

SA[°]DALLĀH WANNŪS AND THE THEATRE OF POLITICIZATION

Katarína BEŠKOVÁ

Department of Classical and Semitic Philology
Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava
Gondova 2, 814 99 Bratislava, Slovakia
katka.beska@gmail.com

This essay deals with the life and work of distinguished Syrian playwright Sa[°]dallāh Wannūs, with special emphasis on his concept of the theatre of politicization (*masrah at-tasyīs*) which originated directly in the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967. The paper concentrates on some of Wannūs's most crucial ideas concerning the theatrical project which was to a certain extent inspired by techniques of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre and whose aim was to encourage the audience to engage freely in a discussion on important social and political matters. This essay also briefly introduces some of the author's most famous plays, like *Soirée for the Fifth of June* as well as his other dramatic works written within the scope of the project, like *The Elephant, Oh, King of Ages, The Adventure of the Mamluk Jābir's Head* or *The King is the King*. Since many of Wannūs's plays include elements of Arabic popular narrative tradition, the paper tries to explore this aspect of his works as well.

Key words: Sa[°]dallāh Wannūs, the theatre of politicization, Six Day War, Arabic literature, popular literature, folklore

The theatre of noted Syrian playwright and journalist, Sa[°]dallāh Wannūs (1941 – 1997), was formed in the period of turbulent political and social changes in Syria and both, his life and his work were marked by several dramatic turns of events in the modern history of the Arab world, like the formation of Israel in 1948, the Six Day War in 1967 or the October War in 1973. Even though he was famous among Arabs, especially in Syria and Lebanon, very few are familiar with his name in the rest of the world, despite the honour that was bestowed upon him by UNESCO to deliver a message for World Theatre Day a year before his death. After famous playwrights like Ionesco, Neruda, Albee and Esslin who addressed their speeches the previous years, he was the first Arab to acquire such privilege. But, as he said in his speech, “theatre is on the

retreat [...] I know no period during which the theatre was so impoverished both financially and morally”.¹ It was ousted by the ever evolving technology of the big screens, television, internet and other media, which is probably one of the reasons why his works are virtually unknown not only to Western audiences (readership), but among the younger generation of Arabs as well.² Or else, is it perhaps, as Asaad al-Saleh asks in his article, because “the regime wishes for his [i.e. Wannūs’s] contributions to disappear and be forgotten?”³ All his life, Sa^cdallāh Wannūs had been an advocate of freedom, democracy and social justice, committed to fight against oppression and tyranny and to elevate political and social awareness of his people during those difficult years through what he could do the best – by writing plays. And in these he often drew inspiration from Arabic folklore and the famous collection of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

His Life and Work

Sa^cdallāh Wannūs was born in a little village of Ḥuṣayn al-Baḥr in the north of Ṭartūs Governorate to a peasant Alawite⁴ family. Despite coming from a poor background, he managed to successfully finish his secondary education, after which he was granted a scholarship to study journalism at Cairo University in Egypt. During his studies he grew fond of literature, especially drama and he read a lot of Arabic books as well as translations of Western literary works, especially Jean-Paul Sartre, William Saroyan and Eugene O’Neill, and he came under the influence of, metaphysics, romanticism and existentialism. He also attended a few performances of Egyptian dramas and Arabic adaptations of plays written by prominent European writers like Beckett and Ionesco. Even though he began writing plays as early as during his stay in Cairo,⁵ he became literarily more active after his return to Syria in 1963. In the following three years, Wannūs wrote as much as seven plays⁶ inspired mostly by the theatre of

¹ WANNŪS, S. Message on World Theatre Day 1996.

² AL-ANEZĪ, A. An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, p. 1.

³ AL-SALEH, A. The Legacy of Saadallah Wannous and *Soirée for the 5th of June* amidst the Arab Revolts, p. 77.

⁴ *Alawīya* (member *Alawī*, pl. *Alawīyūn*) – a religious group, branch of *Shī‘a* Islam, which was founded in the 9th century by Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr.

⁵ *Al-Hayāt abadan* (The Life Forever, 1961), *Mīdūzā tuḥdiq fī al-ḥayāt* (Medusa Gazes at Life, 1962), *al-Jutta alā ar-raṣīf* (The Corpse on the Pavement, 1963).

⁶ *Faṣḍ ad-damm* (The Gush of Blood, 1963), *Ma’sāt bā’i‘ ad-dibs al-faqīr* (The Tragedy of the Poor Seller of Molasses, 1964), *al-Jarād* (The Locust, 1964), *La‘bat ad-dabābīs* (The Game of Pins, 1965), *ar-Rasūl al-mahjūl fī ma’tam Antījūn* (The

the absurd and existentialism. His early works were much influenced by the renowned Egyptian dramatist Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898 – 1987) and his “theatre of the mind” (*masraḥīyāt dīhnīya*), which is rich in symbolism and it is based rather on the gradual development of ideas than on the external action of the characters. Wannūs confessed, very much like al-Ḥakīm did before:⁷ “I was writing plays to be read... And for a long time I kept on writing plays without having any conception of the stage in my mind.”⁸ Later, however, he realised that since theatre originated as a social event, a play demands to be performed because it is never complete without staging.⁹

He even wrote an article on al-Ḥakīm and the theatre of the absurd (*Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm wa masraḥ al-lāma^cqūl*, 1964) for the magazine *al-Ma^crifa* (The Knowledge) published by the Syrian Ministry of Culture where he worked as an editor for the literary and critical section.¹⁰ Later, he decided to travel to Paris to “familiarise himself more closely with European theatre and at the same time to crystallise his critical viewpoint of it”.¹¹ He studied at the Institute of Theatre Studies at the Sorbonne, where he enriched his knowledge of European literary and theatrical movements and schools and came to personally know many distinguished playwrights, directors and actors like Bernard Dort,¹² Jean-Marie Serreau,¹³ Jean-Louis Barrault¹⁴ and Peter Weiss.¹⁵ Besides, he had an opportunity to read and attend plays of many famous authors around the globe, but he took special interest in the works of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht who later influenced his concept of drama the most. His stay in Paris was crucial not only in terms of his artistic development as a playwright, but his philosophical and socio-political preferences became clearer¹⁶ and he became inclined towards socialism and Marxism. After the Arab “setback” in 1967, which left him traumatised, Wannūs penned probably his most famous play

Unknown Messenger at Antigone’s Funeral Ceremony, 1965), *al-Maḥā az-zujājī* (The Glass Café, 1965), *Indamā ya^cab ar-rijāl* (When Men Play, 1965).

