

The Carnavalesque Satires of Muhammad al-Maghut and Durayd Lahham: A Modern Layer of Comic Folk Drama in Arab Tradition¹

Mas'ud Hamdan

The development of Arabic drama follows a trajectory different from that of classical Greek drama. The non-development of canonical myths and rituals in ancient Arabic culture, on the one hand, and the popular carnival-type performances, on the other, are the main factors underlying the dominance of comic-satiric drama.² This historical circumstance has determined the development of Eastern theatrical performances from the Hellenic period to our days in un-canonized folk genres.³ In this regard, we may include here several carnivalesque manifestations or semi-carnavalesque performances that have had a great influence on Arab cultural life. The broad genre referred to as pagan spring festivals and the more specific orgiastic nocturnal festivals might be two examples. Other examples include the later Coptic festival of *Nawruz* (or *Nayrus* in Persia), in which dancers (*orkhestai*) and masked actors (*samaja*) participate, particularly those of the Fatimid period, and such Coptic feasts as the Nile festival celebrated by Copts and Muslims alike and the celebration of *yawm Hurmuz* by the Persians. It is thus justified to search for links between these ancient fertility rites, dramatic ceremonies, and even folk, parodic theater. In this respect, Moreh sums up:

Although Judaism, Christianity, and . . . Islam rejected the dramatic traditions of the Greek, Romans, Turks and Persians, nevertheless it is possible to observe evidence of the survival of ancient seasonal fertility rites and myths of these nations in their dramatic performance a long time after Islam. These cultures used drama to celebrate death and resurrection in rituals of agricultural festivals pertaining to the vegetation and seasonal cycle . . . by the eve of Islam . . . these dramatic ceremonies came to be understood as commemorating some legendary or historical event and became seasonal folk theater. These dramas which became secular entertainment tended toward parody and mockery of the former customs and rituals.⁴

Mas'ud Hamdan is a lecturer at the Hebrew University and Haifa University in the Theatre and Arabic Literature departments. His specific field of research is Modern Hebrew and Arabic Protest Theater and Cinema.

Moreover, even in the pre-Islamic period, evidence exists of carnivalesque ceremonies: *Yawm al-Khuruj* or *Yawm al-Zina* and *al-Mahrajan*.⁵ One of the obvious results of this situation is the near absence of a tragic element in such performances and the difficulty for producers and writers, as well as audiences and readers, to accept Western influences later on. Instead, we can speak about the renewing role of the friction between Western culture and Arab culture as a fertilizing and stimulating factor at the beginning of the revival of Arabic theater in the nineteenth century.⁶ To the same extent, it is clear that Western influences did not stimulate the growth or initiation of new genres and, especially, theatrical representations. The fact that tragedy, in particular, could not attain a place of honor in the hearts of Arabs (despite the desperate attempts of Arab playwrights, such as George Abyad and Salim Al-Naqqash, in the first half of the last century in Egypt) supports this conclusion. One reason for the failure of tragedy to gain a foothold is that tragedy did not have any precedent in ancient, Arab tradition, as did comical and satirical representations.⁷

The works of the two contemporary Syrian playwrights Durayd Lahham (b. 1934) and Muhammad Al-Maghout (b. 1934) provide modern examples of an Arabic tradition of comic, folk literature. This generic sequence goes back to the Musical Theater School of Al-Qabbani (1835 - 1902), Al-Naqqash (1817 - 1855),⁸ Al-Muhabbazin in the fourteenth century,⁹ to Ibn Daniyal (1248 - 1311?)¹⁰ and the "Karakoze" as a main dramatic character on the Arab stage,¹¹ and also to more ancient theatrical performances known as "Al-Siyar Al-Shabiyya," including "Al-Rawi", the "Rababa poet,"¹² "Al-Khayal," and "Al-Hikaya." By polyphonic means, these performances shed light upon the shadowy life of ordinary people and express the colorful popular spirit far removed from formal culture and its moral and political leaders. Only today, after a century, Al-Qabbani, whose theater was burned twice (in Syria and in Egypt) is recognized as an important cultural figure and has now become almost a mythological persona. Al-Naqqash, too, suffered from marginality and in order to produce his first play, *Al-Bakhil* in 1848, he had to turn his own house in Lebanon into a theater stage.

