used to explain the travel between identities and the journey of self-reconstruction within monodrama. The twenty-first century is a stage of postmodern drama which surfaces and demystifies the ideologies behind the work of art. Character, playwright, language and even audience are all core elements in which the whole dramatic apparatus is situated, and are used to help determine the ideology. There have been and still are many discussions as to how the form of the dramatic monologue should be today. To trace back the origins of theater and drama, one has to go beyond any form and think that the dramatic monologue is essentially giving facts "from within." This train of thought is reflected by M. W. MacCallum, a notable literary critic, who explained in a Warton Lecture in 1925: "But in every instance... the object [of the dramatic monologue] is to give facts from within". (Faverio, 2007) The dramatic monologue is also often associated with Robert Browning as well as Tennyson, the poetry between 1830 and 1930, which is defined as:

"a poetry form in which there are a first-person speaker (persona) who is not the poet and who arouses some sympathy because of his complex personal history; a silent or at least unheard listener (auditor) 3 who cannot help but hear (someway in the role of a secret witness); a situation characterized by a specific time and place (occasion); and an argumentative, rhetorical language." (Faverio, 2007)

The displacement of "I" into other personas questions the existence of the speaker within the monologue as a main player. The unity is gone, leaving the self to become an intermediate. Questions about where the play begins and where it ends start to confuse the speaker himself, resulting in an emergence of different selves. Nonetheless, the polygonal variations explore all questions raised.

The persona in monodrama may also be linked with T. S. Eliot's landmark, "The Waste Land", Tiresias. (Eliot, 1922) Eliot's work of art is reflected by her unique choice to combine all oddity in one and represent a speaking persona with a fractured identity, which lacks any agency to affect the world around. Tiresias in Greek Mythology is a Theban blind prophet of Apollo who inhabits the underworld. In book eleven, he meets Odysseus to show the way back to Ithaca during his journeys to the underworld. He also helps Odysseus to communicate with the other souls in Hades. In Eliot's poem, Tiresias expresses what he suffered in mythology. The sense of self diffusion is highlighted as he becomes lost between shared bodies, and in his inability to interact with the exterior world around. Though he retains the ability to narrate the events he sees and feels; yet, like other impotent characters in the poem, he seems to be "neither living nor dead" (38-40). (Eliot, 1922) The poet's famous passage introduces a persona, which should not be able to see originally, but is still capable of vividly describing events. Therefore, Tiresias demonstrates a divided sense of "self," which is capable of doing both: observe the circumstances and allow re-living the typist's experiences. Yet, he seems unable to intervene within the scene:

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from the sea,
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins (218-223). (Eliot, 1922)

Though he is one of the rare unified personas of the entire poem, he claims a divided identity that crosses gender, temporal, spatial, and chronological boundaries:

“And I Tiresias have fore suffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed; / I who have sat by Thebes
 below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead” (243-46). (Eliot, 1922)

Combined, these statements surface the ability to travel between life and death.

In modern/postmodern drama, these threads are woven together, displaying an intentional displacement of “I” into other personas. Consequently, the travel between identities raises questions about the existence of the speaking “self”. Interrogations about the beginning and the end, and how does the “self” intervene in material world/reality, are also all unraveled.

3. Postmodern Drama

Even though continuity was a highlighted aspect throughout the evolution of drama, there have been evident changes, which mark unique characteristics found in postmodern drama. Insights in contemporary drama based on postmodern theories may reveal the changes encroaching on theatrical performance. This study of contemporary drama recognizes that a shift has taken place in the foundational dramatic categories of character, language and representation. The critics that already worked on these changes include Deborah Geis’s *Postmodern Theatric[k]s: Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (1993), (Geis, 1995) Jeanette Malkin’s *Memory Theatre and Postmodern Drama* (1999), (Malkin, 2002) and Nick Kaye’s *Postmodernism and Performance* (1994). (Malkin, 2002) These critics are among the most important critical examinations of postmodern drama. However, it should be noted that these works differ from each other in their approaches to the subject in that each takes a particular aspect of analysis to the exclusion of others.