⁷ Compare to AL-ḤAKĪM, Tawfīq. Preface to *Pygmalion*, p. 12.

⁸ DAWWĀRA, F., WANNŪS, S. Naḥwa masraḥ ^cArabī jadīd [Towards a New Arabic Theatre], p. 191.

⁹ WANNŪS, S. Bayānāt li masraḥ ^cArabī jadīd [Manifesto for a New Arabic Theatre], p. 111.

¹⁰ AL-ABDULLA, A. Western Influences on the Theatre of Syrian Playwright Sa^cd Allāh Wannūs, p. 72.

¹¹ WANNŪS, S. Bayānāt li masraḥ ^cArabī jadīd, p. 181.

¹² Bernard Dort (1929 – 1994), a French writer, theatre director, actor and essayist and one of the most important critics on Bertolt Brecht.

¹³ Jean-Marie Serreau (1915 – 1973), French director who promoted new experimental playwrights in France.

¹⁴ Jean-Louis Barrault (1910 – 1994), a French director and actor.

¹⁵ Peter Weiss (1916 – 1982), an avant-garde writer, experimental filmmaker and painter of German origin, who later adopted Swedish nationality.

¹⁶ DAWWĀRA, F., WANNŪS, S. Naḥwa masraḥ ^cArabī jadīd, p. 191.

Haflat samar min ajl khamsat Huzayrān (Soirée for the Fifth of June, 1967), trying to find out who should be held responsible for the terrible Arab defeat by Israel. It was the only Syrian play that directly addressed this sensitive issue that no one was very keen on talking about.¹⁷ As a result of his open and audacious criticism of the Syrian government, the dramatisation of the play was banned and he had to wait until 1971 to stage it. With this play he started his *masraḥ at-tasyīs* (theatre of politicization)¹⁸ project, whose aim was to encourage people to engage freely in discussion on important social and political matters and to learn how to differentiate lies they had been fed by the government and media from the self-evident truth, which was in Wannūs's eyes, the very first step to change the grim reality. In years 1971 – 1974 Sa°dallāh Wannūs and his friend, a director °Umar Amīralāy (1944 – 2011) were working together on a documentary film *al-Ḥayāt al-yawmīya fī qaryat Sūriyā* (Everyday Life in a Syrian Village), in which they managed to capture harsh conditions and the hardship of poor peasants' lives in the Syrian countryside, more specifically in a village called *al-Muwayliḥ*. Although the film was a success in many countries and it was screened at European film festivals, its projection in Syria was banned by the government. According to Wannūs, this happened because films gradually became much more influential than literature or theatre and they were accessible to a much wider strata of the society, even to the illiterate one. A public screening of such open criticism of the government's failure to improve poor peasants' living conditions and its cold shoulder to those burning issues could have ignited protests among the masses or even worse, and that was precisely what the government feared.¹⁹

After Egypt's peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Wannūs stopped writing for a decade, as he was afflicted by serious depression. When he started writing again in 1989,²⁰ he left the politicization project behind and concentrated more on the

¹⁷ ZITER, E. Refugees on the Syrian Stage: *Soirée for the 5th of June*, p. 11.

¹⁸ The plays written within the scope of the theatre of politicization include *al-Fīl yā Malik az-Zamān* (The Elephant, Oh, King of Ages, 1969), *Muḡāmarat ra's al-mamlūk Jābir* (The Adventure of the Mamluk Jābir's Head, 1970), *Sahra ma' a Abī Khalīl al-Qabbānī* (Soirée with Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī, 1972), *al-Malik huwa al-malik* (The King is the King, 1977), *Riḥlat Haṅzala min al-ḡafla ilā al-yaqza* (Haṅzala's Voyage from Indifference to Awareness, 1978).

¹⁹ AL-ANEZI, A. *An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous*, p. 161. See also WANNŪS, S. *Sīrat film mawqūf 'Al-Ḥayāt al-yawmīya fī qaryat Sūriyā'* [The Course of a Discontinued Film 'Everyday Life in a Syrian Village'], pp. 357 – 364.

²⁰ His literary works written after 1989, some of which are considered his masterpieces: *Al-Iḡtibāb* (The Rape, 1989), *Munamnat tārīkhīya* (Historical Miniatures, 1992), *Yawm min zamānīnā* (A Day of Our Time, 1993), *Aḥlām shaqīya* (Miserable Dreams, 1994), *Ṭuqūs al-ishārāt wa at-tahawwulāt* (Rituals of Signs and Transformations, 1994), *Maḥamat as-sarāb* (The Mirage Epic, 1995), *al-Ayyām al-makhmūra* (The Drunken Days, 1995), Collection of writings *°An aḍ-ḍākira wa al-mawt* (On Memory

fate of the individual and his social circumstances because for the very first time he realised that personal problems were not superficial affairs of the bourgeoisie class, as he had long believed they were.²¹ During his life, which was truncated by terminal illness, he wrote more than twenty plays and many essays on theatre. He worked as a culture and art editor of the Syrian newspaper *al-Baʿt* (The Resurrection, established in 1948), the Lebanese *as-Safir* (The Ambassador, established in 1974) and in 1977, he founded and edited the journal *al-Hayāt al-masraḥīya* (Theatre life). He also established an experimental theatre *Masraḥ al-Qabbānī* in 1976 and contributed to the founding of the High Institute for Dramatic Art (*al-Maʿhad al-ʿālī li al-funūn al-masraḥīya*) in Damascus.

