Towards an Egyptian Theatre: Syncretic Aesthetics in the Works of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and Yūsuf Idrīs

Ghada Abdel Hafeez[1], Ne'am Abd Elhafeez[2]

[1] Professor of English literature & the local Dean of the Faculty of Language Studies, Arab Open University, Bahrain

[2] Assistant professor of English literature, Faculty of Language Studies, Arab Open University, Egypt

Correspondence: Ghada Abdel Hafeez, Professor of English literature & the local Dean of the Faculty of Language Studies, Arab Open University, Bahrain.

Received: May 13, 2024 Accepted: August 5, 2024 Online Published: September 5, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n1p384 URL: https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n1p384

Abstract

Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987) and Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-1991) are two towering figures in Egyptian and Arabic theatre, not only for their poignant social commentary but also for their bold theoretical and theatrical innovations. Their contributions served to decolonize the Egyptian stage and paved the way for subsequent generations to reclaim an Egyptian identity. The objective of the current research paper is to investigate how the two playwrights syncretized elements from Western and Eastern theatrical traditions that created unique and impactful theatrical experiences which are neither Western nor indigenous but amalgamation of both. Moreover, the paper delves into the dramatic world of al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs, specifically al-Ḥakīm's Agamemnon (as revisited and reworked in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* [*Our Theatrical Mold* (1967) and Idrīs's *al-Farāfīr* (1964). Through an examination of these plays, the analysis explores the playwrights' experimentation with dramatic form, which draws upon the rich tapestry of Egyptian folk culture, while simultaneously engaging with the universality of content found within the Western dramatic canon. The research paper is grounded in a multifaceted theoretical framework that integrates several theoretical concepts. Deploying Christopher Balme's "syncretism," along with Homi Bhabha's "third space" and Erika Fischer-Lichte's "interweaving" as analytical framework, this paper examines the transaction between indigenous and colonial theatrical productions that led to the emergence of new dramaturgies by al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs that bridge the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial paradigms. The paper concludes that the playwrights' incorporation of syncretic forms in their plays represents the recognition of multifaceted cultural heritage.

Keywords: syncretism, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* [*Our Theatrical Mold*], transcreation, Yūsuf Idrīs, *Al-Farāfīr*, third space

1. Introduction

Predating the concepts of hybridity and third space articulated by Homi Bhabha in his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), and the notion of syncretism explored by Christopher Balme in *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* (1999), Egyptian authors such as Taha Hussein (1889-1973) explored the importance of reconciling Eastern and Western literary traditions in their writings. In one of his famous books, *Fusul fi al-Adabwa al-Naqd [Chapters from Literature and Criticism]* (1945), Hussein strongly believes in the importance of striking a balance between the genuine Egyptian folk literature on one hand and the Western trends on the other. He argues that the Egyptian literary soul has three major sources that must be balanced: the pure Egyptian element inherited from the ancient Egyptians, the Arabic and Islamic elements derived from the language, religion, and culture, and finally the foreign one resulting from the contact between the East and West. Similarly, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987) and Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-1991), two influential and leading intellectual voices, fused elements from Western and Eastern theatrical traditions and created unique and impactful theatrical experiences that centered and redeployed dramatic and theatrical traditions from their local rituals, folk culture, festivals, and myths. As Omneya Ahmed Yehia (2018), in her article "Contemporary Egyptian Theatre and Heritage" contends, both Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and Yūsuf Idrīs attempted "to found a theatre through the mating between the public celebrative manifestations with their dramatic roots, and the techniques of the western theater." In this way, their theatrical landscape exhibits dramatic innovations and richness of content and remarkable examples of syncretism.

Syncretism is a term that denotes "the fusion of two distinct traditions to produce a new and distinctive whole" (Ashcroft et al. 2007). Balme (1999a) explicates that "syncretic theatre is one of the most effective means of decolonizing the stage" since "it utilizes the performance forms of both European and indigenous cultures in a creative recombination of their respective elements, without slavish adherence to one tradition or the other" (*Decolonizing the Stage*, p.2). Decolonization and syncretism are intertwined concepts that offer a fascinating lens to understand the theatrical transformations that occur following the dismantling of colonial rule. Not only does decolonization heed special attention to the rediscovery of the cultural heritage, which was regarded as peripheral, but also it aims to break away from colonial traditions, deconstruct the Western hegemony of thought, language, and literature, and reclaim the native language and ethnic culture as an important vehicle of national self-expression.

In literature generally and drama specifically, many playwrights from the former colonies in Africa, India, Ireland, and the Caribbean, along with the indigenous peoples of North America, Australia, and New Zealand have advocated the decolonization of their theatres to debunk colonial white supremacy, free their theatres of colonialist cultural values, articulate their own artistic and political concerns, and reclaim their indigenous roots, languages, and representations. For the sake of this paper, Egypt will be taken as an example of a postcolonial state, and its theatre will be examined as a microcosm of postcolonial, decolonial syncretic initiatives.

The late 1950s and the 1960s were the heyday of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism ignited by the 1952 Revolution and the movement of decolonization. Under Gamal Abdel Nasser's zeal and deep belief in national identity, Arab countries embraced a rising nationalistic spirit, which asserted national self-confidence. Concurrent with the political changes of the 1952 Revolution came strong political, economic, and cultural renaissance which changed the fabric of the Arabs' mindset. Nasser used arts to mobilize the masses and to instil the spirit of national pride. Hence, Egyptian playwrights of that era had a burning desire fuelled by the nationalist spirit to find Egyptian, Arab, and Islamic roots for their literary production including theatre. Marvin Carlson (2005) has noted that "a native and popular performance tradition long predating the modern European-oriented theatre of the Middle East began to come to the attention of scholars and theatre artists of the region" (p.226).

Theatre scholars like Ahmed Zaki and Ali Al-Ra'ai have commended the zeal and commitment of the 1950s' and 1960s' generation of writers whose literary productions covered Egypt's historical past, its present and its role within the Arab world. Zaki (2004) notes that their aim was not only portraying reality, but also reshaping it using a variety of styles ranging from realism, folk art, symbolism, naturalism, and expressionism, very often with European influences from Ibsen, Chekov, Pirandello, Brecht, Ionesco, and Beckett in a clear reference to the merging of the Eastern and Western traditions. Similarly, Al-Ra'ai in *Al-Masrah fi al Watan Al-Arabi [Theatre in the Arab World]* (1979) prompted the playwrights to reflect on two critical questions: first, whether their works aligned more closely with a folk tradition or an intellectual one, and second, whether their plays were more deeply rooted in their nation's heritage or influenced by external traditions.To respond to these inquiries, intellectuals, thinkers, and playwrights from several Arab countries initiated various ways to redefine and reinforce their cultures and identities through theatre to produce plays that match their cultural structures.

