

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL - UK

THE DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

**Elements of Myth in the Modern Theatre, with Special
Reference to Current Theatre in Oman**

Being a Thesis Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

By

ABDUL KARIM ALI JAWAD AL LAWATI

Ph.D. (History of Theatre, University of Drama and Cinematography, Romania 1994-1999)

B.A. (In History, Beirut Arab University 1982-1986)

October 2004

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

[3] We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories, in that We reveal to thee this (portion of the) Qur-an: before this, thou too was among those who knew it not.

The Holy Quran, Surat Yuossf, or Joseph

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement

Abstract

Introduction

- Oman
- Definition of the Problem
- Existing Knowledge on the Subject
- The Aims of the Thesis
- The Importance of the Study
- Methods and Sources
- Controversial Issues

Chapter 1: The Modern Theatre Movement in the Sultanate of Oman

- Modern Theatre in the Arab World
- Mythical Theatre in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries
- Beginning of Theatre Activities in Oman
- Theatre Activities in Schools after the Renaissance
- Theatre in Clubs
- The Youth Theatre
- Other Efforts towards a National Theatre
- Evidence of Public and Experts Opinion via Questionnaires

Chapter 2: Myth and Theatre: Vertical & Horizontal Interpenetration

- Definitions of Myth
- Different Classifications of Myth
- Myth from an Islamic Viewpoint
- Myth from an Arabic Viewpoint
- The Interrelationship between Myth and Theatre
- Originated Myth

Chapter 3: Holy and Unholy Myth

- Prehistory Era
- The Holy or Unholy Isis
- Religious Holy Myth
- Myth is Holy because it is Fact: *The Bewitched Girl*

Chapter 4: Identification or Confrontation with Myth

- Grotowski and Mnouchkine: Notable Practical Experiences
- Phaedra from Racine to Kane
- *Don Juan*: The Nature of Myth and the Nature of Play
- Experience from Oman: *The Lament of the Monster*

Chapter 5: Myth and Political Theatre

- Myth and Politics: Twins from the very Beginning in the Epic Theatre
- The Ancient Myth of Antigone in the Modern Political Theatre
- Sartre's *Flies*
- What has Politics done to Isis?
- Is Al-Lat suitable to be the Arab Armies' leader?
- The Forty Years War for the Sake of "Al-Basus's Camel"

Chapter 6: Myth, Realism and Modernism

Part One: Myth and Realism

- Archetypal Criticism
- *A Doll's House*: the Root of Religion and Ancient Greek Mythology.
- Mythological Roots in a *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
- Examples of Realism and Myth in Arab and Omani Theatre

Part Two: Myth and Modernism

- The Myth of Schizophrenia
- Ubu, the New Mythical Monster
- The Modern Omani Myth of Violence and Disaster
- Symbolic and Visual Theatre
- The Theatre of the Symbolic and Visual in the Omani play: *Al-Baragge*.
- The Philosophy of the Absurd and the Root of Myths
- *The Man who Returns from Coming Time*: an Absurdist play from Oman

Chapter 7: Myths in Oman

- Historical Myths
- Myths and Folklore
- Myths of Ghosts, Magicians and Jinn

Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendices

- Questionnaire Data (1 August to 15 October 2003)
- The Story of Malik Bin Fahm
- The Story of Selima
- The Story of the Daughter of the Radish Seller
- The Story of the Human Dog
- The Story of Ajab
- The Story of Zaid Bin Anan

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank those people who helped and encouraged me during my study at Hull University. In particular, I would like to express my great gratitude and special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. D. Keith Peacock for his generous assistance, guidance and encouragement to embark on this project. I greatly appreciate his constructive criticism and invaluable suggestions throughout my study, without which this work would not have reached its present standard.

My most sincere and special thanks go to Mr. Anthony J. Meech, the head of the Drama Department, for his valuable comments on the first draft. I am most grateful to him for his suggestions, support and encouragement.

I would like to thank all those who helped me to attend and complete this study, especially His Excellency Sheikh Muhammad Marhoon Al-Mamary president of the General Organization for Youth, Sports and Cultural Activities, and His Excellency Dr. Yahya Mahfoudh Al-Mantheri, president of the Council of State in Oman, for their encouragement and support.

Also, special thanks are directed to Dr. Khalid Al-Zadjali and my other colleagues in the Omani theatre for their help and comments on the study. In addition, I would like to thank Mrs Kathryn Spry and Mr Peter Wilson for their work in checking the drafts and correcting the language.

My sincere gratitude is due to my parents, wife, brother, sisters and children for their patience and encouragement throughout my study. Their unending support and faith made this project possible.

I would like also to record my gratitude to all scholars whose research in the same field has influenced this thesis and whose efforts have enabled me to complete my task.

Abstract

This study focuses on the relationship between myth in its classical and modern definition and the theatre, and how the developing Omani theatre can benefit from western and Arabian experiences in this field. The study shows how myths, around the world, were the first attempt by human beings to think, explain, justify and produce concepts and images. They were the basis on which the first drama was established, and have continued to be a major source of inspiration. The study then explores various modern explanations of myth from the mid nineteenth century, in which myths were classified into various categories and attempts made to study each in isolation. It then illustrates how myths were subsequently studied by anthropologists and psychologists, as manifestations of the individual or collective conscious or unconscious realm, which confirms that myths, despite their outwardly illogical element, carry not fact itself but the essence of the fact. The author clarifies the definition and concept of myth in Islamic and Arabic culture, the meaning of the word in the Holy Quran and the attitude of Islamic and Arab scholars towards it. Consideration is also given to the explanations by modern Arab scholars for the ancient Arabs' lack of concern with myths, in contrast to the cultures of their neighbours.