Socio-Political Background

In Wannūs's times, the whole Middle East was undergoing a period of dramatic political and social changes and Syria was no exception. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War and the formation of the new states and mandated territories, Syria found itself under the French mandate. The country strived to break free from the unwanted foreign rule because to the French there was little difference between a mandate and a colony.²² Although both countries signed a treaty of independence as soon as in 1936, the French government refused to accept it, so the struggle continued for another decade. After a series of complicated events, Syria managed to gain its liberty at last and the French finally left the country in 1946. After that the country was caught in a political crisis. It witnessed as many as twenty-one governmental changes between the years 1946 – 1970²³ which caused great and long-term political instability in the country. Besides the incapability of highly ambitious Syrian army officers to either rule the country or turn away from interfering into its political matters,²⁴ one of the factors that caused the crisis was the rivalry of superpowers fighting to win their influence in Syria²⁵ and last but not least also the social and religious differences and unstable social conditions in the country.²⁶

and Death) including the short play *Bilād aḍyaq min al-ḥubb* (Countries Narrower than Love).

²¹ PANNEWICK, F. Historical Memory in Times of Decline, p. 103.

²² SORBY, K. Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1918 – 1945), [The Middle East in International Politics (1918 – 1954)] p. 30.

²³ PIPES, D. Greater Syria, p. 152.

²⁴ SORBY, K. Arabský východ (1945 – 1958) [The Arab East (1945 – 1958)], p. 112.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

In 1948, Israel was established as a Jewish state in an almost purely Arabic environment, which deeply affected all people in the region. The whole Arab world perceived it as a catastrophe (*an-nakba*), but it was an even greater blow for the Syrians, who felt especially connected with the Palestinians (as well as the other countries of the Levant region), since they shared a long and common history and they considered the division into separate countries highly artificial. They viewed it as a part of Greater Syria (*Sūriyā al-Kubrā, Bilād ash-Shām*)²⁷ or even a larger Arab state based on the concept of Pan-Arabism.²⁸ Syria even tried to put the Pan-Arab ambition into practice and in 1958 – 1961 it joined a short-lived union with Egypt, creating the United Arab Republic (*al-Jumhūrīya al-ʿArabīya al-muttaḥida*), but it proved to be a failure and a bitter disappointment for the sympathisers of Pan-Arabism, including Saʿdallāh Wannūs, who at that time studied at the Cairo University in Egypt. Shortly after the break-up of the union he wrote his very first play called *al-Ḥayāt abadan* (The Life Forever, 1961), but he never published the work during his life, as later he showed tendency to dismiss all the plays he wrote prior to *Ḥaflat samar* as immature and of little value.²⁹

However, the greatest breaking point came with the Six Day War in 1967 when the Israeli army crushed Arab troops in only six days and took over the territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza strip, Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights. The ease with which the Israelis won the war exposed not only Israel's military strength, but also the ill-preparedness of the Arab states for war and the "limits of their political capacity".³⁰ As Albert Hourani wrote on the topic, the war eventually "left its mark on everyone in the world who identified himself as either Jew or Arab".³¹ The whole Arab world was shocked by the unexpected turn of events. To many it was "not only a defeat, but kind of moral judgement".³²

What the people did not know was that both the then Egyptian president Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir (1918 – 1970, president 1956 – 1970) and Ḥāfīz al-Asad (1930 – 2000, president 1971 – 2000), the future Syrian president who held a position of the Syrian Defence Minister at that time, were aware that their armies were not prepared for the fight properly; they were equipped with outdated weapons of low-quality, and they had no strategy. What is more, the Syrian army was greatly impaired by the regime's sectarian politics and

²⁷ Greater Syria would unite countries of Syria, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Jordan and Lebanon into one.

²⁸ For more information on the topic see PIPES, D. *Greater Syria*.

²⁹ AL-ANEZI, A. An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, p. 32.

³⁰ HOURANI, A. A History of the Arab Peoples, p. 414.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 442.

purges,³³ while the best Egyptian soldiers were fighting in the Yemen Civil War.³⁴

They tried to avoid the war with Israel at all costs, but the pressure was too strong. Because of his reluctance to come to Syria's aid in the frequent Israeli incursions, ^cAbdannāšir, who was perceived in the Arab world as a hero and a personification of Arab aspirations,³⁵ was suddenly being accused of betrayal of his own ideals and principles as well as of Egypt's Arab brothers in Syria in times of need. To save his own face he finally decided to implement some measures, even though he secretly believed that it would not go as far as to start a real war. However, the result was disastrous. The "setback" (*an-naksa*), which is a euphemism that Jamāl ^cAbdannāšir used to refer to the Arab defeat, was a burden that weighed heavily on the whole Arab population. The extent of people's disillusionment and their feeling of deception were made worse by propagandist glosses and lies that were spread by official Arabic media. ^cAbdannāšir skilfully used the radio and the press to achieve his political goals and to win the masses over with his powerful nationalist rhetoric and personal charisma. The radio station *Sawt al-^cArab* (The Voice of the Arabs)³⁶ became one of the regime's most effective forms of propaganda³⁷ because it was able to approach directly a broad spectre of audience and not only in Egypt, but also in other Arab countries, including Syria. Its main role was to spread the pro-regime ideology, and to confirm ^cAbdannāšir's leadership of the Arab nationalist movement.³⁸ After years of continuous deception and misinterpretation of the facts, Arab people by no means expected such a disastrous end to the war. On the first day of the Six Day War, *Cairo Radio* (*Rādiyū al-Qāhira*) was announcing great victories of the Egyptian Army against the Israelis, when in fact, the situation was diametrically opposite.³⁹ On the following day when the truth came out, the radio broadcasted a fabricated version of the U.S. collusion with Israel which was to blame for the terrible Egyptian defeat.⁴⁰ Moreover, after the terrible fiasco of the Syrian army in the Golan Heights, Syrian media tried to persuade the people that in fact, the Israelis did not win because they were not able to overthrow the Syrian regime.⁴¹

³³ SEALE, P. Asad, p. 117.

³⁴ MARSOT, A. L. S. A Short History of Modern Egypt, p. 124.

³⁵ SEALE, P. Asad, p. 121.

³⁶ Radio station *The Voice of the Arabs* was first aired only as a radio programme on *Cairo Radio* in 1953, but later developed into separate radio station.

³⁷ ALAHMED, A. *Voice of the Arabs* Radio, pp. 1 – 30.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8 – 9.