These three critics have been able to identify the unique characteristics of postmodern drama, but still devalue the shift and its impact on theater. For instance, Malkin notes that postmodern drama has shifted its emphasis from character into imagery and voice, which sheds the importance on collectivity and interactivity within the text. Thus, postmodern drama becomes ideologically appreciated as an antipathetic that necessities the artistic form instead of individuality and self-sufficiency. Critics of postmodern drama, such as Malkin, do not appreciate its distinctiveness due to the fact that the plays become repetitive and difficult to differentiate from one another, such as Pirandello, Koskoschka, or Apolliniare (Malkin, 2002) On the other hand, Kaye begins by explaining how postmodern drama is built on the notion to become anything but conventional drama. The very idea that postmodern drama was made to be ideologically different urges many critics, such as Kaye to express how difficult it is to formulate a definition of postmodern drama/theater. Therefore, theater experts would find it more appropriate to say what postmodern drama “is not” than “is.” (Kaye, 1994) Another critic, which rests on the notion of omission as a way to define postmodern drama, is Deborah Geis. Geis notes that contemporary playwrights tend to tamper with the boundaries of traditional theater, which shifts the focus from the dialogue into the monologue. More precisely, American theater has deviated from portraying the character as a separate from the actor into the conflation between actor and character. Therefore, the concept of fragmentation can be distinctive characteristics which mark the changes in theater introduced by postmodern drama. (Geis, 1995)

The awareness of ideologies to analyze postmodern drama creates a link with the parody and historiographical meta-fiction. It is important to also mention a few of the most influential playwrights who challenged the traditional dramatic conventions such as Sam Shepard, David Mamet, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Heiner Muller and Thomas Bernhard. (Mudasir, 2014) However, it is necessary to link these innovations with the foremost dramatists Brecht and Beckett. It is fascinating to note that Roland Barthes was the first critic to see a connection between poststructuralist ideas and Brecht’s theater. In the 1955 article ‘La Revolution Brechtienne’, originally an editorial in Theater Populaire, highlighting what Brecht’s epic theater challenged. Barthes was highly impressed by Brecht’s critique of the notions of essentialism, especially in the notion of character, and his strategies of disrupting the ideology of the theater. (Barthes, 1955)

The focus on the instability and meta-concepts or “master narrative” in the plays of Shepard, for example, are linked with the different “voices” that was introduced earlier by Jeanette Malkin’s comments in her book on postmodern

theater. Bigsby remarks that Mamet's realism is fully shaped on absurdist assumptions about the pressures which offer to dissolve character. In the meantime, there is a stress on the displacement of the character and the deceptions of language. Such features dominate in Beckett's work.

4. Arab Theater and *al-Hakawati*

Tracing the beginnings of the theater in the Arab region, one will realize a strong link with monodrama. Most people know about Arab drama from well-known plays performed in conventional theater such as: *The Death of Cleopatra* (1927 by Ahmed Shawqi) or a more modern example would be *Madrasat Al-Mushaghebeen* (1973 by Ali Salem). (Shawqi, 1989) However, it is important to mention that the general understanding of drama's performance extends beyond a canon of certain known plays limited to those performed within a theater and reliant on the expectations and conventions of such a space. The most relevant examples of theatrical performance beyond the stage are *al-Hakawati* and the shadow plays in the Arab world. Both examples are concerned with representations of society. Re-telling stories and allusions of history was the main focus of the former, while criticizing the actions as well as morals and representing "everyman" was the focus of the latter. They exaggerated movements and used vile language, which clashed with the targeted intention. The *Karagoz* puppet show was another popular source of entertainment, reminiscent of the Western Punch and Judy play. Such pre-modern performances paved the way to the coming and up rise of the modern period during the nineteenth century.