The study sheds light on how the modern mythological, sociological, anthropological, theological and psychological explanations of myth are employed in contemporary theatre and how they have influenced performance and critical theories such as those of Artaud and Archetypal Criticism. It is noted that such theories played an essential role in a number of modern theatrical movements, and consequently concluded that those theories might usefully be applied in developing countries like Oman.

Particular attention is given to the theatre in Oman, asserting the importance of its interaction with international theatre at both theoretical and practical levels, especially with those countries, which have strong theatrical traditions. Nevertheless, alongside

this is emphasised the importance of employing indigenous sources of heritage and knowledge, such as myths.

The study elucidates the role of myths in Oman's culture, in light of historical and geographical factors. It describes how mythology became an integral part of people's lives as a way of thinking about, imagining and explaining different events or phenomena in their lives.

It is concluded that theatre should be aware of this fact, and deal with it. This does not mean uncritically accepting superstitions and regressive thinking, which could be harmful, but saving the popular heritage and employing it in such a way that people recognize its advantages and disadvantages, as modern mythological studies suggest, in order to build a close relationship between the theatre and its audience, and to provide the society with new and wider intellectual and aesthetic understanding of their existing myths, for the Benefit of both theatre and society.

Introduction

Myth was the first adventure of mankind's mind and will not be the last, but certainly, it was the most creative one. It was the basis for many arts and literary forms, including theatre. Therefore, this thesis is an invitation to go back to the womb, Myth, for the sake of rebirth in the present and future.

There are three important elements in this thesis: theatre, myth and my country, Oman.

Oman



Oman is an Arab country far in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. It was firmly established and well known in pre-historic times. Oman has an area of about 309,500 sq km - almost as big as England - and 1700 km of coastline running all along the eastern side of the country from north to south; hence, the emergence of a maritime society depending on fishing and maritime commerce. It eventually also developed an urban

society. On the western side of the country lies the desert; the population lives in scattered nomadic groups that are always searching for water and pasture, as they are essentially herders. These nomadic groups form what can be called the Bedouin society. However, between the two environments, the coastline and the desert, there are chains of high mountains crossing the country from East to West. In between them, there are many oases and flat green valleys, which can be farmed. People, in these areas depend on agriculture for their livelihood and form a third section of the Oman society, which can be called the rural society. Each of these societies overflows with its customs, traditions and different folk arts. This is particularly due to Oman's intermediate geographical position, which has directly linked it to the civilizations that have been influential throughout history, such as the Indian subcontinent, Persia and the Eastern coast of Africa. These have naturally influenced Omani culture and traditional folk arts. Moreover, Oman has witnessed a new era in its modern history since 1970. The Omani authorities, have, since then, welcomed, helped and encouraged all means and ways to achieve social and economic progress. This progressive tendency, however, was not carried out in isolation from the cultural heritage. Instead, it was developed side by side with an authentic and persistent movement for the revival of the country's public and cultural heritage. The young Omani drama is one of the gifts of this glorious stage of Oman's modern history. When we talk about Omani drama, we refer not to a drama movement deeply rooted in history or with extensive experience. We talk instead about a drama that is progressing through its foundational stage. This is one of the most difficult and complicated stages because it determines the present and the future orientation of the Omani drama. For this reason, we have to stop and scrutinize the essence of the trends selected for Omani drama, trends, which will realise the national ambitions and aspirations of Omani dramatists and ensure their status in the wider world

of drama. The theatre in Oman needs to plant roots from which indigenous plants will grow.

Definition of the Problem

From an observation of contemporary theatrical productions in famous Arab capitals such as Cairo, Beirut, and Tunis, it is easy to recognize that the Arabs acquired theatrical knowledge from the Western world. Earlier forms and styles were adopted from Italian and French theatre. Most Arab researchers such as Ali Al-Rai in his book *The Theatre in the Arab World* (1999) refer to Maroon Al-Naqqash, who presented an Arabised European play the *Miser* (Al-Bakhil) in Beirut in 1847, as the starting point of the modern Arab theatre movement. This process of imitation is still active all over the Arab world. There is nothing wrong with imitation in itself, especially in the early stages of introducing a new form of art, and especially in imitating Western theatre, which is popular around the world. The unacceptable situation arises when imitation becomes entrenched, because imitation robs any theatrical movement of two important features: superiority and affiliation. Imitation, whatever aesthetic quality it may reach, remains inferior to the original invention, and, whatever the skill applied, remains unable to establish an interactive relationship with the surrounding society.

Those Arabs interested in Arab theatre recognize this problem, and over the last fifty years, the identity of Arab theatre has been a main topic at many Arab theatrical conferences, forums and festivals. It is still a topic of debate. This concern can be understood in relation to the awakening, which most Arab countries have experienced since the middle of the last century, in all cultural aspects, including theatre. Therefore, it is not acceptable that Arab theatre remains a half-breed, with no roots in Arab culture. Arab culture is rich, ancient and fertile. It is filled with folklore, rituals and traditions. The question arises here, with all these significant features of Arab culture, is it rational

for Arabic dramatists to stay at the imitation stage, without inventing their own original masterpieces, without investing their own traditional heritage to support their theatre movements? Such investment would take the Arab theatrical movement from its current negative position to a very positive level, where it can represent and be part of modern Arab culture and can offer the theatrical world something new and original.