³⁹ GOMBĀR, E. Soudobý Egypt [Contemporary Egypt], pp. 611 – 613.

⁴⁰ PODEH, E. The Lie That Won't Die, p. 51.

⁴¹ SEALE, P. Asad, p. 143.

With an interview with Fu'ād Dawwāra, Sa^cdallāh Wannūs said: “The catastrophe of 1967 [...] in our view, it was a great, unspeakable tragedy.”⁴² He confessed that he spent the months that followed “in a state of deep depression and semi-coma”.⁴³ Wannūs could not believe that Israelis could defeat Syria, Egypt and Jordan all at once in the blink of an eye. As he explained in a documentary film *Wa hunāka ashyā' kaṭīra kān yumkin an yataḥaddat 'anhā al-mar'* (There Are Many Things One Could Talk About, 1996), which was directed by 'Umar Amīralāy, after all those years full of lies they believed that “the Arab defeat in 1948 was a result of treason and bad weaponry and not at all because of the Arab soldiers' poor fighting ability or the superiority of Israel's army”.⁴⁴ Then he continued saying: “What is more, they planted in our minds that Israeli soldier is a coward and that he is not able to fight face to face and that Israel can be defeated at any moment.”⁴⁵ The feelings of disappointment and deception among the Arab people were immense. However, when Wannūs came back from France to Syria, he found out that little had changed.

The radio was playing the same sentimental songs; people were sitting in the cafés and places of entertainment as if nothing had really happened. [...] Syrian newspapers published articles that blamed people for the setback, especially young men who wore long hair and colourful shirts. People in the cafés were gloomy and they cursed, but in their official works they changed the manner of speaking to retain their positions and to preserve their lives of comfort and luxury. It made no sense at all.⁴⁶

Theatre of Politicization Project

A few months after the “setback”, drawn by the impulse to write a work that would give a realistic image of what he saw in Syria concerning the impact of the defeat on the official authorities and the ordinary people, Wannūs wrote his *Ḥaflat samar min ajl khamsat Ḥuzayrān*.⁴⁷ In times when those in charge refused to face the reality of the defeat, this controversial play opened a topic that many were reluctant to discuss. The form of the play is unconventional too;

⁴² DAWWĀRA F., WANNŪS, S. Naḥwa masraḥ 'Arabī jadīd, p. 192.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ AMĪRALĀY, 'U., WANNŪS, S. *Wa hunāka ashyā' kaṭīra kān yumkin an yataḥaddat 'anhā al-mar'* [There Are Many Things One Could Talk About]. Documentary, 14:13 – 14:52 mins.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14:53-15:13 mins.

⁴⁶ DAWWĀRA F., WANNŪS, S. Naḥwa masraḥ 'Arabī jadīd, p. 192.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 193.

it is written as a play within a play, with actors mingled with the spectators in the auditorium, making comments about what is happening on the stage.

According to Wannūs's instructions, the play should begin with a certain delay, inciting the anxiety among the audience, and then the director comes to the stage to apologise for the inconvenience. He blames the author of the play for the delay and it turns out that the playwright has withdrawn his play *Ṣafīr al-arwāḥ* (Whistling of the Spirits), which was to be staged because of its propagandist and untrue content. The director gives the audience the summary of the play whose events take place during the Six Day War but some of the spectators start to protest, stating that the play fails to provide a realistic picture of the incident. In an attempt to end the debate, the director offers to the audience a traditional folkloric performance as a compensation for the play. However, the audience is not to be silenced and so the director's pro-regime discourse is being constantly interrupted by truthful and more realistic testimonies of the audience. In the end, the police intervene and as a result, the playwright and some of the spectators are arrested. The play is concluded with an appeal to the audience to put into practice what they have learned from the performance.⁴⁸

With this play, Wannūs hoped to initiate a debate that would stimulate the audience to express freely their attitudes towards what was happening on the stage and to question all that was being said – not only during the performance but in the real life as well. He openly blamed the government, political leaders and official institutions for the disastrous result of the war and its consequent heavy impact on the population and at the same time he pointed out to the repressive methods used by the regime to silence any kind of criticism and to stifle public discussions. At the beginning of the play Wannūs writes:

At the dawn of the June War, most of the directors and presidents of the cultural institutions, especially those official ones, were trying with their usual enthusiasm, to reinforce the existence of their institutions. It was necessary for the official institutions to participate in all state events, and for them the June War was just one of those events and nothing more!⁴⁹

Even though many critics consider the play to be one of Wannūs's masterpieces, for him it was only the beginning of a much larger project that he later called *masraḥ at-tasyīs*, or the theatre of politicization. After 1967, many writers and intellectuals felt the urge to write works that would re-examine and

⁴⁸ AL-ANEZI, A. An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, pp. 75 – 117.

⁴⁹ WANNŪS, S. Ḥaflat samar min ajl khamsat Ḥuzayrān [Soirée for the Fifth of June], p. 3.

sometimes even redefine the foundations of Arabic culture, including their history and cultural heritage and as a result, they often came up with new creative approaches to literature and art.⁵⁰ Some critics even blamed the neglect of Arabic cultural heritage, history and religion for the defeat.⁵¹ In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Wannūs came to the conclusion that the theatre had deceived the Syrian people since it had failed to react to the current social, political and cultural matters in the country.

It was clear that the theatre was surprised by the defeat of the 5th June as much as the Arab people and it had been too slow to respond to the pressing issues. It seems that due to negligence and other complicated cultural problems that were connected with the regime, the theatre had not found time to confront those issues and to respond to them properly, except at the beginning of the war, when it proved to be an instrument of the deception or a part of a big cultural sham. And because of that, it has failed to allow the people and this country to be less surprised by the defeat.⁵²

Inspired by Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, whose aim was to turn the theatrical stage into a kind of political forum, Wannūs believed that the theatre had to be transformed to truthfully reflect reality and actual problems of the audience. The theatre, Wannūs argues, differs from the other art forms in that it has a social character.⁵³ And that is why it should attribute utmost importance to the spectators, for they are the very reason of the whole performance. According to Wannūs, unless we know our audience well and are aware of their social and cultural status and their expectations, we will never be able to take an attitude towards the challenges they face and we will fail to express their needs on the stage.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the spectators have to be mindful of their role in the performance – they have to pay close attention to what is going on and be careful so that they not let themselves be deceived.⁵⁵ What Wannūs really wanted to achieve was to train the audience's critical thinking during the performance, so that they learn to distinguish between truth and lies in their real lives. He wished to establish a strong mutual relationship between the theatre and the people; he was convinced that as much as the theatre ought to learn from the people, they should learn from it as well.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ ALLEN, R. Intertextuality and Retrospect, pp. 1 – 3.