Edward Muallem, a troupe member and later cofounder of Ashtar Theater, describes *al-Hakawati's* strategy of performing as follows: "We would go to a village and would stay there for two days, build a stage in the center of town, live with the people for two days and put on a performance. This was the particular experience of *al-Hakawati*, developing a relationship with the audience before the performance." (Jawad, 2008) Following the footsteps of storytellers, Al-Hakawati's stage was upheld with fully-designed equipment including light and sound, enough to reflect on modern oral theater (i.e. monodrama and puppet shows). The traditional lighting, sound systems, visual props and costumes in the large-scale performances are all carefully designed. Thus, modifying and expanding the traditional narrator's form helps to develop al-Hakawati's relationship with the audience in a way similar to Arab monodrama today. Al-Hakawati performers started their own works while moving from town to town. By appearing in cafes, squares and campuses, this kind of relationship reflects on *al-Hakawati's* performance as proof of its connection to theater. Adapting and expanding the form of the traditional storyteller served in developing *al-al-Hakawati's* relationship with their audience. This trend was continued and referred to constantly especially in themes of both political and social nature. In the discussion on the strategies of *al-Hakawati*, it is noted that the text is used connotatively in order to declare the position of current events taking place within society. Similar to earlier well-known theatrical forms, such as jesters, mimes, and mimics, the tradition of *al-Hakawati* is often filled with sharp political and social critiques. The difference between *al-Hakawati* performance and monodrama was that the former admitted more people on stage while the latter revolved around the storyteller him\herself.

Tracing back Arabic theater to *al-Hakawati* proves thematic importance, and the spirit to experiment with theatrical trends within the culture's theatrical production. In addition, theatrical production and performance in the Arab region illustrates the significance of drama in recapturing history, constructing identity and evaluating morals. Many of the Arab writers use monodrama as a way to engage the audience with their own cultural concerns as they deal with common everyday man issues. The idea was to engage character\writer and audience on common grounds. Furthermore, monodrama and *al-Hakawati* correspond under the same grounds of a singular performance, which enables to capture an emotional journey of a memorable tale.

5. Monodrama

Since the study focuses on the journey of self-actualization through theatrical performance, it is crucial to discuss and define monodrama. A monodrama is a solo performance that involves a single character in a similar fashion to that of a dramatic monologue. It often relies on the concept of character development, which sheds the light on individuality as a main characteristic. Monodrama performances can come in form of a poem, play, musical theater, or opera. In a monodrama, the audience is able to pay detailed attention to a character's train of thoughts and action, creating a stronger connection to a singular spirit. According to Eric Bentley,

"The task of monodrama is to carry the spectator to the very stage so that he will feel that he is acting himself. . . . The "I," the acting character, is a bridge from the auditorium to the stage. . . . The spectator must know from the program with whom the author invites him to have a common life, in whose image he himself must appear. . . . Monodrama forces every one of the spectators to enter the situation of the acting character, to live his life, that is to say, to feel as he does and through illusion to think as he does . . . in the end it must be clear to the dramatist that if he wishes to represent the life of the spirit, he must deal not with

external realities but with the internal reflections of the real objects, because for the psychology of a given person his subjective perception of the real object is important but not the object in a relation indifferent to him.” (Bentley, 2010, p. 213)

In reference to the stated connection above, Bentley underlines an interesting fact about monodrama. Attending a monodrama performance helps the audience to put their selves in the shoes of the performer. Consequently, a direct relationship between the listener and the play formulates as though it was the listener’s own moment. Exploring the traditional use of dramatic monologues reveals the kind of inner self drawing a dividing line between this form from that of Romantic lyrics. M. H. Abrams, literary critic known for the concept of romanticism, set the two shapes apart by emphasizing the different natures of the speaking ‘I’s while referring to Pierre Macherey’s discussion on the importance of the silences in the texts (1978). (Abrams, 1999) The ideology inherited by Pierre’s theory is that absence speaks, creating an ironic outcome which reveals what the author intended to say from the first place. Similarly, one can conclude that the absence of another performer communicating creates silences or gaps in monodramatic performances that allow the listener’s own emotions to speak.

Besides, looking through Bakhtin’s dialogic concept explained as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness’s,” (Bakhtin, 1984) one will find the speech or accents of multiple voices inserted into the lone actor’s utterance. The following selected plays will be serving a perfect example, which reflect on the multi-voice’s ability to impact consciousness of the performer and the audience as well.

A similar definition of monodrama is stated by Nikola Evreinov who conceives it as:

“the kind of dramatic presentation which, while attempting to communicate to the spectator as fully as it can the active participant’s state of mind, displays the world around him on stage just as the active participant perceives the world at any given moment of his existence on stage” (Evreinov, 1981, p. 187).

The point here is that, as the critic finds it, that the solo performance presents an emotional experience for the audience. The experience makes up exactly what an audience is looking for in a theater, which generates a singular adventure while attending the play.