Some leading playwrights strived to find original, authentic, and precolonial roots and "indigenous performance traditions" as a source for inspiration for their plays. Key among them were Yaqub Sanu (1839-1912), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), Alfred Farag (1929-2005), Salah Abdul-Saboor (1931-1981), Saad Eldin Wahba (1925-1997), Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-1991), Saadallah Wannous (1941-1997) and many others who introduced innovative approaches to theatre aesthetics. They claimed back the place of the interactive performance, revived native theatrical forms, rejected the traditions of the imposed realist and Aristotelian drama, and many adopted Brechtian dissenting epic form.

Before delving deep into the analysis of syncretic aesthetics in some of the works of al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs, a broader theatrical context will be provided to situate al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs within the realm of their contemporaries. For instance, Farag's theatrical syncretism is characterized by blending Western dramatic forms and traditional Arabic storytelling techniques. In *Sulayman al-Halabi* (1965) and *Halaaq Bagdad [The Barber of Baghdad]* (1964), he combines historical events and folklore with Western narrative structures. *Suqoot Al feroun [The Fall of Pharaoh]* (1956) and *Ali Janah al-Tabrizi watabe'ou Quffa [Ali Janah al-Tabrizi and his Follower Quffa]* (1969) showcase his integration of episodic storytelling and mythological themes with modern dramatic techniques. Diverse cultural influences can also be traced in Salah Abdul-Saboor's syncretic theatre which masterfully combines elements of folklore, Sufi mysticism, historical narratives and modern drama to explore deep existential and spiritual questions. This fusion is evident in many of his plays, which use poetic language and symbolic imagery to enrich the narrative. In *Ma'sat Al-Hallaj [The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj]* (1964), he uses historical and mythological references along with Sufi themes to discuss martyrdom and divine love to portray the life of the Sufi mystic Mansur Al-Hallaj, who was executed for his beliefs. *Musafir Leil [Night Traveler]* (1968) is an absurd play which explores many existential themes, uses symbolic imagery, and departs from traditional narrative structures. Finally, *Sika El-Salama [the Safe Road]* (1964) by Saad Eldin Wahba is a notable example of syncretic theatre, which intricately weaves together various elements of Egyptian culture, history, and social commentary. In *Ya Salam Salem! Al Heita Betetklem [Oh my God, the Wall is Talking]* (1974), Wahba incorporates a mix of traditional Egyptian cultural elements and modern influences, reflecting the complexity of Egyptian identity and society.

It is worth noting that the syncretic approach adopted by al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs not only affected their contemporaries, but also successive generations of Egyptian playwrights. This influence culminated in the emergence of contemporary experimental Egyptian theatre during 1990s. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed remarkable attempts to initiate experimental theatre. In his book *El Etgahat Al Hadeetha Fe al-Masrah al-Masri* [*The Experimental Directions in the Egyptian Theatre: Years 1988-1999*], Hossam Atta argues that during that time a group of innovative playwrights produced plays characterized by blending classical Greek traditions with a contemporary touch. Drawing inspiration from Egypt's traditional heritage, they presented "Egyptian folkloric forms and historical stories as projections of contemporary reality" (Atta, 2014, p.82). Moreover, Fahmi El-Khouli's initiatives to produce plays that "employ traditional themes centering on peasants' lives" and present them "in rural theatres among peasants" bridge the gap between the theatrical arts and the everyday experiences of the community, fostering a deeper connection and engagement with the audience (Atta, 2014, p.83). Khaled Abu Bakr's play *Muhakmet Alsayed Meem* [*Mr. Meem's Trial]* in the Room Theatre, a part of the Roaming theatre movement, and Nagi George's Café theatre, were among other notable examples that foregrounded the appearance of contemporary experimental theatre. Later, with the increased number of independent theatrical productions, more experimental plays emerged. Examples of these plays include

Mohamed Elfeel's *Daket Zar [Elzar Beat]* (1988) and *Almahbazteya [Buffoons]* (1989) which employed techniques previously used by al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs, such as breaking the fourth wall, engaging the audience, syncretizing Zar[i] with other folkloric traditions, and using elements like al-Sāmir, shadows, and Karagöz[ii].

2. Rationale for Selecting al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs

The rationale behind selecting al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs in particular is deliberate. Both belong to the generation of writers emerging after colonialism and share a commitment to giving voice to previously marginalized perspectives on the stage. Their theatrical works, deeply rooted in native cultures, aim to embrace, and celebrate the unique voices of their own cultural heritage. Al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs not only have written plays but have also proposed theories for the purpose of bringing about the decolonization of the Egyptian stage. Al-Ḥakīm's Introduction to *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* [*Our Theatrical Mold*] (1967) and Idrīs's "*Nahw Masrh Masri"* ["Towards Egyptian Theatre"] which introduces his play *al-Farāfīr*[iii] (1964) are among the earliest theoretical works to tackle themes and ideas related to experimenting with theatrical form, reviving indigenous performance traditions, and inciting their audiences to reflect on the conditions of their lives.

3. Aims of the Paper

The goal of the research paper is to examine the two playwrights' postcolonial and decolonial aesthetics of syncretism and cross-culturalism. Deploying the concepts of "syncretism" along with Homi Bhabha's "third space" and Erika Fischer-Lichte's "interweaving" as an analytical framework, this paper analyses the transaction between indigenous and colonial theatrical productions that led to the emergence of new dramaturgies by al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs that bridge the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial paradigms. It is crucial to note that the playwrights' incorporation of syncretic forms in their plays represents the recognition of multifaceted cultural heritage.

Moving on to specific plays, al-Ḥakīm's *Agamemnon* as revisited in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* and Idrīs's *al-Farāfīr*, the paper attempts to show how syncretism resides in the playwrights' abilities to draw upon multiple influences and create unique theatrical expressions in which both playwrights experiment with form and blend European and indigenous performance styles.

4. Theoretical Framework

The research paper is grounded in a multifaceted theoretical framework that integrates several theoretical concepts. Balme's concept of "theatrical syncretism" is utilized as each playwright in his creative way combines "heterogeneous signs and codes" together to create a new form of theatre (1999a). As a theatrical concept, syncretism describes the "new theatrico-cultural system" which "mixes to varying degrees" the European and the local cultural texts (Balme, 1999a, p.18). Syncretic theatre allows the playwrights to use authentic "signs and codes" from their indigenous cultures which "retain their integrity as bearers of precise cultural meaning" (Chinyowa, 2012, p.69) along with other Western "signs and codes". In this way, syncretic theatre merges and analogizes several originally discrete theatrical traditions with the aim of refashioning new molds that are neither native nor western, neither one nor the other but both at the same time. The result is something "in between" or "a third space" to use Bhabha's terms (1994), or a state of "liminality" "neither here nor there" but "betwixt and between" to use Victor Turner's concepts (Turner, 1969), or "interweaving" to use Erika Fischer-Lichte's term (2014).