⁵¹ SHANNON, J. H. *Among the Jasmine Trees*, p. 78.

⁵² WANNŪS, S. *Bayānāt li masrah ʿArabī jadīd*, p. 89.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20 – 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21 – 39.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

As Abdulaziz al-Abdullah writes in his article, a rather late arrival of the political theatre into the Arab environment was due to a long lasting repression of personal freedom as well as of attainment of political maturity.⁵⁷ Even though the elements of political theatre appeared in the works of other Arab dramatists, like Ya^cqūb Şannū^c or Aḥmad Khalīl al-Qabbānī, al-Abdullah argues that the real birth of the political theatre is connected with the Six Day War and dramatic works of Sa^cdallāh Wannūs.⁵⁸ However, Wannūs did not content himself with the political theatre, for in his opinion it was not enough for the theatre to deal with politics, it has to politicize. That is why after 1967 he completely lost interest in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm whom he had previously admired. Unlike Wannūs, al-Ḥakīm despised politics and did not consider it appropriate to fuse it with art. In the play *Ḥaflat samar*, Wannūs addresses the audience through the character of the director who says:

First, I have leafed through the works of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, but unfortunately, he despises politics and is not interested in wars. So I have turned the pages of other writers and I have found that for one reason or another, none of them responded to the demands of the times we live in.⁵⁹

Indeed, Wannūs saw the politicization of the theatre as a necessity of the era. But he went a step further by claiming that since its beginnings, the theatre has always been political. Even if it tries to avoid political issues, it still performs a political function which is to divert spectators' attention from their problems and from pondering over their living conditions and speculating over the means to change them.⁶⁰

By means of theatre, Wannūs wanted to educate the people who were for a long time deliberately depoliticized or kept politically ignorant by the government because those in power were afraid that they might revolt against them. Wannūs said: "We make theatre because we wish to change something,"⁶¹ and he really wanted people to transform the way of their thinking, to be revolutionary and to rise up against the dominant political ideology. In many of his plays he criticised the passivity of the people, their indifference towards what was going on around them and their fear of authorities. He believed that the theatre should awaken the viewers' consciousness, to disturb their peace and not to anaesthetise them.⁶² He says: "I imagined that if people in our country had an opportunity to express themselves, if they learned to speak and raise

⁵⁷ AL-ABDULLAH, A. The Politicisation of Arab Theatre, p. 663.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 667.

⁵⁹ WANNŪS, S. *Ḥaflat samar min ajl khamsat Ḥuzayrān*, p. 11.

⁶⁰ WANNŪS, S. *Bayānāt li masrah^c Arabī jadīd*, p. 35.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁶² Ibid., p. 35.

their voice, step by step they would find the courage to say the truth and then with their inner strength they would become masters of their own destiny.”⁶³ He meant to raise their political awareness because, even though he knew very well that theatre could not make a revolution, he was convinced that it might pave the way for it in people’s minds.⁶⁴

As a result of his ferocious critique and revolutionary ideas, *Haflat samar min ajl khamsat Huzayrān* was banned by the Syrian government and Wannūs had to wait until 1971 to stage it.⁶⁵ Until then the play was mainly available in print because even though the ban initially applied to the written form of the play as well, after that it was lifted,⁶⁶ it were mass gatherings of the people in theatres and cinemas that the government was afraid of. The staging was very successful and the play won great acclaim among the audience and the critics.⁶⁷

Folklore: The Source of Inspiration

Coming from a poor rural area where lives of people have always been closely connected with folklore, Wannūs’s relationship with Arabic popular stories must have begun in early childhood, as was the case of many other Arab artists. However, a first important impulse to connect his literary work with Arabic folk heritage came during his studies in France, where he met notable theatre director Jean-Marie Serreau (1915 – 1973). Serreau’s theatrical activities and opinions had a great impact on the further development of the young playwright and his intellectual and artistic leanings. In 1968, Wannūs interviewed Serreau and on that occasion he asked him, what he would do to establish an original theatre if he were a playwright in a country that lacked theatrical tradition, to which Serreau replied:

You have to start from your folk stories and traditions. Since time immemorial, there has always been present the struggle between the people and the feudal system in Muslim history, even if it has not always been clearly visible. The wisdom of the people expressed itself through various tricks and proverbs, so your cultural heritage is rich in artful criticism. For example, the character of Juhā,⁶⁸ even though he is not able to make a revolt, being a part of folk heritage, over the centuries he has

⁶³ Ibid., p. 106.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁵ AL-ANEZI, A. *An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous*, p. 150.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 82 – 83.

⁶⁷ SEALE, P. Asad, pp. 170 – 171.

⁶⁸ Juhā is a folk hero of many Arabic humorous stories and anecdotes.

been attacking the corrupt feudal system in a noble way. Thus, folk heritage is a good starting point and it is full of possibilities. Some people see the lack of theatrical tradition in countries whose experimental theatre is in its beginnings as a problem, however, this is unimportant. It would be a serious mistake to try to establish a theatre in compliance with European models, for it is you [the Arabs] who are capable of helping the experimental theatre to break away from the rigid state it has lapsed into. Here in Europe, our theatrical heritage has turned into a heavy burden that halts our movement and curbs our potential to invent new methods and techniques. But in an intact environment, there are many opportunities for a fresh start which is free and spontaneous and filled with collective exaltation. The desire for dramatic act is weak in third world countries, and that is because their people bring theatre to life in their everyday lives. And that is the most powerful form of theatre.⁶⁹

Apparently, Serreau advised young Wannūs to seek inspiration in Arabic folklore which was a vast repository of stories, characters, literary forms, genres, techniques and elements, either indigenous or foreign but naturalised in the Arab environment. Wannūs took his mentor's advice and started writing plays that were inspired by Arabic oral tradition in one way or another. Sometimes he drew his inspiration from widely known folk stories, other times he used different elements of Arabic folklore.