However, Arab dramatists have not simply been passive. Some prominent writers have confronted this situation, and worked hard, in the last fifty years, to create a mutual relationship between the theatrical movement and the traditional heritage. Such dramatists are Tawfiq El-Hakim and Yusuf Idris in Egypt, Saadallah Wanoos in Syria, Ezial-Din Madani and Umar Bin Salim in Tunisia, and Kassim Mohamed in Iraq. These and others have made every effort to achieve the target of developing Arabic theatre. Some of their productions were very successful, but others stirred up many arguments such as *The Cave Companions* and others, which will be discussed in coming chapters.

Oman is part of the Arab world. Its theatrical movement is the most recent and it, too, has imitated Western theatre. Nevertheless, the situation in Oman is different. Perhaps it is more complicated, because imitation in Oman is not directly from the original Western European sources, but indirectly, through the imitation of Cairo, Beirut or Tunisia. Therefore, if there are problems with a direct copy, then there will be even more with a second or third-hand copy. The recentness of the Omani drama movement may make it seem in need of maturity on the one hand, but on the other hand, offers great opportunity to learn from successful external experimentation and to begin from the point they have reached.

However, in addition, the idea of drawing on inherited traditions of myth and performance in order to root the theatrical movement in Omani culture is appropriate in two respects. First, the fact that the Omani theatre movement is in the process of establishing its own character, which means that such traditions may make a significant

contribution to the creation of a new dramatic form. Secondly, Oman is one of the few countries which has retained intact its national heritage and traditions. Indeed, it is true to say that people in Oman live through their heritage. In other words, they consider heritage as an integral part of their daily lives. The people, in Oman, are very proud of their folk dances as much as their songs, fairy tales and myths, and will respond to their presentation on stage.

It is in this context that the idea for this thesis was generated. It is an attempt to throw light upon the Omani national heritage and its treasures, specifically in the realm of myth and fairy tale, and consider how they might offer a source for an indigenous drama.

Existing Knowledge on the Subject

Theatrical studies and criticism in Oman are in their infancy; they consist of a few articles in the newspapers and occasional brief research papers. There is nothing which deals with myth and theatre, while there are a few historical books that refer to mythical events, as well some collections of traditional stories such as those in *Harvest of Omani Studies*, which record a number of traditional myths. In the wide Arab world, there are a few studies concerned with Ancient Egyptian myth and theatre, and fewer still with Iraq, Syria, and North Africa such as *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre* (1993) and *Myth and Theatrical Writings* (1994). On the other hand, studies concerned with myth and theatre can be found in the West. Although they are far away from the mythology of Oman and most concern points specific to European culture, some aspects concerning the relationship of myth and drama are relevant to this research. Examples are recent unpublished Ph.D. theses: Hazel, R. M., *The mediation in late twentieth century English Theatres of selected Ancient Greek tragedy texts and themes concerned with women and power* (1999). Babbage F., *Re-visioning myth:*

feminist strategies in contemporary theatre (2000) and Sakellari A., *The scenic presentation of the Electra-myth in Greek, German and American drama* (1994). These studies provide the researcher with valuable examples of how the modern Western European theatre has employed myth.

The Aims of the Thesis

In ancient Greece, the theatre was born from the womb of myth. But the question now is, do we need myth any longer in the contemporary theatre and if so, why do we need it, in what form and for what Benefit? This is of special concern in developing countries where enlightened social reformers are struggling against the domination of myth over people's thinking which may lead to social divisiveness. This thesis is an attempt to address such questions. Therefore, its aims may be divided into two categories. First, the short-term aims are to understand the value of myths in the past, to discover the potential of myths in the present day and to provide suggestions and ideas as to how the contemporary theatre could employ myths in its performances, especially in developing countries, and how it could utilize other Arab and Western experiences in the same field. Second, the long term aims are to focus on two main interrelated points: to change the attitude towards myth so that it is not considered either complete nonsense or absolute fact; and to develop Omani theatre by rooting it in its culture and thus building its own individual character. In addition, there is a personal aim, to improve my contribution as a playwright and director to Omani theatre.

The Importance of the Study

The first point of significance is the contribution of the research in altering the attitude towards myth. In Oman, as in most developing countries, myth has a strong position in people's collective memory, to the extent that some myths are considered as complete

fact. Some Arab Governments and enlightened social reformers are fighting against the domination of myth over people's lives because they want them to be more practical in dealing with the modern world. No doubt, theatre can play an essential role in this fight, not in order to annihilate myth in social life, but to admit that myth is an integral part of society's culture and it is necessary not to ignore it but to deal with it face to face. This is not to claim that myth is super fact but to admit that it expresses some underlying truths and has value as a source of knowledge and as a vehicle for exploring ideas and invisible realms.

The second point is that the research will help to develop the Omani theatre. The young Omani theatre was established on the basis of Western theatre traditions, and certainly there is value in knowing modern theatrical experiences and theories, but there is also a danger that the Omani theatre will remain just a pale imitation unless it also builds its own individual character, depending on its own heritage and culture, of which myths are an integral part.