6. The Alley by Samia Bakri

The first writer, Samia Bakri, a Palestinian writer and performer, comes from a culture determined to survive. Many forms were undertaken to preserve both culture and identity: “Present day Arab world there is a crisis of identity, a crisis brought on by the fact that change is occurring with enormous rapidity.” (Rubin, 1999, p. 10) The play is governed by a Palestinian female storyteller who describes life in Palestine before 1948, interwoven with al-Bakri’s own life in present day Acre. Palestinian theater has been taking prominence since 1850. The need for such entertainment was essential in the face of political turbulences. Due to the same reasons of occupation and unrest, the theater took on a political turn as part of its themes. (Jayyusi, 2003)

In this play, Samia Bakri combines both the *al-Hakawati* form with her political and cultural drive to produce a mono-dramatic performance. The outcome of the play fixated her role as a champion of identity. The writer uses both visual portraits on stage and sensory descriptions, characteristics that powerfully and minutely preserve the identity of her people as well as her hometown. Through her narration, al-Bakri cites specific examples of places present followed by a description of the ongoing elimination process. The earlier landmarks (now eliminated) found in the play resembles a direct connection that distinguishes her place and her happy childhood memories of Palestinian. The counter description to her dreamy life in Palestine is interrupted by the replacement of Israeli landmarks. In the same play, the audience is able to live throughout a mood shift, which starts with passion and affection then ends with darkness and destruction. The dual process of erasing Palestinian history and establishing Israeli facts on the ground allows the audience to live through a roller coaster of emotions. (Jayyusi, 2003, pp. 82-113) In a way, Sami’s narration also foregrounds a new history by pinpointing two different Palestines (one during the earlier simpler times and another one after the war):

“I grew up in them –I played there- I passed through them every day. Some while I was passing through the quarter where the Akki House stood long ago, behind the olive mosque. The Akki House – where the souq started. Al-Akki was one of Akka’s rich men. He has boast in the harbor, and he used to loan poorer brides gold jewelry from the wrist to the elbow –enough to fill both their arms. He’d be on their wedding day, supporting and consoling him. They blew his house up in 1948, and the rubble was never cleared away. Part of the wall were still standing, and we’d clamber over them and hide inside, digging holes.” (Jayyusi, 2003, p. 82)

Even before her entrance, Bakri sets the stage for a space of photographs and paintings of Acre, a seaport in Palestine

pre-1948. Such set up prepares the audience for the mood, creating a sense of early excitement. In addition, al-Bakri interacts with the images, pointing to places and scenes as part of her narration during the performance. Based on interviews with Palestinian women villagers who lived through 1948 and now reside in Israel, the content of al-Bakri's play comprises of the very words of these oral narratives. She tells their stories, thus documenting and putting into circulation Palestinian oral histories. Nassar, scholar of modern Arabic culture and literature, also notes that the manner in which al-Bakri tells these stories directly draws on the traditional figure of the storyteller in Palestinian culture. According to Nassar, "By transplanting the traditional figure of the storyteller into a modern setting on the Palestinian stage, and in light of the continuous failure of peace negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel, *The Alley* does not hesitate to mobilize its audiences." (Nassar, 2006, p. 16) Drawing on both the content of oral narratives and the form of storytelling, her performance is an act in the present. The oral narratives of early Palestine engage the audience with the past and how it is understood, reconstructed, and re-presented. The shift between contrasting images and changing times create a duality which reflect Bakri's concerns as she juggles between stability, security and serenity against emptiness, loss and annihilation of a culture. "Akka loved art and artists then. All the performers came to Acre. They all performed at that theatre." With another move both of gestures and description she makes a blunt sharp observation void of the life and warmth she was describing "The cinema isn't there now.... They tore them down." (Bryant, 2006, p. 85)

Technique and design are at the writer's disposal. Manipulating her words and descriptions to recreate the place and keep its identity through her warm memories of it juxtaposed to a sense of harsh reality of nothing created by occupation. This is also demonstrated by the ironic conclusion of her monodrama as she recounts an encounter with an old woman who leaves after she talks to her leaving her footprint on the sand and watching it disappear. She masterfully clings on to survival of a culture as she confidently and loudly greets people with the tradition of the *al-Hakawati*. This marks an invitation to people to get ready to hear another story passing on a vision and a determination to keep the history alive.