Wannūs became more and more aware of the extensive range of artistic possibilities that lie in their folk heritage, but his attitude towards its incorporation into his dramas (and literature as such) was quite different from that of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm or others. There has been a prevalent belief among many writers and literary critics that one of the means to establish an original Arabic theatre and to give it distinctive character is to draw on their popular heritage or history.⁷⁰ However, Wannūs did not share their opinion; he was convinced that it was not enough to build on folklore since it simply could not compensate for the lack of culture and defects of the civilisation. Since the beginnings of modern Arabic theatre, a large number of playwrights have gained their inspiration from the *Thousand and One Nights* or popular semi-theatrical performances, including pioneering dramatist like a Lebanese Mārūn an-Naqqāsh, a Syrian Aḥmad Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī or Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm.⁷¹ If it were possible to have founded original theatre on the basis of Arabic folklore, it would have been established already and writers, critics and the general public would not be talking about a crisis of theatre in the 1970s.⁷² Wannūs saw the

⁶⁹ WANNŪS, S. Bayānāt li masrah^c Arabī jadīd, pp. 193 – 194.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 100 – 101.

⁷² A survey on the crisis of national theatre was done by the magazine *al-Ba^ct* in 1971. According to Wannūs, it was a result of a crisis of culture, which was, in fact, nothing

greatest asset of Arabic popular stories in their content which was engraved in the collective memory of the people. Over the centuries, folk stories from the *Alf layla wa layla* or popular epics (*sīrat*, pl. *siyar sha‘bīya*) have been narrated by folk storytellers and then circulating among the people who were passing them down from one generation to the next. Storytelling itself was one of the earliest forms of Arabic theatrical manifestations, since it combines the act of narration with performance and even poetry, as was the case of a *rabāba* poet or *rāwī as-sīra* (narrator of a folk heroic epic).⁷³ To make his narrative successful and to captivate the audience, a storyteller has to be a little bit of an actor so the presence of a theatrical element in these stories is undeniable. What is more, as Mas‘ud Hamdan noted in his book, “Arabic theatre from its beginning until today was generally accepted with greater acclaim as long as it presented and adopted popular issues and as long as it responded to popular needs.”⁷⁴ As a gifted playwright, Wannūs recognised this potential of folk tales and from his own experience and the history of theatre and playwriting he also anticipated their success among the audience. He wanted to take advantage of the familiarity of the stories and give the spectators space to ponder over them in a more profound way. If one knows a tale almost by heart, one can concentrate more on the ideological aspects of the performance and its deeper meaning, which can then broaden one’s horizons. According to Wannūs, the only condition to the use of folklore in theatre besides its creative application is that it has to form a part of the organic structure of the play. As for the superficial attempts to innovate Arabic theatre by means of folklore for merely decorative purpose, in Wannūs’s eyes it was unacceptable.⁷⁵ But unlike al-Ḥakīm or other enthusiasts, he did not espouse an opinion that in Arabic folklore and popular stories artists can find whatever material they need for their works.⁷⁶ For, it is not the source of inspiration that defines the quality of a play and gives it a distinctive character, but it is the manner in which the source of inspiration is incorporated into the play and the overall elaboration of both, the piece of writing and the live performance. An ideological element of the work which defines its pertinence to a certain time and society will finally be the one to decide whether the play would be successful or not.⁷⁷

However, in the later phase of his dramatic career Wannūs no longer used Arabic folklore and the stories from the *Thousand and One Nights* as a source

more than a crisis of society. And the reason for this crisis of theatre was that dramatic texts did not respond to pressing issues of society. See WANNŪS, S. *Bayānāt li masraḥ ‘Arabī jadīd*, p. 79.

⁷³ HAMDAN, M. *Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre*, pp. 36 – 42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁵ WANNŪS, S. *Bayānāt li masraḥ ‘Arabī jadīd*, pp. 100 – 102.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 119 – 122.

of inspiration for his plays. He confessed that he turned away from this kind of intertextuality simply because he believed that folklore was no longer untainted. According to Wannūs, it had been profaned by the national media and thus it had become part of an empty and silly public entertainment whose aim was to brainwash viewers and to anesthetise their minds. Since its artistic and moral purity had been compromised, playwrights needed to search for other creative ways to communicate their message to the audience and try to resist the majority of information and aesthetic and other values that were being spread by the dominant media like television, radio and the press.⁷⁸ Even though his later dramatic works are less influenced by the folk heritage, he still wrote some of his greatest works inspired by Arabic folklore, stories from the *Thousand and One Nights*, and popular improvised performances.

His Plays

His play *al-Fīl yā Malik az-Zamān* (The Elephant, Oh, King of Ages, 1969), was inspired by a widely known tale frequently attributed to Juhā about a king who took an elephant for a pet, but it wreaked havoc on the city and its people. Instead of complaining to the king that the elephant is ruining their city and lives, the citizens suggest that they find the elephant a partner, which will only reduplicate their suffering and add to their misery even more, since the elephants will possibly multiply in the future. Wannūs criticised the passivity of the people towards the misconduct of the ruler as well as their fear to defend themselves from his tyranny and abuse, implying that their laxity will sooner or later lead to their doom.

Another play, *Muḡāmarat ra's al-mamlūk Jābir* (The Adventure of the Mamluk Jābir's Head, 1970) is based on an historical anecdote that he found in the popular tradition of the adventures of Mamlūk Sultan aẓ-Zāhir Baybars⁷⁹ of the events that led to the siege of Baghdad (1258).⁸⁰ In the play, Wannūs used a

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 95 – 96.

⁷⁹ Baybars I (1260 – 1277), originally a *bahrī* Mamluk who later became Egyptian Sultan. For more information see for example LACINÁKOVÁ, M. The Characteristic Features of Sultan Baybars in the Arabic folk novel *Sīrat aẓ-Zāhir Baybars* and their Relation to Reality, pp. 177 – 194.