Methods and Sources

One aim of the research was to find out to what extent myths in their classical form exist in the Omani heritage and traditions, both quantitatively and qualitatively and what are people's opinions toward the relationship between myth and theatre. This aim was achieved first by a questionnaire designed especially for this thesis and by research in books that record traditional myths or those on the history of Oman which include ancient legends. *Tuhfat Al-a'yan fi sirati Ahli Oman* which means *The Valuable View in the Legacy of the People of Oman* by the Omani scholar and Imam, Shaikh Nur Al-Din Abdallah Al-Salimi (1869-1914), is such a work, which mixed mythical phenomena with historical events, especially relating to the first period of the establishment of the state of Oman pre-Islam. Al-Salimi, in his turn, depends on another work of Arab

history from the tenth century entitled *Murug Al-Dhahab*, by Al-Masoudi. References to this period are, however, very rare. Other Omani myths were recorded in three collections of traditional stories in the 1990s, *Al Basrawiyan wa'l Omani* by Isa Bin Hamad Al-Shuaili, *Popular Tales* by Uthman Al-Balushi, and *Dhofari Folklore and Folk Tale* by T. Johnston. Some other short studies published by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, in five volumes between 1991-1995, of the Harvest of Omani Literary Forum are useful, as well as some printed material from the Ministry of Information in Oman, such as the *Dictionary of Omani Traditional Music*, (1989) by Yusuf Shawqi and *Traditional Arts From Oman* (1990). In addition, I, as an instructor, directed the Youth Theatre Group in recording on cassette tape numerous oral myths narrated by local people, from different Omani regions, as an assignment for theatrical workshops between 1997 and 2001. This research will be referred to in the subsequent historical introduction to theatrical features in the Omani heritage, and in the brief history of the modern Omani theatre movement.

The second priority of the research was to study the modern Omani theatre movement in terms of history, practical performance and text, and how it has dealt with myth. This part of the study depended on my own writing for, and experiences of Omani theatre, in addition to attending live performances, seeing others on videotapes and reading published plays and manuscripts of Omani plays.

The third stage was to study myth, in general, from different aspects, then undertake a comparative study of the concept of myth in Western culture, and in the Arabic and Islamic culture. There, sources in books, research papers, and articles about myth in the West were abundant, especially relating to the ancient Greek period and the Middle Ages. Examples are Laurence Coupe's *Myth* (1997), Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1973). Some Arabic sources were also available, in particular concerning the pre-Islamic period in the Arabian

Peninsula, Ancient Egypt, Iraq and Syria. These include Shawqi Abd al-Hakim's *The Cyclopaedia of Arabic Folklore and Myths* (1995), Hamid Alawi's *The Employment of Myth in Tawfiq El-Hakim's Theatre* (1995), Ilia Al-Hawi's *Aeschylus and Greek Tragedy* (1980), Firas Al-Sawah's *The First Mind's Adventure* (1989), Muhammad Abazah's *Myth and Theatrical Writings in Tunis* (1994) and Kamal al-Din Husayn's *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre* (1993). In addition, the attitude of Islam towards myth was studied through the verses of the Holy Quran.

The fourth stage was to study and analyse how myths were employed in ancient theatre, and compare that with the employment of myth in modern theatre in a variety of theatre movements in the light of modern mythical, anthropological and psychological explanation of myths. The most important sources in this stage were James Frazer's book *The Golden Bough* (1922), Bronislaw Malinowski's *Magic, Science and Religion* (1954), C. G Jung's *Man and his Symbols* (1964), Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1938) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1953), Mircea Eliade's *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries* (1957), Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), and George Walworth's *The Theatre of Opposition and Contradiction* (1963). In addition, reference was made to the published texts of plays such as *Nothing Stops the Disaster* (1991) by Sama Isa Al-Ta'i, performances, some critical theatrical studies, articles, essays and electronic resources such as "A View from India" about *Peter Brook and Mahabharata* (1991).

The fifth stage was to study and analyse a number of Arabic and Omani texts based on myth, and compare their employment of myth in the theatre with Western examples. In addition, consideration was given to the ways in which the Omani theatre can learn from the Arabic and Western theatre experience of employing myth. Sources for this stage were the texts of plays, critical works such as Hani Mitawi's book *New Readings*

h's The
of Protest
to dox

of Old Plays (1993), and studies and some electronic articles such as *Another Antigone* by A. R. Guney.

The final stage was to conclude how theatre is rooted in myth, considering how myth was and remains one of the main sources for the theatre across the world, to define contemporary myth and explore how is it used in the modern theatre, and to suggest how Omani theatre might develop its drama and theatrical performance by investing in own ancient and modern mythological features.

Controversial Issues

A potentially controversial issue in this thesis lies in its central suggestion of employing myth or mythical features in theatre, especially in developing countries where progressive intellectuals are struggling against the domination of mythological thinking. This suggestion, unless explained clearly, could lead to profound misunderstanding. The invitation in this thesis is not to accept myth completely or reject it, it is an invitation to encounter it; in other words, to face the problems associated with a specific myth in order to Benefit from its advantages and avoid its perceived disadvantages.