According to Moreh, "Al-Khayal" too, was a live theatrical genre. 'Babat al-Qadi' of Ibn al-Haj (d. 1331) might be an appropriate example to express laughter, mockery, self parody and carnivalesque dismissal:

. . . when actors (*mukhayilun*) from among the class of entertainers perform theatrical plays (*khayal*) in the presence of the common people and others, they sometimes produce in the course of their acting a play called the "Scene of the judge" (*La'bat al-Qadi*). They put on his attire, with his large turban, a long wide sleeves and long garment (*taylasan*). They dance, wearing this attire and give voice to many rude remarks which they attribute to him.

The laughter of the audience grows. They (join in) the mockery of him and lavish money on them (the actors) for this reason.¹³

"*Al-Hikaya*" too had another meaning beyond its function as story, discourse or mimicry. Usually, it was a theatrical, carnivalesque play with songs and dance and satiric criticism. Look, for example, at the "Trial of the Caliphs" as it appears in "Iqd al-Farid" of Ibn Abd Rabbih (d. 328.940):

. . . in the reign of al-Mahdi there was a mystic who was intelligent, learned and god-fearing, but who pretended to be a fool in order to find a way of fulfilling the command to enjoin what is right and prohibit what is disapproved. He used to ride on a reed two days a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. When he rode on those two days, no apprentices obeyed or were controlled by their masters. He would go out with men, women and boys, climb a hill and call out at the top of his voice, "What have the prophets and the messengers done? Are they not in the highest Heaven?" They (the audience) would say, "Yes." He would say, "Bring Abu Bakr al-Siddiq," so a young boy would be taken and seated before him¹⁴

This trial goes on until the mystic sends the good Caliphs to the highest Heaven, whereas all the bad ones are thrown into Hell. What is of interest here is the playful, carnivalesque element that is represented by the play's progress within its own boundaries of time and space, differentiated quite consciously from "regular" time and space and standing outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious." Also, the clear presence of known and fixed rules, the absence of any division or separation between actors and audience, the presence of the wise man who pretends to be fool, the ride on the reed, the familiarity between the educator (the mystic) and his students, the breaking down of age and other hierarchical barriers, and the open-outside square in which the performance takes place. In his summary, Moreh says, "But drama did exist in the Arab world; we do have dramatic texts; and we do have descriptions of dramatic representation. The problem is not why drama was absent, but why it was present without developing into a high art."¹⁵

While poetry had gained, through hundreds of years, a supreme position in the polysystem of Arabic literature, theatrical performances had to a large extent to cope with its marginality. Even nowadays, the common presentation of Arabic literary and dramatic performances illustrates a narrow traditional concept. "Reference has been made almost exclusively to those literary types and genres which have been recognized by the literary establishment as belonging to highbrow culture."¹⁶

Al-Maghout counts as one of the outstanding poets and playwrights the Arab world has known since the 1960s. Yet he is known more as a poet, in spite of the fact that his poems have broken all the rules of classic poetry. Lahham, on the other hand, started his career as a comedian but today is a playwright, actor, and director of such crucial importance that some see him as having inherited the mantle of Ahmad Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani (1835-1902), the father of Syrian theater.¹⁷ In their theatrical works, Lahham and Al-Maghout express primarily an aesthetic substitute for mass communication. Twenty-five years ago, being the only media available that reflected the “second life” of the public, they represented the ideology of the informal. The Lahham-Al-Maghout theater presents a pseudo-utopian, populist vision and, concurrently, is a vehicle for popular-festive criticism, which unfolds fearlessly, through the “Dionysian Satyr,” Lahham’s various figures, the disguised falsehood of the formal culture. This culture is manifested primarily by a monolithic one-dimensional, strict government, performed repeatedly in various forms as a “caricature of deceit.” The use of the “carnavalesque sense of the world” is essential for these works as tragi-comical satires, for it is an efficient and powerful art form for both dystopic and utopic expression. This “carnavalesque sense of the world” is a crucial ideological strategy for these art forms because it is being used to fulfill the ideological functions and the socio-political statements of both playwrights. Actually, as rituals of inversion, both Satire and Carnival are located on the thin borderline between life and art, play and reality. Both, Turner and Bakhtin use the same definition for the two phenomena; Turner for Satire, Bakhtin for Carnival. The basic differentiation between the two seems to be their different location: Satire in art; Carnival in life itself. Plebeian satirical theater, then, might be a modern form in which “the second life” of the ancient Carnival is fulfilled:

The rhythmic succession of carnivalesque uncrowning and renewal, the “pathos of radical change,” is the “second life” of the people, a form of real politics, an ethos, a “mode of production” existentially prior to the states and its administrative apparatus. This second life is lived in the public squares and also in the theater as a public space; it is mimetically represented in the forms of political drama.¹⁸

Scribner suggests treating Carnival as an alternative mass medium. In this regard, “it creates freer forms of speech and gesture, and allows a familiarity of language outside the limits of social convention . . . lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal or abstract to a material level, to the sphere of the earth and body.”¹⁹ Parodization of the official ideology by creating a reversible world, folk multilinguality (several kinds of speech in local *ammiyya*) as an antithesis to formal

speech (high *fusha*), and the breaking of the conventional boundaries of speech are all major identifying marks of the Lahhamian-Al-Maghutian language.

Day 'at Tishrin, their first play, was also one of the first Syrian satiric attacks after the cease-fire of the June war of 1967.²⁰ This play was performed in 1974, one year after a war that had succeeded in restoring to the Arabs part of the dignity that had evaporated in less than a week six years earlier. This fact alone can shed some light upon the main strategy that the two playwrights had adopted from the very beginning. It can also explain why they have been able to survive this long while living under a rigid authority and still gain the respect and popularity of the populace. Lahham and al-Maghut seem to have realized they could use the partial success of the October 1973 war to have another look at the tragic farce of 1967, to make fun of it and mock the way their leaders had conducted that war. It is no coincidence that *Day 'at Tishrin* means "October village."²¹ But October is actually the last scene in this play, preceded by Al-Nakba's May of 1948 and Al-Naksa's June of 1967.

Al-Maghut, as a writer, and Lahham, as an actor, director, and partner in writing, succeeded in developing a national satire that is deeply rooted in a concrete historical context and has obvious popular and carnivalesque origins.²² Above all, it carries reflections of deep collective feelings and aspirations and is not without popular-festive criticism. Additionally, it offers a populist utopian vision. It is important to note also that their works ought to be viewed as a non-canonized cultural phenomenon in all ways.²³ With *Day 'at Tishrin*, the playwrights gained acceptance throughout the Arab world. Their theater soon adopted a high ringing and self-assured voice, instead of the mumbling whispers of people in dark halls, and as Lahham himself says, "Our role is to tell in a high voice what is being said secretly so as to make sure that the governments in the Arab homeland listen to the suffering of the Arab citizen."²⁴

As a buffer between the people and the authorities, Lahham not only linked the two sides, but also helped to minimize friction between them. In this way, the stage of Lahham and al-Maghut became an aesthetic medium for alternative mass communication largely responsible for introducing a popular-festive confrontation between the official and the unofficial ideology; that is, between the frozen-faced government and the seething life of the nation. By using carnivalesque principles and virtues, the playwrights could caricature the threatening regime and expose the lies hidden behind the masks. Ironically, parodying the government's representatives and its administrative apparatus was accepted by the government itself. It seems that the authorities knew very well that laughing at your own suffering actually gives you strength to go on enduring it. Montesquieu, in his *Spirit of the Laws*, says that monarchic governments tolerate satire or impose only limited penalties so as to "give the people patience to suffer" and indeed to "laugh at their suffering."²⁵ In other words, such compensatory satire formed no real threat to the