7. Reflections of a Garbage Collector by Mamdouh Udwan

Mamdouh Udwan is another writer who deals with social concerns and disturbances. This time it is not occupation, it is human nature and the corruptions of a society. This play is ironically called "Reflections of a Garbage Collector." He admits that "the most deadening censorship is now self-censorship." (Miller, 1992) Udwan, a Syrian writer is active in the study of human folly and failures. "Garbage, garbage everything's garbage," the theme of the play is exactly echoed in these exact lines. The play is a mirror reflection of all types of garbage: behavioral, familial, societal, and political. The neglected minority those of the working class highlights the corruption lying in the hidden layers beneath the outer glimmering surfaces. Here, the author selects symbolism as an esthetic device to map out his main vision. In other words, the problems revolving around garbage collection of the community help explain the bigger conflict of social inequality. (Jayyusi, 2003)

The playwright begins the scene with a crying baby and piled up garbage, preparing the audience about the impact of littering on society and inequality. The crying of the child that is used as a background throughout the play serves a dual function. First, it rounds up with final confession of the early death of the character's grandchild, weaving the whole text into a single knot. Clearly, the author aimed to trigger an instant psychological outburst near the end of the play where the messages connect. In addition, it is a constant reminder to the audience about the tragic situation of the author's own society, emphasizing the fact that the new born will find no support or shelter. Hence, the tree with no leaves of love, religion, or humanity, provides no protection. It is a sterile life where a child is born to die. The tree provides another symbol which explains the cyclical relationship between environment and society; the environment fails society when humanity fails to protect it. (Jayyusi, 2003) An assortment of portraits is revealed through a powerful ironic antithesis of appearances and inner reality. The performer and orchestrator of the monologue is an old insightful garbage collector. The motivation of the character is uncomplicated since in the one act play there is no extension of time, place and action. This limitation in technique makes the language highly suggestive. There is no room for any irrelevant statement. The character introduces himself and his own hidden dirt subtly as he tells the inside story of every respected citizen's house. Each comment in every single sentence adds a new picture. The journalist, the old lady, and the hooker are all types of the oppressed. The playwright describes them by creating lonely isolated images that are hiding behind facades that nothing is wrong. Abu Adnan is aware of the fact that "No one's ashamed of anything anymore" (Jayyusi, Short Arabic Plays: An Anthology, 2003) and that "Half the country's eating garbage now" (Jayyusi, Short Arabic Plays: An Anthology, 2003). This is ironically stated to reveal the hypocrisy of all responsible figures pretending to care. Separation from religion is another major reason behind such hypocrisy and pretense. A contrast is drawn by the description of the content of the garbage revealing both behavior and shocking realities that describes the helplessness in the face of society. Nonetheless, the main

character this time manipulates his audience as he sees these people from his own eyes. To him the world is nothing but:

“A desert. A desert. A desert with no child or friend, no kindness or dignity. A desert with just concrete and lights.” (Jayyusi, 2003, p. 393).

No humanitarian element experienced by the lonely man, it is not a matter of poverty but rather the separation, isolation and indifference that kills. Nobody cares no one even knows anything about anyone else, total exile dominates the lives of all. Within and without are dead “concrete”, only “crazy speed” where no one “hears” you. This is the tragedy of the artificiality and fakeness every one lives. Although Udwan does declare that I wanted to expose a man’s life, so I let him talk at will. The monologue allows him to delve deep into the hidden territories of the inner mind. The feeling that someone listens gives limited freedom and space of expression, yet, exposes all pain with no pretense. Being the male, the man, the husband, the father and the breadwinner, he represents social authority, par excellence, an authority parallel in kind to both political and economic authority. He prepares us for the garbage collectors own evil under pressure. We are gradually led to a final revelation of Abu Adnan’s own dirt as his psychological trauma is finally revealed in the power of his crime. The language used is chosen to reproduce ideological effects, for usually discourse presents “a coherent system of meanings, historically located, support institutions, reproduces power relations, and has ideological effects” (Metila, 2013)

8. “Actress J’s burial night”