In addition, potential misunderstanding could result from considering the achievements of theatre movements to be similar in developed and developing countries. This is far from being the truth. There is a big gap between theatre in Western countries and theatre in developing countries like Oman. Because of this gap, it is appropriate to keep in mind that, sometimes, what is suitable for western theatre may not necessarily be acceptable in developing countries. Such issues will be highlighted during the thesis.

To describe the theatre movement in Oman, I sometimes use the term, “modern theatre movement”, by which I mean the theatre movement along Western lines, which was imported, in the last thirty years. On the other hand, the term “theatre phenomenon” will

be used to indicate theatrical elements which are rooted in Omani culture, but which do not represent a complete form of theatre.

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between the classical form and meaning of myth in ancient eras, which was usually linked with religion, Gods and demigods, and the wider and more liberated concept of myth in the present day, which can be an element of the narrative, plot or characterisation. Although both concepts of myth will be considered, the thesis is concerned with the essential features and meaning of myth more than the classical form of myth. That is to say, myth will be dealt with, on the one hand, as no more than a single feature in a play or performance, and, on the other, as a unit in the web of mythology in general, which in turn is an integral part of mankind's thought in the past, present and future. This thesis will focus on mythological elements whether these elements exist in the classical form of myth, or in the forms of legend, fable, fairy tales or folklore of Oman.

Chapter 1:

The Modern Theatre Movement in the Sultanate of Oman

The concentration in this chapter will be on Oman, starting with early efforts, then displaying the activities of school theatre, club theatre, youth theatre, private theatres and university theatre. Particular attention will be paid to some productions of clubs and youth theatre, as patterns, which are considered the basis of drama in Oman. This will be followed by consideration of the originality of Omani drama and its prospects for the future, posing the question, how Omani theatre could participate in developing the society. Public attitude towards theatre in Oman and experts views of myth and its relation to theatre will be explored via evidence from two questionnaires.

Modern Theatre in the Arab World

Study of the modern theatre movement in Oman needs to be contextualised with a brief description of Arab modern theatre in general. Researchers continue to wonder whether, during their long cultural history, Arabs experienced theatre. This question has been examined, through symposia and Arab Cultural conferences, since the early years of the last century. There are a number of different opinions, each with its own arguments and evidence. Some researchers deny any Arab experience of theatre before the French military invasion of Egypt in 1798. They claim that Arab Theatre was introduced by the Lebanese Maroon Al- Naqqash (1817 -1855) when he staged the first theatre show based on European theatre in 1847. It was an adaptation of *The Miser*, by Molière, and was staged in a church in Beirut (Al-Rai 1999, 69, 70). Subsequently, Arab theatre shows were known, and Arab theatre groups formed specifically in Beirut, Damascus, Cairo and Tunisia, followed by other Arab capitals and big cities. All these efforts were modelled on the European theatre, whether the plays were translated directly from the western originals or were written in the country and handled local issues. They were

strongly committed to European theatre forms. Those of this opinion, think that any artistic phenomenon, even if it had a dramatic form, cannot be considered as theatre, unless it conforms to the Aristotelian concept of theatre and its heirs in Europe.

Another school of thought is that cultural history is rich in artistic literature, with features that are not very different from the concept of theatre, but may not conform to the view that theatre is characterised by human actions in performance, and the desire to imitate (Idris 1974, 467- 477). This concept of theatre is certainly broader than the Aristotelian model, and extends the scope of theatre. In this regard, writers have mentioned a number of phenomena, occasions, and Arab festivals that exhibit aspects of theatre. These will be referred to in subsequent chapters of this study, in which the focus will be on examples of Omani social life, art, and literature that have dramatic elements. Theatre is something seen, and involves interaction between a performer and an audience. From this perspective, it can be said that the Arab and Omani heritage is rich in such media.

Mythical Theatre in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries

The modern theatre did not enter the more advanced states in the GCC until after the 1920s. Kuwait and Bahrain were the pioneer countries in this domain, temporally, quantitatively and qualitatively (Al-Attar 2001, 72, 156). However, the theatre in these states has shown little interest in referring to indigenous myth. I have been involved personally in the theatrical movement in the GCC countries from the beginning of the 1980s to the present day, attending, during this period, numerous plays, festivals and theatrical meetings. I can confidently assert that although public life is full of stories, rumours, beliefs, phenomena and habits that are related in one way or another to the mythical aspect, there is for the most part, a kind of alienation between the Arab theatre in the GCC countries and their popular myths. In general, the theatre movement ignores

myths. Whether this alienation of myths is realized by the theatrical profession or not, it undoubtedly has a clear rationale. The theatrical movement in Kuwait, for example, in its foundation stage from 1940 to the mid 1970s, did not present a single play whose theme depended on local, Arabic or even universal myth. Of course, there are some mythical features here and there, as in the play, *1 - 2 - 3 - 4 Bom*, which translated the seven sleepers' myth in a modern guise. The play was about a family that died before the discovery of oil, came back to life after a quarter of a century, and were surprised by the marvellous change in life because of oil. This change was not confined to externals such as the city, which became crowded with high concrete buildings, cars and other tools and technology, but extended to include humankind's internal nature and external behaviour (Al-Rai 1999, 370-372).