rulers. Rather, since it would keep the masses contented, it could even be seen as a form of political control, a harmless way to allow them to let off steam. A close analysis of the plays reveals many obvious carnivalesque themes, such as desecration of sanctity,²⁶ eccentricity (especially the figures of the fool, the eccentric, the drunken man, and the dead man as satirical soldiers), familiarity, mixing of sexes and unifying poles as satirical means.²⁷ By using these themes as artistic instruments, the authors cancel the boundaries between serious and non-serious, sacred and profane, central and marginal, rulers and the ruled. Thus, they create a fictional world whose reality has new, different, playful rules. The result is a total demolition of the official truth by a non-official one. Pure carnivalesque features underlie the space-time concept in the plays too. For example, a recurring central space-time is the carnivalesque square in time of crisis, turning point and catastrophe undergone by the heroes as individuals, as well as a “collective grotesque body.” Central pivots for the plot are additional carnivalesque activities, such as coronations and dismissals. In *Day`at Tishrin*, we can see, for example, the self coronation of the *mukhtar* during the fifth overturn in the state and, then, the people’s dismissal of the *mukhtar* by interrupting him and declaiming instead of him the traditional lecture, which they already know by heart.

In addition, an emphasis exists on the use of the reverse world topos (*mundus inversus*)²⁸ as a central element around which the carnivalesque world is created. In these works, this topos is the initiator of utopia and dystopia at one and the same time. The Lahhamian utopia is constructed by the gay inversion of hierarchy that exists in reality, whereas the dystopic evolves from turning common sense upside down.²⁹ This dystopic perception is most obvious in al-Maghut, for example his *Shaqaiq al-Nu`man (Anemone)* in which he did not collaborate with Lahham.³⁰ Above all, we sense clearly the great Lahhamian ability to “laugh in the face of suffering” and the “moral victory” this brings.³¹ Freud puts it in these words: “By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable, or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him.”³² Nietzsche talks of the play of the fool and how he thereby floats superior over a morality that is official and false.³³

In the scene of the electroshock from *Kasak ya Watan (Cheers My Country)* (1979), we can see the security services try electroshock as a means of pressure for getting an avowal from an innocent citizen. Surprisingly, the antihero Ghawwar laughs as if he was tickled. The amazed inquirer asks him for the reason behind the unreasonable reaction and Ghawwar says: “My ass has got electricity before our village did. I will go back home proud with my ass;” and when he is commanded to raise his feet for beating, he says: “Don’t you read the paper? It is written there that a citizen is born to raise his head not his feet.”

Ghurba was the second play the two playwrights produced in 1976. *Ghurba* means alienation and is the symbolic name the writers chose for the Arab homeland in this play. It indicates how deep the disappointment of the people had become

and how strong their feelings of alienation were as a result of the bureaucratic corruption and the total distortion of socialist ideology. Their disappointment and alienation explains why they decided to immigrate to the West. Out there, they end up as mere nameless numbers in a big, anonymous, industrial area: their genuine identities are completely erased. Before the last scene, however, we behold, in their exile, a brave attempt to preserve that identity, through the performance of a collective song and dance.

It is an important fact that in *Day 'at Tishrin*, the satirical attack was acceptable because it happens in the shadow of a battle with an outside enemy, the Zionist state. *Ghurba* and the third play *Kasak ya Watan*, on the other hand, introduce a direct attack on the political, cultural, and social conditions within the Arab world. While the Israeli-Arab conflict plays a main role in the plot of the first play, the central arguments in the second play shift to the strained relationship between the people and political power and, in the third play, between the individual citizen and the state. Thus, if we look at these plays chronologically, we get an understanding of how the playwrights' orientation gradually moves ahead from the outside to the inside. Since the playwrights followed this cautious strategy, and knew when and how to carry their message, they were able to say whatever they wanted. Also, their criticism is indirect, that is, it is directed to the Arab world as if it were one unit, never concentrating on one particular state (regime) or another. Furthermore, the "Mukhtar," the "Baic," and the "Agha" are all imagined leaders who rule far-away villages not located anywhere on any Arab map. This strategy allows a deliberate ambiguity of the kinds of political and social situations as found in reality and somewhat blurs the bitterness and the pungency of the political satire itself.