Bhabha's concept of "Third Space," as articulated in his book *The Location of Culture,* refers to the space where diverse cultural structures and practices intersect, giving rise to 'innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (1994). "Third space unfolds new possibilities" as Bhabha clarifies since "the transformational value of [third space] lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the One...nor the Other...but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both" (1994, p.28). In her book *The Politics ofInterweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism* (2014) and her keynote speech "Interweaving Cultures in Performance: Different States of Being In-Between", Fischer-Lichte maintains that performance cultures are not isolated entities but are constantly encountering, influencing, and being influenced by each other. This creates a dynamic process of interweaving, where cultures are transformed through these encounters.

Al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs have not followed a unified pattern in syncretizing their stages as "different cultural mixes generate distinctly different aesthetic practices" (Sibanda, 2019, p.2). Each of them, based on his own cultural paradigm, has created a new and creative performance praxis that privileges the indigenous forms over the European ones. Both wanted their readers and audience to realize that their plays with all the Western theatrical elements adopted are their own. Both endeavoured to minimize the distance between indigenous theatrical forms and the source culture. Syncretism, third space, interweaving, and liminality are useful theoretical tools that will be utilized throughout the paper to explain this transcultural adaptation process.

Furthermore, the syncretic plays created in the audience destabilizing theatrical effect by mixing between the homely, i.e. the indigenous "signs and codes" that the readers/audience are familiar with, and the unhomely i.e., the unfamiliar traditions derived from European theatre. In this way, the plays created an effect similar to that of Freud's uncanny experience when something unfamiliar or *Unheimliche* (unhomely) defamiliarizes and disturbs the familiar, *heimlich*. It is this aesthetic experience which transfers the readers/audience into a liminal state, forces them not only to be active participants in the performance but also to shake them out of their complacency. Thus, they share with Bertolt Brecht a revolutionary approach to theater, one that seeks to create a dramatic world designed to empower the audience to question, reject, and take action against unjust status quos.

5. Review of Literature

Although the similarity between two playwrights has often been remarked upon, exploration of syncretism within their respective theatrical practices remains absent in existing scholarship. In "Political Symbolism and Censorship: *The Tree Climber* and *Al-Farāfīr* (2019) Revisited", the author, Dina Amin, analyzed how the two playwrights turned their skepticism about the 1952 Revolution failure to achieve its promise of democracy into art. In "Contemporary Egyptian Theatre and Heritage" (2018), Omneya Ahmed Yehia investigated how many Egyptian playwrights including Alfred Farag, Naguib Sorour, al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs, Abdel Aziz Hamouda, and Ahmed Ismail attempted to give a local identity using themes and characters from heritage. Therefore, the scope of her paper is broader and more geared towards the theatrical spaces and performances than the scope of the current research.

Regarding Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm's *Qālibunā al-masraḥī,* the current research delves into uncharted territory since the book has not received any extensive scholarly attention. Thus, the current paper has the potential to be groundbreaking in understanding al-Ḥakīm's theatrical contributions. As for Yūsuf Idrīs's famous play, *Al-Farāfīr*, it has captivated scholars since its publication. Its unique blend of theatrical experimentation, social commentary, and humor has attracted extensive research, contributing to a rich body of critical analysis. The following are some notable examples of scholarly engagement with *al-Farāfīr* in Arabic and English. "The Master/ Slave Duality in Yūsuf Idrīs*'s al-Farāfīr:* A Discourse Analysis Study" (2023) published in Arabic by Heba Ragab Sharef El-Dein studies the theory of power and its embodiment in the play's discourse. It exposes the process of cultural hegemony and social power inequalities. Another recent paper published also in Arabic titled "Carnivalesque Phenomena in Yūsuf Idrīs's*Al-Farāfīr* (2020) by Samah Safouri Khuri focuses on the carnivalesque features of the play with special emphasis on the burlesque theater. The same interest in the carnivalesque is found in the paper, "Lighting the Torch of the Carnivalesque amid the Heart of the Existential Darkness: The Politics of *al-Farāfīr* by Yūsuf Idrīs" (2022) by Ahmed El-Hoseiny, published in English, which analyzes the carnivalesque elements in the play to critique societal structures and offer a glimmer of hope amidst existential anxieties. "Redefining Theater: Yūsuf Idrīs *al-Farāfīr* and the Work of Cultural Decolonization" (2019), by Emily Sibley, explores how the play seeks to redefine theatrical form, rejecting Western influences and advocating for a more localized and decolonized expression. While the previously mentioned research papers have touched upon various aspects of the play, the current paper's specific focus on syncretic aesthetics offers a valuable contribution to the existing scholarship. Finally, there is a valuable paper titled "Decolonizing Theatre History in the Arab World" (2018) by Khalid Amine which is close to the present study, but it mainly takes Morocco as its case study and there was no reference to the comparison between al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs.

To conclude this part, despite the massive amount of research published about the two playwrights separately or together, the present research fills a gap by zooming in only on the syncretic strategies they used to decolonize their theatres and to create distinctive theatrical endeavours.

The focus of the following sections is on how each playwright has "syncretized" both modes to decolonize his stage. The major fields of analysis include theatrical space and the manipulation of narrative and performative conventions of drama that emphasize the agency of the two playwrights to interpolate the discourses of the hegemonic imperial canon.

6. The Interplay of Indigenous and European Aesthetics in al-Ḥakīm's Dramaturgy

Al-Ḥakīm, a pioneering Egyptian playwright, intellectual, and philosopher, holds a significant position within the context of postcolonial drama. His works, which include historical plays, myth-infused narratives, and social critiques, offer multifaceted insights into the complexities of Egypt's colonial experience and its subsequent struggle for cultural identity in the postcolonial era. What follows are examples of early plays that shed light on al-Ḥakīm's syncretism. In appropriating *King Oedipus* (1949), he injected it with Egyptian context, sensibilities, and themes, creating new interpretations that resonated with Egyptian audiences while retaining the essence of the original. Infusing the play with Egyptian cultural essence, he challenges the notion of strict separation between European and Islamic, or Western and Middle Eastern systems of thought. He saw these seemingly distinct intellectual and artistic expressions as interconnected and capable of cross-pollination. In his Introduction to *King Oedipus*, he posits that tragedy in its original Greek understanding, depicting the struggle between humankind and unseen forces beyond their comprehension. He clarifies that in writing this play, he derived inspiration from the Holy Quran, and not from the Greek mythology, emphasizing that his intention was not simply to appropriate a sacred narrative into a theatrical form, but rather to "examine our Islamic mythology through the lens of Greek tragedy" (1949). Thus, in blending mythical narratives with historical figures, myth and history, and Greek tragedy with Islamic thought, al-Ḥakīm created what he described as "the mating" (1949) or the "third space" between the two literary mindsets.