Consequently, the mythical idea in this play was subordinated to direct social criticism. In fact, most plays, in that period, concentrated on the social themes and individual reformation on two overlapping levels, which sometimes seem contradictory. On the first level, people were encouraged to develop their lives towards urbanization and the openness of society to the external world, in order to achieve progress and a luxurious life-style. At the same time, there is an insistent call to preserve the old habits, traditions and genuine manners that face the danger of extinction in contemporary civil society. It could be said that plays dealing with conflict between the traditional and the contemporary dominated theatrical performances not only in Kuwait but also in all GCC countries.

It may be wondered why the theatre in GCC countries has avoided mythical ideas. Some researchers see the causes in the fact that the Gulf societies are so conservative that they cannot accept the entrance of mythical ideas, which might contradict religious views. Others, including myself, are of the opinion that the prioritisation of social

development and human development has led to mythical ideas being classed, sometimes, as backward looking and an enemy of development.

The problematic concern, which might be raised against the use of myths in the contemporary theatre in developing countries like the GCC, relates to the question of how far myths fit the different circumstances of those countries. For example, in many states people's lives and attitudes are dominated by superstition, which cripples their minds and affects their lives in a serious way. When the local progressive authorities are sparing no effort to improve people's physical conditions, and fight against illiteracy and ignorance, which are associated with old myths or tales, how can we expect such countries to establish myths firmly in their theatrical movement?

Beginning of Theatre Activities in Oman

While theatre was introduced in Bahrain and Kuwait in the 1920s, theatre in Oman did not begin until the 1950s, and was still rare until the early 1970s, when a theatre movement was really established. Although it is considered to be still in the developing phase, there have been some significant achievements in terms of the formation of different types and schools of theatre, the linking of theory and practical work. It is difficult to specify when and where the first theatre activity began, especially as there are no clear documents before the 1950s to refer to. The earliest evidence of the practice of theatre can be found in three primary schools, all with the same name, Al-Saidia, before the Omani renaissance in 1970. The first and biggest one was in Muscat, the capital, established in 1940. The second was in the centre of the southern region, in Salalah, and was established in 1951. The third was in Mutrah city, established in 1959. A book entitled, *Aspects of the History of Education in Oman*, published by The Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs in 1985, mentions that there was an internal courtyard in Al-Saidia school in Muscat, where the administration of the school used to

hold a celebration annually, at the end of the school year. Many state officers and students' fathers attended this celebration to see a variety of dramatic performances, school choirs and many other activities intended to display the achievement of the students (Ministry of Education 1985). This book is the only written source available about educational and theatrical activities in this period. More information, however, can be gleaned from the people who lived in this period and participated in those activities as supervisors or students. Ahmad Salim, one of the oldest teachers in Al-Saidia school in Muscat (1949-1969) has talked about these drama activities: "In those celebration occasions, we used to present some short dramatic sketches based on the curriculum, in addition to some comic sketches such as those criticizing misers and their obsession with saving money. The teachers of the school took turns, year after year, in supervising those activities" (Al-Lawati 1988, 8). Tawfiq Aziz, who started as a teacher in the Al-Saidia school in Muscat in 1956, then became headmaster of the school until 1972, said, "As soon as I started my work at school I became the supervisor of the theatre group" (Al-Lawati 1988, 8). He added that every year they used to present some dramatic extracts of around 10 to 15 minutes maximum. Some of that drama was in pure Arabic and some in English. Of course, as he stated, the school suffered from a shortage of facilities and equipment, but they coped with that by various creative solutions. He illustrates: "For example, to prepare a temporary stage, we used to join all the students' desks between two classrooms, and then we covered the tops of the desks with carpet to use it as stage and used the classrooms on both sides as a backstage area, while the audience sat in the open courtyard. In addition to comic sketches, the dramatic performances contained some religious, social and historical subjects". The Al-Saidia school celebration was one of most important events in the whole sultanate of Oman at that time and was attended by members of the royal family, many governors, and the British Council (Al-Lawati 1988, 8). Riza Abdul Latife, who was a student in Al-Saidia



school in Mutrah in 1960, and who became, later, one of the pioneers of theatrical activities in the Al-Ahli club, has talked about his remarkable experience when he and the theatre group in Al-Saidia school in Mutrah, presented for the first time a play that lasted one and a half hours. The play was entitled *The Saker of Quraish*, by the well-known Egyptian playwright Mahmood Taymur and this was the first performance of the full text in Oman. The play was presented in Kuwait in 1961.

Thus, the drama activities in all Al-Saidia primary schools before 1970 were, in general, no more than short sketches, more concerned with academic subjects than any aspect of theatre. Nevertheless, those activities provided an important impetus to the theatre movement in Oman in two ways: Firstly, although these schools' brief sketches cannot be counted as complete dramatic experiences, they represented the starting point for modern drama in Oman, and the first step on the road. Secondly, students who had their first experience of theatre activities in those schools before 1970 became the main supporters of theatre groups in the clubs, which flourished in the period 1971-76.