Kasak ya Watan is an ingenious play about a miserable citizen who loses his daughter Ahlam (which means dreams) as a result of malpractice in the central hospital of an Arab metropolis. Instead of taking care of the poor girl, the hospital's top brass prefer to take care of one of the representatives from the foreign affairs department whose problem is that he is impotent: Since he should in no way embarrass his country abroad, his problem is determined to be more urgent.³⁴ Close to the end of the play, the poor citizen Ghawwar prefers to sell his children rather than see them suffer. Robbed of his dreams and without a future, he buys a bottle of *araq*, which he drinks to the health of his mother country. In the last scene, Ghawwar finds himself answering a phone call from paradise. He can hardly believe that his father, a dead, national soldier/hero from the past, is on the line: "For whom have you sacrificed your life?" Ghawwar asks. And then, when his father asks to know about the present situation in the homeland, Ghawwar, to prevent disappointment, hides the bitter truth for a while. In colorful words, Ghawwar paints in his father's imagination a satirical paradise on earth: The Arab world is united; the borders are only on the maps; no more prisons exist, and, instead, schools

and hospitals, justice and order are everywhere, and tourists from all over the world come to look at “us” and are jealous. Above all, Palestine too (how come not?) is already restored. During the dialogue, father requests his son to join him. Ghawwar answers that nothing is absent in his mother country, and the people actually have everything they want, and, therefore, there is no reason for him to “yearn” for death. At this point he breaks down: “we actually need only some dignity,” he says finally.

Shaqaiq al-Nu'man means anemone, and anemones are usually found among the graves in a cemetery. Here, anemone is a metaphor for the country. It deals with a situation synonymous with the Lebanese civil war and its street gangs who spread terror and destruction, but actually the metaphor presents a picture of the total collapse of the so-called “scientific socialism” as a feasible revolution. A major character in the play is the Marxist ideologue, whom the authors portray as a chef in a kitchen. Lahham and al-Maghut here create a caricature of the conscripted intellectual who believes that social change can be brought about by a simple act. All you need to do is follow a set of scientific instructions as you would with a recipe for a good meal. For the authors the world of determinist politics and the world of the art of cooking are identical: At one point in the play “workers of the world, unite!” becomes “chefs of the world, unite!” The ideologue tries throughout the play to lead the people to class-consciousness as if it was a meal through which they could redeem their suffering. In the end, what we get is a totally different repast: the rise of religious fundamentalism. *Shaqaiq al-Nu'man* also presents in its last scene a dark apocalyptic picture of the Arabs in the future: starvation everywhere, the trade of women, and street shows of local prisoners enclosed in cages as monkeys for the entertainment of foreigners.

Sani' al Matar (Rain Maker) is the final 1993 Lahham play, which he wrote without al-Maghut. It is a play about the true patriot Qaisar al Namli who brings rain to his village after a long drought by an act of ceaselessly digging deep in the ground.³⁵ Qaisar who finds himself forced to hide behind the mask of the eccentric fool, in order to protect his life, has little trouble in detecting the gap that exists between the false public image of his leaders and their real face:³⁶ “they demand respect. They are the “aghawat” (that is the leaders) of the place, but on the inside they are “kharawat” (excrement).”³⁷ To Deghel, the young girl in the play, he gives the gist of his philosophy of life as follows:

Who is stronger? you or the hen?, (he asks)
 Me, (she answers spontaneously and naively)
 No. (he says), she is
 How come, (she asks)
 We need her eggs, she doesn't need any one of us.

The play draws attention to the only possible dynamic between government and truth. Only through compromise can the powerful politician Boda and Qaisar al Namli find a way for coexistence. Through the steamroller of political corruption, the conscientious nonconformist is being transformed into the jester of the court. Now the ruler can be sure: since truth resides with the court, the jester will remain marginal. But the man of truth can also be sure of at least one thing: as a clown, he at least saves his life! We encounter this same dynamic, of course, also outside the Lahham's fantasy world—through the official political and academic attitude towards these plays. The fact that they are eliminated from the canonical genres makes them “marginal” and “inferior.”