Jamal abu Hamdan defines monodrama as a type of self-presentation in which an individual takes several parts by implying that several voices are speaking. His work presses on issues of identity, which occupied the works of different writers at the beginning of the twentieth century. This time, a criticism of theater itself makes Abu Hamdan create his Chokovian like monodrama: “Actress J’s burial night”. (Jayyusi, 2003) It is an actress this time representing herself. She recreates the roles she played to reveal the glory of the past in characters, but not in presentation. The actress dances around a wooden coffin on stage that signals her own downfall. The play is reminiscent of the Afro-American famous dramatist Adrienne Kennedy’s “Funny house of a Negro” (1964). (Kennedy, 1964) The playwright is portrayed as a revolutionist and the only follower at the time to move in the wake of Brecht and Becket where her plays weave symbolism and absurdism in her focus on fragmentation, ritualistic repetition and variation, and radical experimentation with character, setting, and plot. There are parallels existing between the two plays where in Kennedy’s play the actor plays the role of several inhabitants and voices of true anxiety, entrapment, and alienation. Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg, Patrice Lumumba and Jesus Christ are the main characters she wares. The choices are intended to symbolize different roots and links in the life of the hybrid speaker, Sara. The play, as many others by Kennedy, is packed with allusions to the American culture. The hybridity of cultures is another commonality between the texts and the use of which allows the multiple subject positions the main character takes. All such features in the play create a strong parallel with not only the play at hand, but also with different types of “monodrama” being is a form that:

has the capacity to invoke a gallery of characters and the culture they inhabit by entering the world of a single individual. The emotional depth of that individual determines the depth of the drama. The states of consciousness portrayed in the streaming of memory are universal, but the situations that provoke its development are not.” (Novakovic, 2007, pp. 133-136)

Like Kennedy, the playwright presents in the play at hand the actor, using the stage as a symbol of the whole world, and wearing several masks of the different characters she played on that stage. In both plays the choice is of a woman character probably for its closeness to the idea of the oppressed. The choice of women figures within the play focuses on the inner wish to overcome her woman’s sense of oppression and identity loss. “Cleopatra. Shahrazad. Penelope. Salome. Ophelia. /Zanobia. Zarqa al Yamama./... Who am I among them?” (Jayyusi, 2003, p. 207). The dictates of the profession has its impact on the actress as she declares her own loss. In both plays again the choices mark a link and a difference between the main character and her dreams. They both lose control and suffer a loss of their own identity, the first commits suicide and the second, as the title affirms is “Actress J.” Quite obviously, no single echo or parallel cited here, if taken separately would mean that Kennedy’s play served as a source to Abu Hamdan. But taken collectively, the echoes and parallels form a pattern of associations between the plays which raises the interest of any researcher.

In the structuring of their performances this analysis demonstrates how the contemporary Arab dramatists mimic reality. Through a flexible handling of a complex chronology and a single voice that plays on a combination of old and modern techniques (i.e. ironic juxtaposition), the use of flashback within flashback, among other devices through reminiscences, retrospection, or introspection along with the use of both subjective and objective narration is

obtained. Successfully, the author uses the present to trigger an emotion of the past. Consequently, they achieve a subtle interrelation between structure, narration and character delineation to condition the reader's response to, reception and perception of a world that is to be seen as a replica of their own. Thus, these techniques help the authors embody in form their vision of an ever shifting contemporary reality, bringing in the process a total alliance of form and content.

The sense of escapism is dominant for the stage places the character on top of the world, "the whole planet my private domain" while as she climbs down the stage "The frightening world stretched out around me" (Jayyusi, 2003, p. 209) . The actor dreams of all the women figures she acted and wishes to identify with them for "the soul within me is almost choked" and she calls for an escape. She finds in each one a similar suffering in Zarqa for example, lived in "enmity" and "pursued in enmity", and she died in an exile without exile/ She lived amid disaster, decadence and delight/ And days of grief" (Jayyusi, 2003, p. 211) . "Nothing" again "nothing" all is a "void", meaningless and absurd. Like in Kennedy's play the actor speaks of dreams and portrays hers while the Many-headed Mask moves around. The zigzag structure links past and present, history and contemporary. Once more, children are mentioned, like in Udwan's play they symbolize the future that is born dead: "The children's eyes faded,/The children were born to wait. The children died waiting" (Jayyusi, 2003, p. 219) . Waiting bridges back to Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* echoing the meaninglessness and the sense of loss that the characters suffered. (Bradby, 2001) His characters, stripped of all remnants of the past are thoroughly decontextualized, as the plays themselves tend to take place in some spatial and temporal void. In his plays, there is "the fragmentation of experience and the dissolution of the unified self" (Malkin, 2002). Here the character cries "Oh, how weary I am" of waiting of the wavering between illusion and reality. The inner conflict surfaces a sense of bewilderment and frustration. Words in the discourse such as "lust", "blood", "tears", "loneliness", "death", "coffin", "captive" and "prisoner" as well as many others storm the play with anxiety and fear.