Theatre Activities in Schools after the Renaissance

After 1970, schools, institutes and colleges opened everywhere in Oman. Instead of only three primary schools, thousands of primary, intermediate and secondary schools were opened to contain tens of thousands of students, both boys and girls. The education movement was in a race against time. Therefore, the focus was on quantity more than quality. The priority was given to the fight against illiteracy rather than any other aim. For this reason, all supplementary pedagogical activities such as art, music and theatre were to some extent ignored. Schools in this period were very simple buildings; some of them were even tents that did not have any facilities. Now, the situation has changed. A new educated generation has grown up and new schools with modern facilities have been built. Unfortunately, however, activities, in particular

theatre, remain as they were in the past, playing a very limited role in the educational curriculum. This is because the curriculum is structured in a way that leaves such activities to chance. They depend, first, on the availability at the school of an active instructor, who although not necessarily a specialist in theatre is able, at least, to supervise the theatre activities. Secondly, there might be, by chance again, a school teacher who is interested in theatre activities, who would lead the theatre group as a volunteer. As such instructors and teachers are rarely available in schools, theatre activities remain limited.

Perhaps, therefore, scholastic theatre has done less than we might have expected from it, but it is fair to mention many of its achievements. School theatre presented various performances, on different occasions, based on some famous international and Arabic plays, like several adaptations of Molière's play, *A Doctor in Spite of Himself*, Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*, and several of Tawfiq El-Hakim's one act plays. However, the afore-mentioned performances remain modest compared to those presented in the name of the complete educational region on the occasion of Pedagogical Day every year¹. On this occasion, each region gathers all its expertise in order to present one major performance, usually about some national issue, such as the dramatic operetta, *The Land of Faithfulness* (1980), though there have been a few exceptions from time to time, such as a the social comedy, *The House of Abu Marhoon* (1987).

Theatre practitioners in Oman look to school theatre as the first source to provide the theatre with talented performers and an aware audience, but this will not happen until the theatre activities in schools become an integral part of the curriculum, rather than a seasonal activity.

¹ In Oman, there are nine educational regions.

Theatre in Clubs

The Omani students who finished their basic study in Al-Saidia schools had a simple idea about the theatre and drama in general. Some of those students pursued higher studies in some Arab capitals like Cairo and Beirut, which had active theatre movements, and links with the European theatre movement. Thus, Omani students, in those capitals, found themselves in direct contact with real theatre. Some of them took this opportunity to develop their talent and knowledge of theatre. When they returned home in the early 1970s, or even in their summer holidays, they brought good theatre experience, which led to the formation of theatre groups in the clubs which were originally set up for sports activities, and rivalry grew up between the two activities. Interest in the club groups continued for many years, and various theatre shows were put on, of various levels and topics. Some were local social comedy, others were folklore drama with songs, while some expressed nationalistic philosophy and thinking and enthusiastic attitudes.

Common features distinguished the club theatre experience throughout its development. These features were important for the later Oman theatre movement. The most important were: first, the clubs' plays depended mainly on actors themselves. One reason for this was probably the lack of resources to meet the requirements of different shows, like décor, costumes, lighting and sound effects. On the other hand, the attention paid to the actors in clubs resulted in rapid development in their performance, as well as a real response from the audience, who came to see them in this new introduced art called theatre. The audiences, male and female, attended the annual theatre shows organized by the clubs, and the records of Al-Ahli Club estimated the audiences of its plays to number 2500 for each evening. Although this figure may be somewhat exaggerated, it gives an indication of the early interest in theatre where the performances were taking place in an open area in the heart of a local district so

everybody living there automatically becomes part of the audience. Secondly, the club theatre gave the first chance to Omani women to participate in this art, side by side with men. This was without doubt an important development in the Oman theatre movement. The booklet of Al-Ahli Club theatre mentions that the first time Omani women acted on stage was in 1973, in a play entitled, *The People Persecuted Me*. Thirdly, the experiences of theatre in the clubs strengthened, to some extent, the values of theatrical experiment, and the skills of theatre writing and production. Previously, the group had carried out these functions in a rudimentary way, despite the lack of specialist theatre techniques like lighting, sound effect, décor, costumes and makeup. Fourthly, the club theatre experience produced a number of actors, directors, and playwrights who may be considered the pioneers of the theatre movement in Oman. Some of them became well-known for a special style of theatre and achieved a great popularity in society. The most notable theatrical experience in club theatre was the Al-Ahli Club in 1971- 1976, where spectators could recognize various theatrical trends; social realism, expressionism, black comedy and musical shows. In addition, the Al-Ahli Club, by publishing its theatre activities in many booklets, became the first documented source about the theatre in Oman. Moreover, the Al-Ahli theatre group was responsible for the first efforts at Omanization - meaning presenting the play in local patois and with a local atmosphere- in some Arab plays such as *The Council of Justice*, by the Egyptian playwright Tawfiq El-Hakim, and his colleague Saad al-Din Wahba's play, *The Fire and Olives*. The theatre group of the Al-Ahli Club used to present several plays each year. In 1972, the group produced seven shows, including sketches, one-act plays and one long play. Its experience remained seasonal and amateur, but it was very active and varied. Those features can be illustrated by briefly describing the plays presented by the Al-Ahli Club in the years 1973 and 1974:

Year 1973:

The Suicide of Fact, a romantic play written and directed by Ameen Abdul Latif.

Alaseeda, an adapted play by Husayn Abdul Latif, from the play entitled, *Saad Alhanak*, by the well-known Egyptian playwright, Saad al-Din Wahba.

The People Persecuted Me, a social play, written and directed by Mahmood Shahdad.

Madmen in Happiness, a social comedy, written and directed by Mohamed Ilyas Faker.

The Tiredness, a symbolic play written and directed by Riza Abdul Latif.

Year 1974:

The Duty and the Rope, a social drama written and directed by Husayn Abdul Latif.