In 1993, two years after the Madrid Conference, Lahham decided to break away from the stage. Certainly, it was not because he had exhausted his role as satirist, but rather that the idealistic and romantic attitude that Lahham represented now clashed with a more cynical and cruel reality. In one of his recent interviews, he says, “To speak today about the idea of Arab unification is to laugh at yourself.”³⁸

Over the past thirty years, Lahham has shown his audiences a delectable “game” with exchanging roles between the apex (rulers) and the basis (the ruled). In the carnivalesque atmosphere, popular characters could criticize, mock, scorn, and even shit and spit right in the face of their masters. An old Tantalian dream appears again and again: a dream about an ordinary and integrative coherent, collective body, much like a utopic return to a state of natural purity that has been corrupted by a complex civilization, debilitating bureaucracy, and a rigid regime of the new nation state.³⁹

Notes

1. One of the infrequent articles in English on Lahham's works, if not the only one, includes paraphrases of interviews that the author conducted with the playwright regarding a study on popular culture made by her in Syria in 1982. This article argues that “Ghawwar,” the theater character of Lahham in most of his works, is actually another link with the cultural performance of the ancient past like shadow play and “Al-Hakawati,” the traditional storyteller in Arab culture until these days. The author also lays stress on the similarity between the Syrian acting style and the British *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and the American *Saturday Night Live*. E. A. Early, “Darid Laham: Political Satirist as Modern Storyteller,” *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early. Indiana Series in Middle East Studies (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993) 264-70.

2. On Eastern Carnival, see A. Al-Carmili, “Carnival, Its Origins and Spread among Nations,” *Al-Mashriq* 5 (1906): 193-202.

3. The use of *fusha* or *'ammiyya* is still to a large extent the basic criterion as to whether literature is considered to be canonical or non-canonical. For further information regarding this matter, see R. Snir, “Synchronic and Diachronic Dynamics in Modern Arabic Literature,” *Studies in Canonical and Popular Arabic Literature*, ed. S. Ballas and R. Snir (Toronto: York Press, 1998) 87-121.

4. Shmuel Moreh, *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arab World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1992) 14-15.

5. See A. Al-Carmeli, "Al-Marfa', Asluhu Washuyu`hu `Ind Al-Aumam," *Al-Mashriq* 5 (1906) 193-202.

6. Both playwrights (the first ancestors) Jacob Sanoua in Egypt and Marun Al-Naqqash in Syria were influenced primarily by Moli(re directly and by the *commedia dell'arte* (which influenced Moli(re) indirectly.

7. "Summing up, one finds that most Arabic plays are melodramas, historical plays, and comedies, followed by political plays, farces, and dramas. Tragedy and symbolic plays are as yet few in number." Jacob M. Landau, *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1958) 45. In this respect, it is important to notice that tragedy as a "sacred play or played rite" is approximately an outcome of an official and religious rite. Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944) 144-45.

8. On these two playwrights, see M. Najm, *Al-Masrahiyya fi al-Adab al-Arabi al-Hadith 1847-1914* (Beirut: N.p., 1956).

9. *Al-Muhabbazin* are the actors in the art of *Khayal*. See Moreh, *Live Theatre* 152-60. For example, see also in this book, the play text *Mastarat Khayal Monadamat Aum Mujbir* written by 'Abd Al-Baqi Ishaqi (d. 1660) 170-72.

10. The three texts of Ibn Daniyal are in I. Hamada, *Khayal al-zill watimthiliyyat Ibn Daniyal* (Cairo: N.p., 1963).

11. "The Turkish Karagoz succeeded afterwards in leaving its imprint on the Arabic shadow play, particularly on shows performed in Syria, Palestine, Algeria, and Tunisia for the last three generations." Landau, *Studies in the Arab Theater* 45.

12. On these genres, see F. Khurshid, *Al-Siyar Al-Shabiyya* (Cairo: N.p., 1978).

13. Moreh, *Live Theatre* 129.

14. 91-92.

15. 163

16. Snir, "*Synchronic and Diachronic Dynamics* 88. Snir draws our attention to Pierre Cachia's 1990 study, *An Overview of Modern Arabic Literature*, pages 171-78, and to Cambridge's *Modern Arabic Literature*, edited by M. M. Badawi (1992) as a typical expression of this confined concept: out of 14 chapters, only one is devoted to non-formal literature.