⁸⁰ The storyteller narrates a story about the ^cAbbāsīd caliph al-Musta^cšim (in the play he is called Šha^cbān al-Muntašir bi Allāh) and his vizier, Ibn al-^cAlqamī (in the play Muḡammad al-^cAbdalī), who betrayed him through secret correspondence with the Mongol founder of the Īlkhān dynasty, Hülegü (1217 – 1265, in the play he is a Persian king called Munkatim ibn Dāwud), because he hoped he would be able to keep his post of the Vizier under Hülegü's rule. According to al-Anezi (p. 129), many historians believe that Ibn al-^cAlqamī had his messages tattooed on his slaves' heads and when their hair grew back again he sent them to the enemy who shaved their heads again to

folk storyteller (*ḥakawātī*) to narrate a story of betrayal in a local café, while in the other corner of the stage the storyteller's tale is being performed. Wannūs masterfully incorporated a traditional Arab storyteller into the play to achieve Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*⁸¹ (distancing or alienation effect), so that the audience do not identify themselves with the characters, especially with the main character, Jābir. The spectators are repeatedly reminded by the *ḥakawātī*'s storytelling and his comments, that what they are watching is only a dramatisation of a story, not reality. Besides, the parallel presence of the storyteller and the actors who are performing his story on stage makes it even more difficult to completely immerse oneself in Jābir's story. Wannūs did not want the audience to sympathise with his character because he viewed Jābir as a traitor who took advantage of the opportunity to achieve personal gain, overlooking what consequences his actions might have on the people of Baghdad. Wannūs was highly critical of this kind of opportunism and that is why Jābir had to be punished for his error. As Ali al-Anezi put it, "to see Jābir as a hero is to accept the political *status quo* and admire acts of individual enterprise that enrich the person concerned and leave society untouched. Such stories have the effect of legitimising unjust societies because exceptional individuals are able to rise to the 'top of the heap'".⁸² Since Wannūs wanted to make Jābir a negative example, he had to ensure that he would be perceived in such a way. However, this was only possible to be done by suppressing the audience's emotions and by inciting their rational thinking during the play by means of various theatrical devices, of which the *ḥakawātī*, as part of Arabic folk heritage, was definitely the most important and most inventive one.

Gradually, Wannūs's works grew more and more complicated and more demanding for the audience, too. In the play that followed, which is called *Sahra ma'a Abī Khalīl al-Qabbānī* (Soirée with Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī, 1972), Wannūs revived the life and work of the Syrian pioneering dramatist, Aḥmad Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī,⁸³ whom Wannūs greatly admired for his spontaneity,

read the message. In Wannūs's play, Vizier al-^cAbdalī's slave Jābir was commissioned to do this job. Jābir agrees to do as his master pleases because he wishes to marry his beloved Zumurrud, who is a slave of the Vizier's wife. However, in the end, the slave is beheaded in compliance with the Vizier's instructions included in the message and the city of Baghdad is conquered.

⁸¹ A dramatic concept coined by Bertolt Brecht. Emotional distancing, whose aim is to prevent the audience from empathising with the characters, so that their judgement of the characters' actions is always conscious and not subconscious. The spectators cannot forget that what they are watching is only theatre and not something real.

⁸² AL-ANEZI, A. An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, p. 140

⁸³ Aḥmad Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī (1833/6 – 1902) was a Syrian playwright, sometimes considered the Father of Syrian Theatre. He set up his theatre and troupe in Damascus after the model of Lebanese dramatist, Mārūn an-Naqqāsh (died 1855). Some critics

improvisation and interaction with the audience. The play on al-Qabbānī's life intertwines with a performance of one of his plays, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, which he took from the collection of popular stories of *Alf layla wa layla*.⁸⁴ The play concentrates on the life of a misunderstood artist in hostile environment and suggests that acts of the individual to reform society are doomed to failure; it is a collective action that brings about a desired change. Paradoxically, Wannūs, whose situation was reminiscent of that of al-Qabbānī in his play, was despite all his efforts not able to arouse sufficient interest of his fellow playwrights in his politicization project or to initiate a literary movement, but he was mostly forced to act as an individual during his artistic career.⁸⁵

Even though it is evident that in his works, Wannūs frequently employed material from various sources of Arabic oral and literary tradition, like the tales of Juhā, the *ḥakawātī* and Arab popular history, it was not until 1977 that he made direct use of a story from the *Thousand and One Nights* in his play *al-Malik huwa al-malik* (The King is the King) that many rate among his masterpieces.

The play is based on a well-known story from the collection of popular tales called *Hikāyat an-nā'im wa al-yaqzān*⁸⁶ (The Story of the Sleeper and the Waker) in which Abū al-Ḥasan, a son of a merchant is made a Caliph for one day. However, the first part of the play, in which the drunken protagonist pretends to be a king and takes his servant for a vizier, is reminiscent of a story that occurs in Wortley-Montague Manuscript of the *Thousand and One Nights*, called *The Tale of the Qādī and the Bhang-eater*.⁸⁷ Wannūs took what seems like a humorous popular tale and reworked it into a circus-like play with a gloomy atmosphere and

regard him to be the founder of the Arabic operetta. His plays were mostly adaptations of Western literary works (he knew them probably from their Turkish translations) or dramatisations of popular stories from the collection of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Al-Qabbānī faced harsh criticism from the side of the conservatives and the clergy for staging of a play on Hārūn ar-Rashīd, especially from Shaykh Sa^cīd al-Ḡabra, which resulted in closing down of his theatre. Then he moved to Egypt where he continued with his theatrical activities until 1900 when his theatre was burned down. See SADGROVE, P. C. Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī, p. 265; or MOOSA, M. The Rise of the Arab Drama in Syria and Egypt, pp. 21 – 40; or HAMDAN, M. Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre, pp. 56 – 58.

⁸⁴ See at-Tājir Ayyūb wa ibnuhu Ḡānim wa bintuhu Fitna. [Known also as 'Hikāyat Hārūn ar-Rashīd ma^ca Ḡānim ibn Ayyūb wa Qūt al-Qulūb', in English translation 'The Tale of Ḡānim ibn Ayyūb, the Distraught, the Thrall of Love']. In *Alf layla wa layla* [Būlāq], Vol. 1, pp. 146 – 162.