9. Conclusion

Thus, the three plays as monodramas are viewed as internal aesthetical effect of external ethical causes inspired by the socio-historical, psychological reality and the implied reader of each author. Each play is received not only as a representation of contemporary reality, but also as a projection of its author's psyche in pursuit of healing through a form that opened up speculation and re-evaluation. Language plays a very significant role all through and especially in modern drama, for it has the power to shape thoughts and construct the human subject. The discourse of each play therefore, is naturally predisposed to reveal a version of truth as its author views it and exposes the reality he observes. Words do construct the speaker's inner vision. Hence, in each case monologue is seen as a manifestation of repressed aspects of the author's psyche in pursuit of catharsis on the level of theme and a graphic representation of a bizarre yet unified reality on the level of plot and lastly as repressed instinctual selves representing author and man in general on the level of characterization.

Through the orchestration of the findings of the analysis of the three selected plays to examine the relationship between form and content it was discovered that the three plays produced a form that is appropriated to embody their authors' experience of reality and to mediate their vision of that reality. The analysis began on the level of theme. By taking theme as a point of departure, we have started at the end to arrive at the unifying principle of the work. It was discovered that vision determined the choices of stylistic devices geared to elucidate theme as a compact part of form as internal effect. The analysis also showed how this vision is anchored in external causes in the authors' milieu. As such, the analysis on the level of theme illustrated how the vision of each author was the shaper and determiner of that aspect of form making form a determiner that in itself determined by content. Consequently, the place of Akka, the coffin and the garbage were devices determined by the author's vision and acted in itself as a determiner of vision.

The provided reading of each play equally demonstrated the way the method each writer used to present his/her protagonist are again governed by the vision of the author and consequently fictional man becomes a replica of the man inhabiting contemporary reality in his dislocation and alienation. Here in each case, the monodramas represented different regions and different concerns. Nonetheless they were all reunited by the use of a form that was best appropriated to their own ethical messages. These writers were moulded by both political and social concerns. Their wish to communicate their own visions made them revert to the *al-Hakawati* tradition. This same tradition to them was characterized by its authenticity and its relevance to their immediate concerns. It had effective "communicative strategies" with the audience and enabled them to use and manipulate techniques that gave them both characteristics of narrator and commentator alternating between subjectivity and objectivity without losing the faith of their audience. Therefore, all three mono-dramatists alternate between the past and present, reality and

deception, history, present. They directly address the audience and adopt the roles of both narrator and commentator of past and present events as a means to engage with the audience, imbedding their speech strategies with meaning.

Thus, the act of narration often served as a technique to frame familiar material in order to communicate a particular political purpose to a local audience. Utilized in both content and form, oral narratives in the Arab regions have contributed to making marginalized voices and experiences heard, as well as to developing a social space in which to comment upon and potentially offer political and social critiques. What is emphasized is the relationship between the performance and the audience, thus highlighting theater performance as both a communicative act and a public event actively engaging its audience. However one has to go back to the original argument specifying that in a monologue the speaker does not necessarily say the truth, As a concluding remark I will use Edward Said who describes how the performance of one's actual condition "sparks your consciousness of what you are all about, where you are to be found, how maddeningly complicated are the mechanisms that surround you." (Andrew, 2019, p. 252) He elaborates further, saying how this "moment of unguarded reflection is also the moment of deepest vulnerability." (Said, 1999) This form has expressed for many writers concerns in a way that philosophically engaged proper thinking. Nonetheless, most writers have presented a tragic vision that is forewarning a pessimistic future and this has to be explored further.

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