At the local level, he also excelled in synthesizing indigenous Egyptian folk traditions with European ones which is manifested in *al-Zammar*[iv] *[The Piper]* (1930) and *Al-Safqha [The Deal]* (1956). The first play adopts al-Sāmir, traditional village evening performances, which includes storytelling, poetry recitals, or even puppet shows, as its form, which will be further explored in the following section. *Al-Zammar* is another theatrical attempt to integrate village folk arts like dancing, singing, and *Tahteeb* [stickdancing] within the fabric of the play.[v]

While adept at syncretizing and keeping the balance between traditional and Western theatricality, al-Ḥakīm craved for a deeper expression of Egyptian identity, because all the above-mentioned theatrical attempts as he rightfully acknowledges "are bound by the Western theatrical forms and molds[vi]" (1967, p.12). Like other intellectuals and playwrights, he yearned for a truly indigenous theatrical mold, a wholly new form, a mold that creates a unique expression based on deep understanding and integration of the Egyptian cultural specifics, a mold that is not just a showcase; but one that "breaks the barrier between the masses and major world arts" (1967,

p.16-17). The question raised was whether it is possible to escape the Western mold and create one's own theatrical form rooted in the "tapestry of our soil and cultural inheritance" (1967, p.12-13). His unwavering quest took him back to two authentic sources: the first is the traditional performers: "*al-hakawātī*" (traditional storyteller), "*al madah*" (panegyrist), and "*al-muqallid*," (the impersonator) (1967). The second source is "the [Arabic] literary heritage from *Kitāb al-Aghānī* [*The Book of Songs*] by al-Farāj al-Isfahānī, characters, dialogues, and scenes from al-Jāḥiẓ, Hariri, and Badi' al-Zamán al Hamadhani's Maqamat" (1967, p.14). From this rich tapestry, al-Ḥakīm created a mold which could bridge the gap between the theatrical traditions of the East and the West, and high and pop cultures. Thus, *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* can be considered as the practical response to this query in a way that shows the interplay between the indigenous and the European theatrical traditions.

In addition, al-Ḥakīm posits that his proposed Arabic theatrical mold can encompass all types of plays, regardless of origin or era, be they international or national, classical or contemporary, and can even be employed by European playwrights. His mold also rejects the physical separation between performers and audience through elements like elevated stages, elaborate sets, and ostentatious costumes. Instead, performers and audience sit together in a circular arrangement, fostering a sense of intimacy and shared experience. This proximity allows for the performers to transition between characters while remaining within the audience's awareness of their true identities.

Resurrecting "*al-hakawātī*, "*al madah*, "*al-muqallid*" and adding "*al-muqallida*" – female impersonator – who narrates the plays' action rather than enacting it, al-Ḥakīm hopes they would carry the banners of renowned playwrights like Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Chekov, even Pirandello and Durrenmatt. Most importantly, they would achieve the hope many had aspired to which is "popularizing high culture or in other words breaking the wall separating the masses from great world literature" (1967, p.16-17). In short, al-Ḥakīm's mold aims to breathe new life into undervalued aspects of Egyptian folk theatre.

It is worthy to note that rather than writing original plays to support his theory, al-Ḥakīm "curated excerpts from canonical plays and recast them within his Arabic mold" (1967, p.17). Thus, it is his indigenous Arabic theatrical mold that would carry the European content. By recasting some scenes from *Agamemnon, Hamlet, Don Juan, Peer Gynt, The Cherry Orchard, Six Characters, and An Angel Comes to Babylon*, al-Ḥakīm raised the same timeless themes but in a way that is relevant to his local audience as the plays were written in Arabic. Balme, in "Indian Drama in English: Transcreation and the Indigenous Performance Tradition," (1999b) describes this practice of translating or adapting a work from one language and performance tradition to another as "transcreation" which is a form of syncretic theatre. In the case of al-Ḥakīm, he revisits the seven excerpts using Arabic along with Egyptian performance codes which help him "retain the unmistakable signature" of indigenous aesthetics (Balme, 1999b, p.355).

In what follows, the focus will be only on the first excerpt that is reworked by al-Ḥakīm, which is Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* as a sample of his theatrical syncretism achieved in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī.* All the excerpts revisited by al-Ḥakīm are in Arabic as he relied on translations. As for *Agamemnon,* al-Ḥakīm utilized the translation by Dr. Louis Awad. The aim is to demonstrate how his theatrical mold becomes the medium that transmits the Greek tragic content and the universal themes of fear, revenge, and justice through the traditional performers, thus realizing the syncretic dramaturgy successfully. Instead of the prologue that gives background information, in the quotation below, we meet the traditional performers who introduce the tragic play in a much unexpected fashion:

> *AL-ḤAKAWĀTĪ:* I am*al-ḥakawātī*... (*He mentions his real name*). I will show you today a play by the poet Aeschylus titled *Agamemnon*... Once upon a time dear esteemed audience there was a king called Agamemnon, ruling Argos … who participated in Trojan War … and returned victorious … Clytemnestra, his wife, took Aegisthus as her lover while Agamemnon was away at war … when her husband returned back, she welcomed him but she had evil intentions … Clytemnestra invited her husband to take a bath … While relaxed in the bath, she murdered him with a dagger … We will watch now how the ancient Greek poet, Aeschylus, highlighted this tragedy through the performance of *al-muqallid* and *al-muqallida and al-Madah'*srecitation ... *C*ome forward now dear *al-muqallid* and inform the esteemed audience whom you'll impersonate … start first by introducing yourself.
>
> *AL-MUQALLID:* I'm *al-muqallid*. *(He mentions his real name).* I will impersonate Agamemnon, the Watchman, and the Chorus.
>
> *AL-MUQALLIDA*: I'm *al-muqallida.* (*She mentions her real name*). I will impersonate Clytemnestra and Cassandra, Agamemnon's concubine.
>
> *AL-ḤAKAWĀTĪ:* And you *al-Madah*? What's your name? Whom do you impersonate?
>
> *Al-MADAH:* I'm *al-Madah*. (*He mentions his real name*). I will recite the Chorus' songs … The chorus of Argos' Elders. (1967)

By merging "signs and codes" from the Egyptian heritage with the European ones, the playwright creates Bhabha's "third Space" in which *Agamemnon* becomes a new text that is neither Greek nor Egyptian but something new.