⁸⁵ Al-ANEZI, A. An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, pp. 143 – 148.

⁸⁶ See *Alf layla wa layla*, [Breslau], pp. 134 – 189.

⁸⁷ The story can be also found in Burton's translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*. See The Tale of the Kazi and the Bhang-Eater. In *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night: A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments*, Supplemental Vol. 5. Translated by Burton, R. F., pp. 189 – 202.

a strong menacing undertone about class struggle and the general corruptness of a ruler. The play is led by two ‘organisers’, Zāhid and ‘Ubayd, whose role is very similar to that of storytellers. Their presence, together with other theatrical devices like exaggerated costumes and props or interplays in which actors talk directly to the audience, contributes to the distancing effect Wannūs wished to achieve. In course of the play, bored King Fakhraddīn wishes to entertain himself and so he makes a notorious local drunkard, Abū ‘Izza, his substitute for a day. However, he is oblivious to the fact that the real power lies in the hands of the economic and religious authorities (shaykh, shahbandar), who would support any ruler as long his conduct is in their favour while the king is only a puppet. Once on the throne, Abū ‘Izza changes diametrically from a mentally unstable weakling into a ruler even crueller and more ruthless than was his predecessor. With the help of his ambitious vizier, he manages to usurp the power immediately and he forgets not only his old enemies, but his family as well. With this new bloodthirsty king on the throne, the intended rebellion of the subjects is nipped in the bud because “the only way open to him is more terror and repression”.⁸⁸ Such ending served Wannūs as the means to revolutionise the spectators by showing them the possible dismal outcome of their passivity. On the other hand, the main idea of the original story which suggests that a commoner is neither suitable to replace the real caliph nor is he capable of governing the country is subverted. Instead of reaffirming the authority of the ruler, Wannūs managed to destroy the myth about untouchability of the king; his entitlement to rule the kingdom by virtue of his extraordinary qualities that serve as a justification of the sultan’s absolute power in the country is questioned. It is true that popular tales from the *Thousand and One Nights* only rarely contain anti-establishment ideas, perhaps due to the role of the scribes and boon companions in the royal court who wrote the stories down.⁸⁹ However, there were other popular theatrical or semi-theatrical carnivalesque genres like shadow theatre (*khayāl az-zill*) or popular farce (*al-faṣl al-muḍhik*) that satirised burning socio-political issues,⁹⁰ and that is why we assume that Wannūs borrowed some of those elements and blended them in his work together with modernist theatrical devices and the popular story from the *Thousand and One Nights*.

When Wannūs saw that his theatre did not have the effect he wished to achieve and the intended political and social changes were not likely to become reality, he became depressed. The situation worsened especially after the visit of the then Egyptian President Anwar as-Sādāt to Israel which initiated a process of negotiations that led to a peace treaty between the two countries in 1979. The

⁸⁸ WANNŪS, S. Al-Malik huwa al-malik [The King is the King], p. 119.

⁸⁹ See IRWIN, R. Political Thought in The Thousand and One Nights, p. 247.

⁹⁰ HAMDAN, M. Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre, pp. 44 – 47

fact that “as-Sādāt had betrayed the Arab people”,⁹¹ as Wannūs felt it, weighed so heavily on him that he even attempted to commit suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills, which he later confessed in a documentary *Wa hunāka ashyā’ kaṭīra kān yumkin an yataḥaddaṭ ‘anhā al-mar’*.⁹² He stopped writing for a decade because he felt desperate and needed to contemplate that “painful history”. When he started writing again he began with a very controversial play *al-Iḡtiṣāb* (The Rape, 1989) in which he managed to portray a positive Israeli character – an act that helped him to somewhat reconcile with the situation.⁹³ After that he penned some of his best plays, though, he never returned to the theatre of politicization again. Political or educational messages were left out and he concentrated more on the lives and problems of individual characters which he used to consider of lesser importance before.

Sa^cdallāh Wannūs was one of a few Arab writers to openly point out to some of the most pressing issues of that time. By means of his theatre of politicization he tried to return to the Syrian theatre its original social aspect and he hoped it would initiate a political debate and raise awareness of the Syrian people. In his plays, he managed to merge the elements of Arabic popular narrative tradition and folk farces with European modernist theatrical techniques of epic theatre in a most original way. Even though his politicization project might not have been as successful as he had hoped, from the long-term perspective his plays have left their marks on the conscience of the Syrian people who have actually never forgotten him. The fact that the memory of Wannūs is still living and vivid in Syria came true during and after the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 when some of the demonstrators demanding the resignation of Bashār al-Asad carried the banners which read “*Innanā maḥkūmūn bi al-amal’*”,⁹⁴ or “we are condemned to hope”.⁹⁵ These words which Wannūs addressed to the public on the occasion of World Theatre Day in 1996 shortly before his death can be also found in the form of graffiti on some of the war-shattered walls in Syria.⁹⁶ His grim vision of the political reality in Syria turned out to be almost eerily

⁹¹ MYERS, Robert. In *Dramatizing Resistance: Saadallah Wannous and the State of Contemporary Arab Theatre*, [online], 00:08:09-00:08:12 min.

⁹² AMĪRALĀY, °U., WANNŪS, S. *Wa hunāka ashyā’ kaṭīra kān yumkin an yataḥaddaṭ ‘anhā al-mar’*, [online], 28:16 – 28:23 min.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 29:08 – 34:26 min.

⁹⁴ McNAUGHT, M. Yarmouk Miniatures; CAMBANIS, T. A Revolutionary Playwright for the Middle East.

⁹⁵ WANNŪS S. *Risālat Yawm al-masrah al-°ālamī li °ām 1996* [Message on World Theatre Day 1996], official UNESCO translation.

⁹⁶ We Are Condemned to Hope. In *The Creative Memory of Syrian Revolution* [online]. October 26, 2012 [cit. 2015-06-27]. Available at <<http://www.creativememory.org/?p=21513>>.

prophetic and as Matthew McNaught noted, the full implications of his words were to be understood only years later.⁹⁷

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⁹⁷ McNAUGHT, M. Yarmouk Miniatures.

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