17. On al-Qabbani, see 'U. Al-daqqaq, *Modern Literature Arts in Syria 1870 - 1970* (Beirut: Dar al-sharq Press, 1971); W. Al -Malih, *The History of Syrian Theater and My Memories* (Damascus: Dar Al-fikr, 1984); M. Y. Najm, *The Play in the Modern Arab Literature 1847-1914* (Beirut: American UP, 1956).

18. Michael David Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985) 200.

19. R. Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Turned Upside-Down," *Social History* 3 (1978): 322.

20. Beside this play, Sa'dalla Wannus's play *Haflat Samar Min Ajil Khamsa Huzairan (Night Party for the Fifth of June)*, which was written immediately after the 1967 war, must be counted.

21. It is important to note that more than ten years before his partnership with Al-Maghut, Lahham had performed with Nihad Qal'in social dramas for television, such as *Hamman Al-Hana*, *Qal' dirs*, *Maqalib Ghawwar* and *Sah Al-Nom* and a huge number of comical films that made him one of the most famous actors in the Arab world. He was given a second name: "Charlie Chaplain of the Arabs."

22. Political theater in modern Syria started with "Masrah al-Shok" in the late sixties, and Lahham was one of its members.

23. This fact stands behind the neglect of their works. For instance, see G. Ghanaim, *The Political Theater in Syria 1967-1990* (Damascus: Dar 'Alaa Al-dein, 1996). This book on political theater in Syria during the title period does not even mention these plays at all.

24. See *Al-Quds*, 21 Dec. 1985: 5; qtd. in Reuven Snir, "The Literary System in Syria," *Hamizrah Hehadash* 38 (1996): 181.

25. Charles de Secondat de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of The Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner, 1949) 2: 195.

26. For example, this carnivalesque principle exists in *Hikayat Abi l-Qasim al-Baghdadi* written by Al-Azdi between the years 1009-1010. Further information on *Hikaya* can be found in Moreh, *Live Theatre* 94-100.

27. See M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984).

28. This *topos* has spread throughout Arab literature. See R. Snir, "The World Upside-down in Modern Arabic Literature: New Literary Rendition of an Antique Religious Topos," *Edebiyat* 5 (1994): 51-75.

29. In *Kasak ya Watan*, the playwrights inform us that the play is like Arab reality, which does not follow common sense or logic.

30. See also his plays and poems in M. Al - Maghut, *Alaathar Alkamila* (Beirut: Dar Al-a'uda, 1981).

31. See B. Tomashevski, "Literary Genres," *Russian Poetics in Translation*, vol. 5 (Oxford : Holdan Books, 1978).

32. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vols. 8, ed. and trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-) 103.

33. See Friedrich Nietzsche, "Our Ultimate Gratitude to Art," sec. 107 of *The Gay Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 104-105. On foolery as an efficient arm for criticism in Arab culture, see M. H. Al - Samman, *The Discourse of Madness in Arab Culture* (London-Cyprus: Ryad' Al-Rayyis, 1993).

34. This also means that the weakness of the government is the main cause behind the crime of murdering the future of the nation.

35. Drought is a famous background in Arab plays. See for instance S. Al - Qasim, "*Qaraqash*," *Al-A'mal Al-Najiza*, vol. 5 (Kafr qar': Dar Al-huda, 1991) 9-69; and M. Al-Maghut, *Al-A'sfour Al-Ahdab* (Beirut: Dar Al-A'uda, 1973).

36. On the mask of the eccentric fool in Arabic literature and culture, see Al-Samman, *Discourse of Madness*.

37. John Dryden defines the power of satire as follows: "The very name of satire is formidable to those persons, who wou`d appear to the world, what they are not in themselves." *Works of John Dryden* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1961) 4: 48.

38. Lebanese Television, January 19, 1996.

39. According to Greek mythology, King Tantalus was condemned to stand up to his chin in a pool of water and beneath fruit-laden boughs only to have the water or fruit recede at each attempt to eat or drink. The stationary position of Tantalus and the background of the Tantallic existence are internal: anticipation and craving for the unattainable.