The following excerpt from the play showcases how al-Ḥakīm places the Greek tragedy in a local context recognizable yet alienating to the readers/audience at the same time. The traditional opening, characteristic of the source material, is deliberately subverted by the unexpected intervention of *AL-ḤAKAWĀT and AL-MUQALLID*. This disruption of the readers'/audience's expectations fosters a sense of the uncanny, creating an unsettling experience. Thus, he transforms the source text into a new text that is familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, resonating with Balme's "transcreation" (1999b).

AL-ḤAKAWĀTI: Great … Great … Let's start the play … it begins in front of the Palace of Agamemnon in Argos … with statues of the gods and altars for the sacrifices … Now it is night … On the roof stands a Watchman … Now you *AL-MUQALLID* start and impersonate the Watchman and let's hear his soliloquy.

AL-MUQALLID: GUARD[vii]

The gods relieve my watch: that's all I ask.
Year-long I've haunched here on this palace roof,
year-long been the all-fours watch-dog of the Atreids,
learning by rote the slow dance of the stars,
spectator of the brilliance in black skies
that brings to men their winters and their suns:
the stately light-lords' settings and their rise.
I'm here still. Still watching for the fire,
the relayed beacon that will bring the word
that Troy is taken: watching by command
of the heart of a woman who waits, her mind like a man's.
My rest is a sleep-walk, sweated clammy dew,
a sleep-walk which no kind dreams over-watch.
The presence by my bed's not rest but terror,
eyelid-spasming drowse-out-jolting terror.
And when I think to sing or hum some tune
to inject alertness since no sleep will come,
the tune becomes tears how miss-fortune freights his house,
the song is miss-rule capsizing mastership.
But now, gods, change my luck. Relieve my task,
shine out the dark good news for which I ask! (1967, p.24-25)

The Arabic version of *Agamemnon,* along with all other extracts from the other six plays revisited and re-visioned by al-Ḥakīm, expands the audience's cultural understanding as it fosters appreciation for both Western and Arabic cultures, and highlights shared themes and underlying human experiences. Furthermore, the work challenges simplistic generalizations and fosters dialogue across cultural divides by deconstructing the artificial barriers between "West" and "East." For example, the references in the translated excerpt above to "gods" "الألهة" and "light-lords," "أرباب الضياء" resonate with Egyptian readers/audience due to the ancient Egyptian cultural background steeped in polytheism. Moreover, the reference to "their winters and their suns," skillfully translated by Dr. Louis Awad as " رحلة الصيف والشتاء" (1967, p.26), directly alludes to a verse from the Quran"[...] "caravans of winter and summer [...]" (Quraysh). This intertextual reference fosters cultural resonance with Arabic-speaking audiences, seamlessly integrating familiar religious imagery into the narrative, which not only empowers the performers, but also allows them to capitalize on the richness of Egyptian cultural legacy and actively resist the constraints of canonical traditions.

The storytelling tradition meshed into the structure of the original play transfers it from its solemn tragic atmosphere into a lighter and interactive version. Furthermore, the absence of the proscenium-arch theatre significantly modifies the play's pacing and atmosphere, creating a more dynamic and immersive experience, a main feature of the indigenous theatre.

Thus, the transcreation of *Agamemnon* helps the playwright rewrite the colonial canonical narrative, subvert the original meanings, and introduce his own perspectives, experiences, and cultural values. In using Arabic, al-Ḥakīm challenges the linguistic dominance of English and creates a more inclusive theatrical landscape. By utilizing the traditional performers, he redefines the theatrical technique, thus creating a new syncretic form that offers a platform for the Egyptian cultural expression. Finally, by transforming the source text into a new, indigenous mold, a third space is created. Kamaluddin Nilu describes this "transformative aesthetics" as "cross-fertilization process where we can observe co-action, co-ordination, and co-experience" (2021, p.156).

7. A Nuanced Exploration of Syncretism in Idrīs's Theatre

Like al-Ḥakīm, Idrīs stands as a towering figure in Egyptian and Arabic theatre, not only for his poignant social commentary but also for his bold theatrical innovations. Idrīs, the prolific playwright and novelist, embraces syncretism in many of his dramatic works, though in ways that are distinct from al-Ḥakīm, and in more subtle ways. He asserts in his interview with Nabil Faraj (1971) that when he commenced his writing career, he was fully immersed in the local theatrical experiences with almost no exposure to foreign literary

influences. As he explicates, that total immersion facilitated the conveying of "the essence of the Egyptian identity" through character development, narrative structure, and thematic content (p.102). Nonetheless, such claims should not be taken literally as many of his literary productions draw heavily on Brechtian epic theatre and Becket's absurd theatre in addition to surrealism and expressionism.

Many of his theatrical works before *al-Farāfīr* followed the classical European theatrical traditions in a similar manner to al-Hakim's plays which predated *Qalibunā al-masrahi*. While the one-act-play *Malik al-Qutn* [*Cotton King*] (1963) undeniably presents a socialist realist portrayal of life in an Egyptian village, the play transcends a mere "slice of life" by serving as a powerful critique of social injustices. *Jumhüriyyat Farahat* [*Farahat's Republic*] (1956), another one-act play, a naturalistic depiction of the cruelty and ugliness of life that takes place in a police station in one of Cairo's poor quarters, deals with the ugly reality of a bigger slice of life encountered by Farahat, an old police sergeant. In this one-act-play, Idrīs experiments with naturalism and fantasy, as he presents a striking contrast and profound tension between two distinct realities: the harsh and unsettling brutality of the real world and the idyllic, innocuous, and joyous realm of utopia.

However, fueled by the 1952 Egyptian revolution, Idrīs's writing became increasingly infused with a sense of national pride and a desire to explore what it meant to be truly Egyptian. The Revolution's emphasis on self-determination was extended to the cultural sphere as highlighted in the introduction. Idrīs, like many other writers of his generation, challenged the dominance of Western European theatrical forms. He embarked on a pioneering mission to forge a profound connection between Egyptian theatre and a multiplicity of European genres and codes in line with Balme's notion of syncretic theatre and Bhabha's third space. His zeal brought to the fore what he calls the spontaneous "theatrical moments" and "theatrical forms" he enjoyed during his childhood [Naḥw Masraḥ Miṣri] ("Towards an Egyptian Theater", 1964, p.10). These "moments" - as he clarified - are recurrent events in our daily lives that include gatherings in funerals, weddings, village festivities, and fairs accompanying the anniversaries of the holy men. They also include gatherings that take place in Zar rituals, poetry recitals, and al-Sāmir (which will be explained later). These popular festivities and fairs that he immersed himself in during his teen years served as a reservoir of inspiration motivating him to resurrect local diverse theatrical expressions and interweave them into a form that reflects the Egyptian theatrical identity. Idrīs in this way shares Ngugiwa Thiong'o concept of drama which he explicates in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1981). For Thiong'o, "drama in pre-colonial Kenya was an integral part of the community's daily and seasonal life …which took place in any empty space among people" (1981, p. 37-38). Idrīs's concepts similarly include involvement of audience with the actors where audience becomes active participants in a shared dramatic experience that is unfolded in front of them. Idrīs like Thiong'o regards theatre not as "a place in which you watch something" but as "a meeting in which all attendees participate" (1964, p.11).

In the series of three articles, "Naḥw Masraḥ Miṣri", published between January and March 1964 in a*l-Katab*, which later became the introduction to *al-Farāfīr*, Idrīs proposes his theatrical manifesto in which he first expresses "his discontent that the thematic and structural elements of the Egyptian theatrical productions remained confined within the established conventions of Russian, French, and American theater" (1964, p.18). Then, he differentiates between "watching" and the immersive experience of what he calls "the state of theatricality" "*halat al-tamasruh*" (1964, p.11) which is a theatrical experience that emphasizes the social interactions between the audience and the actors. For him, this immersive experience should run very deep in the fabric of the play itself. Similar to al-Ḥakīm's concept of theatre, the dividing lines between acting, spectating, and the actors and the spectators are abolished, and everyone must take off their external selves and bring out their hidden human nature to gather all together and form a single collective self that enjoy *halat al-tamasruh*. Furthermore, Idrīs takes "*halat al-tamasruh*" to be as essential for life as other activities like "eating, drinking, dancing, and laughing" (1964, p.9). He suggests that "*halat al-tamasruh"* fosters "the sense of communal security allowing individuals to cast aside their personal fears, worries and anxieties." Through this collective experience, "individuals can confront their own shortcomings, free themselves from the grip of constant fear, and achieve a greater sense of freedom" (1964, p.10).

Similar to al-Ḥakīm, Idrīs meticulously examined the nascent elements of theatricality present in a diverse array of traditional practices which include the lively and dynamic atmosphere of the al-Sāmir gatherings, the captivating improvisations performances in "alley theatres" staged in open spaces, the mesmerizing interplay of light and shadow in "shadow theatre," and the comic narratives brought to life through the skillful manipulation of Turkish "Karag öz" (1964, p.14). While acknowledging that these forms may not have originated in Egypt, Idrīs argues that Egyptian artistic talents played a significant role in their development (1964).

Out of the above theatrical forms, Idrīs adopts al-Sāmir to be the frame of reference and the true expression of Egyptian theatrical identity (1964). Al-Sāmir is a theatrical form developed by the Egyptian peasants and occurs in rural settings, at homes after a day's work or in the market after selling or purchasing. It includes spectacle, assembly, spontaneity, satire, and witty verbal exchange. Idrīs advocates the return to al-Sāmir because he believes that it truly embodies "the qualities of "Egyptianness" (Ouyang, 1999, p.401). As he contends, "all artistic expressions can be understood as the products of specific communities, which share a common environment and are shaped by a collective mood and underlying psychological formation" (1964, 19). Dr. Jameel Hamdawi (2013) also confirms that "among the most distinctive artistic and aesthetic components of Idrīs's al-Sāmir is community spirit, emotional participation between the actor and the spectator, [and] breaking the fourth wall."

Unlike al-Ḥakīm who did not put his theoretical manifesto into practice, Idrīs wrote *al-Farāfīr,* which represents his *tamasruh and Farfurism.* According to him, *Farfurism is* the most distinctive landmark of *tamasruh* which takes the form of al-Sāmir (1964). *Farfurism* aligns with the broader concept of *tamasruh*, as both share characteristics of improvisation, audience engagement, and social commentary and involve storytelling, singing, and informal performances. Within al-Sāmir, Farfur-like figures emerge, offering

humorous observations and prompting the audience's collective reflection. The Farfur-like figures transcend the traditional definition of an actor, existing as a ubiquitous and enduring social phenomenon, combining elements of the Karagöz and the chorus. Embodying diverse characteristics, they encompass humor, wit, wisdom, and philosophical depth simultaneously. They function as astute societal observers, meticulously monitoring and critically evaluating the flow of life. This role arises from the observed tendency of individuals to become so immersed in daily routines that self-reflection is neglected. The collective gathering of al-Farāfīr serves as a periodic forum for introspection, guided by the insightful and candid perspectives of these "intelligent, bright, and frank connoisseurs" (1964, p.30-31). Therefore, al-Farāfīr can be understood as embodiments of the collective conscience, wielding satire as a tool for social commentary and critical analysis. This unique role leads to the metaphorical labeling of *Farfurism* as a "religion," with laughter acting as its symbolic "prayer" (1964, p.30-31).

In addition to the unconventional features of al- Farafir as theatrical figures, al-Sāmir allows Idrīs to solve the riddle of presenting "an Egyptian, local but at the same time universal issue" in an indigenous Egyptian theatrical form (1964, p.43). The flexible, circular form of al-Sāmir helps him deconstruct the European structure of a play divided into acts and scenes. Instead of the three acts, the play comprises two parts. As for the setting of the play, both the place and time are not specified: "any place" and "any time" (1964, p. 47). Most importantly, there is no plot or at least a plot as we know it. As for the characters, Idrīs distinguishes between the comedy of al-Sāmir and commedia dell'arte[viii] as in the latter, the roles are evenly divided among actors while in al-Sāmir, roles are not distributed as there is only one role which is the role of Farfur, around whom the narrative revolves (1964, p. 29-30).

Like al-Sāmir, the play breaks the wall between the stage and the audience by turning both into one unified entity. It also creates *halat al-tamasruh* which cannot fully take place without all members' contributions and participation. So, if the action involves dancing, all must dance; and if it involves singing, all must sing. Sender and receiver, actor and audience, must be unified, so they can reach euphoria (1964, p. 44). Al-Sāmir as a theatrical mold injects vibrancy and creates a state of connection between the local audience's and local cultural signs and codes.

Despite the reliance on the concept of al-Sāmir along with the other local and indigenized sources mentioned above, *al-Farāfīr* carries unmistakable signs and codes from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) which are subtly interwoven into the syncretic dramatic world of the play. *Waiting for Godot* comprises two acts and *al-Farāfīr* two parts. The setting and characters in the two plays draw heavily on absurdism, surrealism, and expressionism. *Al-Farāfīr*'s stage directions reflect resemblance to *Waiting for Godot's* setting. *Al-Farāfīr's* bare stage with its minimalist setting takes us to the absurd world of *Waiting for Godot*[ix]with its lack of inherent meaning in the world while the nameless Author, who addresses the audience, carries features of al-Ḥakīm's *al-Hakawati.* In addition, the bare stage carries features of expressionism which seeks to display abstract, profound emotional and visual content with characters that are devoid of individuality and given just designation: Author, Master, Spectator (1964). The extract below reflects the syncretic nature of the play:

> The AUTHOR: Alright, ladies and gentlemen, there is no need to tremble, I am no preacher or nothin'. I'm the author of this here story, see? We could've just started the show, and each could have just watched, kind like the movies, alone. But hey, this is no cinema, it's a theater! It's a party, a big get-together, a festival! Folks, real people, left their troubles at the door, came to share two, three hours together, like one big human family that celebrate! Well, first, just to be here, to connect with each other. Second, to dive into some drama, some big ideas, and maybe even poke fun at ourselves, without holdin' back, raw and honest. That's why my story has no actors nor spectators, nah, you play a bit, they watch a bit. And why not? Anyone who can watch good knows how to act, isn't that right? (1964, p.58)

But the Author gets upset and addresses Farfur:

> AUTHOR: Wait a minute, Farfur, no one enters now, I haven't finished my speech yet. (*Then he turns back to address the audience*). Fellows, I want to present to you tonight something big, something great, something wonderful, something important, something beautiful ... (1964, p.59)

The second time music plays, Farfur enters. The circus music contributes to the mood of the play and serves as a reminder that the play adopts a circus atmosphere. He enters in a fashion like the grand entry of a player in a circus or a Karagöz show in "a very old weird costume; a mixture of the costume of the circus clowns and Karagöz." Even his face is "covered with flour or white powder (*or he wears a special Farfur mask*). On his head is "an old tarboosh or a tartoor[x] in the shape of a tarboosh" (1964). Then, like the circus presenter, the Author introduces Farfur:

> AUTHOR: Hey fellows I want to present to you tonight the biggest, greatest, and most powerful Farfur that appeared on the face of earth, but before I introduce him, let's find his Master. (1964, p.59)

The visual level of communication in the production of *al-Farāfīr* interweaves the circus atmosphere with surrealist ambiance. This creates a liminal experience for the audience who are drawn into the familiar world of the circus but defamiliarized by the abstract surrealist and expressionist elements in a way that makes them evaluate and reflect on the hidden messages conveyed in the exchanges between Farfur and his Master.

Yet, with the appearance of the Master, with their puns and wily exchange, the grotesque couple bears unmistakable resemblance not only to commedia d'arte's stock master and servant but also to Estragon and Vladimir, Becket's archetypal protagonists. The couple in the two plays also resembles Everyman characters in the Renaissance morality plays that deal with allegorical and existential issues and discuss

the meaninglessness of human existence. Farfur and his Master perform various tasks, including grave-digging and child-rearing. With the progress of the play, their roles become increasingly blurred, and they question their identities and societal positions.

To conclude, Idrīs masterfully bridges the gap between Eastern and Western influences, forging a theatrical aesthetic that resonates deeply with audiences both in Egypt and beyond. Not only did he create a hybrid theatrical form that challenges Western hegemony, but also, he asserts the artistic validity of his indigenous narratives and sensibilities. He rightfully states that "the development of our distinct identity in literature, art, and science necessitates a twofold approach. First, we must delve deeper into our own cultural heritage and historical legacy. Second, we must actively engage with the artistic and scientific achievements of all world civilizations" (1964, p.28).

8. Conclusion

Al-Ḥakīm and Idrīs are distinctive Egyptian voices not only in terms of writing innovative and unique literary texts, but also for theorizing new approaches for the Egyptian theatre that are at the heart of their Egyptian identity. Belonging to a generation that witnessed the rise of nationalism and decolonization on political and cultural levels prompted the two playwrights to form syncretic theatre that hybridizes various forms of performance and create distinctive Egyptian/Arab theatres. In doing so, the playwrights' embracing theatrical syncretism is a means of reclaiming their cultural identity and indigenous cultural forms which have historically been marginalized or deemed inferior to the Western forms.

Through integrating multiple theoretical concepts of Balmer's syncretism, Bhaba's third space, Turner's liminality and Fischer's interweaving, the research paper attempts to show how syncretism in the selected literary texts resides in the ability of the two playwrights to draw upon multiple influences. Even when residing on the traditional performers as in the case of al-Ḥakīm or al-Sāmir and *al-Farāfīr* in Idrīs's case, the plays inventively toy with both Egyptian and European traditions and bring significant departures and deviations. The result is theatrical productions which are neither Western nor indigenous but amalgamation of both. In addition, al-Ḥakīm's and Idrīs's excluding the Western theatrical structure and adopting more local theatrical forms that break the fourth wall between actors and audience create immersive and occasionally interactive experiences to reach their audiences and build deeper, emotional connections between audience, actor, and content.

Following Balme's comment that syncretic theatre is one of the most effective ways of decolonizing the stage, the excerpts from *Agamemnon* and *Al-Farāfīr* analyzed above bear testimony to how syncretic forms can have a decolonizing or indigenizing effect on Western theatre classics by means of the incorporation performance forms. In al-Ḥakīm's transcreation of *Agamemnon*, although traces of the original play were present in the title and the main action, the play was written in Arabic, placing emphasis on the traditional performers. While in *al-Farāfīr*, Idrīs' use of multiplicity of forms and styles enabled the emergence of what Bhabha calls an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" which "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1994, p.4). Following Bhabha's argument, the syncretic productions by Idrīs allow multiple and diverse ways of being to emerge, rather than for fixed identities that are posed against one another.

Acknowledgments

The authors greatly appreciate the valuable contributions of Dr. Lubna Adel, Assistant professor of Linguistics and Translation at Arab Open University-Egypt for revising and editing the first draft of the manuscript.

The authors would also like to thank Dr. Manar Shalaby, associate professor of Linguistics, at Arab Open University-Egypt for the meticulous reading of the final draft of the manuscript.

Authors' contributions

Prof. Ghada Abdel Hafeez was responsible for the research paper design, choice of the authors, the abstract, aims of the research, part of the theoretical framework, the review of literature, and the analysis of al-Ḥakīm's dramaturgy.

Dr. Ne'am Abd Elhafeez was responsible for enhancing the theoretical section, the anaylsis of Idrīs's theatre, the conclusion, and the references section.

The two authors were responsible for data collection. Prof. Ghada drafted the manuscript and both Prof. Ghada and Dr. Ne'am revised it.

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

This work was funded by the Scientific Research Council (SRC), at Arab Open University-Bahrain.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

---. (1999b). Indian drama in English: Transcreation and the Indigenous Performance Tradition. In H. Gilbert (Ed.), *(Post)colonial stages: Critical and Creative Views on Drama, Theatre & Performance.* (pp. 146-160). Hebden Bridge, Sussex: Dangaroo Press,

---. (1938). *Taht Shams al-Fikr*. [*Under the Sky of Thought*]. Cairo: Misr Bookshop.

---. (1949). *Al-Malak Oediup.* [Oedipus the King]. Cairo: Misr Bookshop.

---. (1967). The Tragedy of Agamemnon. *Qālibunā al-masraḥī.* [*Our Theatrical Mold*]. Dr. Louis Awad. (Trans.). (pp.23-56). Cairo: Misr Bookshop.

Fischer-Lichte, E. (2009). Interweaving cultures in performance: different states of being in-between. *New Theatre Quarterly*, *25*(4), 391-401. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X09000670

Idris, Y. (2009). Nahw masrah misri [Towards an Egyptian Theater]". *Al-Farafir. Cairo: Nahdat Misr lil-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-TawzT*, 5-62

Al Hakim, T. (1967). *Introduction. Qālibunā al-masraḥī [Our Theatrical Mold].* (pp.11-22). Cairo: Misr Bookshop.

Al-Ra'ai, A. (1979). *Al-Masrahfi al Watan Al-Arabi [Theatre in the Arab World]*. Cairo: A'lem Alma'r.efa [Worlds of Knowledge].

Amine, K., & Marvin C. (2008). Al-halaqa in Arabic Theatre: An Emerging Site of Hybridity. *Theatre Journal, 60,* 71-85. https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2008.0062

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts* (2nd ed.). London, New York: Routledge.

Atta, H. (2014). *Experimental Direction in Egyptian Theatre: 1988-1999.* Cairo: General Organization of Culture Palaces.

Balme, C. B. (1999a). *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* London, New York: Routledge.

Brand, H. (1990). Al-Farāfīr: by Yūsuf Idrīs: The Medium is the Message. *Journal of Arabic Literature, 21*(1), 57-71. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/4183214

Carlson, M. (2005). The contribution of Yusuf Idrīs to Egyptian and World Comedy. *Documenta*, *23*(3), 225-230. https://doi.org/10.21825/doc.v23i3.10369

Chinyowa, K. C. (2012). Building Critical Citizenship through Syncretic Theatre: A Zimbabwean Case Study. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 7*(2), 67-78. https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2008.0062

Faraj N. (1971). *Yūsuf ldris Speaking about his Literary Journey.al-Majalla.* [The Magazine] 100-105.

Fischer-Lichte, E. (2014). *The Politics ofInterweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism.* London, New York: Routledge.

Freud, S. (1955). The Uncanny' in an Infantile Neurosis and Other Works 1917–1919. In J. Strachey (Trans.), *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (pp. 217–52). London: Hogarth Press.

Hamdawi, J. (2013). The Farfur Actor in Yūsuf Idrīs's Al-Sāmir Theatre [Al-Mumathel al-Farfurfi Masrah Al-Sāmir end YūsufIdrīs]. Retrieved from https://www.almothaqaf.com/qadayaama/qadayama-09/65057-2012-06-14-12-58-55

Hussain, T. (2012). *Fusul fi al-Adad wa al-Naqd [Chapters in Literature and Criticism]*. Cairo: Hindawi for Education and Publication.

Idrīs, Y. (2009). *Al-Farāfīr. Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣrlil-Ṭibā'awa-l-Nashr wa- l-Tawzī.*

Nilu, K. (2021). Making Nativepeer: The Process of Transformative Aesthetics. *Ibsen Studies, 21*(2), 13-164. Retrieved from

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15021866.2021.1997232

Ouyang, Wen-chin. (1999). The Imagined Modern Nation in Yusuf Idris's Al-farafir. *Modern Language Quarterly, 60*(3), 379-408. https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-60-3-379

Sibanda, N. (2019). Conceptualizing Alternative Theater and Alternative Performance Space in Postindependence Zimbabwe. *Original Research, 9*(2), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/215824401984669

Sibbley, E. (2019). Redefining Theater: Yūsuf Idrīs's Al-Farāfīr and the Work of Cultural Decolonization. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, 39*, 31-62. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/26596423

Thiong'o, N. W. (1981). *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Nairobi: James Currey.

Turner, V., & Abrahams, R. D. (Eds.) (1969). *The Ritual Process*. London, New York: Routledge.

Yehia, O. A. (2018). *Contemporary Egyptian Theatre and Heritage.In A. Catalani. & Z. Nour (Eds),Cities' Identity through Architecture and Arts.* (165-181). London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315166551-16

Zaki, A. (2004). North Africa: Egypt. In M. Banham(Ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa (pp. 13-36).* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Endnotes

[i] Zar refers to traditional practices of exorcising a demon possessing an individual in Egypt.

[ii] Karagöz, a traditional Turkish shadow puppet theater, became popular in Egypt due to Ottoman influence, local adaptation, social commentary, and cultural exchange. Egyptian artists adapted the form to suit local tastes, incorporating Egyptian dialects, customs, and references to Egyptian society and history. This Egyptianization helped Karagöz resonate with Egyptian audiences and become a become part of the country's cultural heritage.

[iii] *Al-Farafir* was translated as *Flip Flap* by a number of translators including Marvin Carlson in his article "The contribution of Yusuf Idrīs to Egyptian and World Comedy" and as *Small Fry* by David Tresilianin in his article "Yusuf Idrīs in a New Edition." Yet the researchers opt not to use these translations as they fail to convey the cultural connotations of the term.

[iv] It was published in *The Variety Theatre* in 1956.

[v] *Tahteeb* is a stick dance/game performed by males in rural areas.

[vi] All the excerpts are the researchers' translation from Arabic.

[vii] The excerpts from the play are rendered back into English by the researchers with reference to the original play written in English.

[viii] It refers to an early form of theatre which originated in Italy.

[ix] *Al-Farafir*'s introductory scene resembles Becket's *Waiting for Godot* as it appears in the quotation which is taken from *Waiting for Godot:*

The theater is completely empty except for a solitary lectern. Upon its surface, there are microphones and a jar of water and a glass. Behind the lectern stands an elegant, gentleman with the air of culture, tall, with glasses over his eyes that give him prestige, and wearing a jacket with a special shirt and a bow tie. When the story begins or the curtain rises, he clears his throat and then says. (58)

[x] Tarboosh or a Tartoor is a red, cone shaped cap used by Muslim men in some Islamic cultures.