The Café of Joy, a social drama written and directed by Muhammad Ilyas Faker.

Oh Sea, where is your Epoch, a reality drama written and directed by Musa Jaffer.

The Song of Love and Earth, a musical show written and directed by Musa Jaffer. In this play, for the first time, fifty actors and actresses participated in one play.

However, by the end of the 1970s, the glow of club theatre groups gradually subsided for several complicated reasons. Leading figures from the pioneers of club theatre groups finished their higher education studies and attained important government positions in different fields, which occupied most of their time and attention. Consequently, they left the theatre, which was for them only a hobby. The women in the groups, when they got married, left behind the theatre, which was not a socially acceptable activity for married women, in favour of a quiet family life and desirable social rituals. Moreover, the clubs, in society's perception, are primarily places for sports activities, and all educational activities such as theatre are of minor concern. The line management in clubs operates according to this vision, and the football team is allocated the whole budget. Furthermore, clubs, usually, do not have proper facilities for theatre groups, like a place for rehearsal and a stage or hall to present performances on, not to mention scenery, lighting system, and sound effects. Clubs found it very hard to

cope with all these difficulties in order to carry out theatre activities. In addition, most clubs suffered from a lack of expert instructors in theatre who could lead their theatre groups according to a complete plan and by proper methods. To find such instructors in Oman was difficult, unless help was sought from other Arab countries. Although there were some talented playwrights who sometimes provided club theatre groups with original or adapted plays, the clubs lacked full-time playwrights who would dedicate themselves to providing the theatre group with suitable texts every season. Therefore, those groups on many occasions found themselves without a proper text to work with, which lowered their morale. Moreover, far from making a profit, the people who were working in club theatres sometimes had to pay from their own pocket to support club productions. Finally, most club headquarters, especially in the capital, moved from their locations in the heart of popular districts, where their audiences lived, to new locations, which were more difficult for a great number of supporters to reach.

The Youth Theatre

In 1980, the Youth Theatre Group was founded, and considered the first semi-specialized theatre group. The theatre activities in the clubs had slowed down in the late 1970s for the above-mentioned reasons. The actors from the remaining club groups, frustrated at the slow-down, began to search for another outlet to participate in theatre activity. This situation was in line with the interest of the Ministry of Information, which was the official body responsible for youth activities at that time. Therefore, the Youth Theatre Group was established and an expatriate producer, Mustafa Hashish from Egypt, was recruited to supervise it. Omani lovers of theatre and actors gathered round him and contributed their efforts to establish the first official theatre group under the direct administration of a government body, responsible for its budget and supervision. Although the members of the group are amateurs and not full time actors, from the

beginning of the group's establishment to the present day, the Youth Theatre Group has led the Oman theatre movement.

Enthusiasm was the main feature of all who contributed to the establishment of this group. With this enthusiasm and the availability of an Arab producer, the group overcame all the initial difficulties. Its first work was a difficult classical Shakespearean play, *The Merchant of Venice*, one of very few texts available to them that dealt with topics acceptable in Omani society. The group was compelled to rise to the challenge; they understood that this was the only way to prove the worth of their theatre group, so they worked hard to stage this international play for an audience used to seeing simple local theatre sketches. Although the play was translated into Arabic, it kept its western form, costumes, traditions and acting style. For this reason, the producer organized a series of acting workshops, extending over a period of six months, in which he trained the group members, and provided them with academic knowledge of the principles of theatre technicalities in general and performance techniques in particular. The training led to the success of this first theatre performance, which made the group members increasingly enthusiastic to participate in the second experiment in the following year, *The Captains' Sons*, adapted from a play by a well-known Egyptian playwright, No'man Ashour². This play dealt with a number of social issues, in particular, the need to preserve human heritage in the face of modernization. Although this problem was relevant to Omani society, the group were still looking for something that emerged from their environment and reflected the local spirit. To find a suitable text, was still one of the biggest problems that the group faced. That is why the ministry turned to the professional Egyptian playwright, Mansur Makkawi, who tried his best to study the society and culture of Oman and write plays with specific features to suit the Youth

² The present writer who was one of the "Youth Theatre" founders, played one of the main characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, and executed the adaptation of *The Captains' Sons*.

Theatre Group³. Makkawi wrote *Altaui*, which means, *The Well*, which discussed peoples' emigration from the countryside, abandoning their land and agriculture, to modern cities in order to work at a variety of desk jobs. He wrote also, *The Homeland*, which summarized the struggles of the people of Oman under the Portuguese occupation. In addition, he wrote a play entitled *Émigré Bird*, about the contemporary singer, Salim Rashid Al-Suri. The play was in a documentary style, recording the singer's biography, more than having a dramatic plot. Play followed play, until in the mid 1980s the Youth Theatre Group was established as the base of Oman's theatrical art.



***Under the Ash* (2002) One of the latest productions of Youth Theatre**

The Youth Theatre contributed significant features to the development of the Omani theatre movement. First, it adopted the pre-training method, holding workshops for several months before every play. Gradually the skilled members of The Youth Theatre

³ The director of the "Youth Theatre" group in this period was Muhammad Al-Shanfari, one of the educated Omani pioneers in the theatre movement as a director, producer and playwright.

began to prove themselves in acting, producing, writing and planning the group's activities. They became pioneers not only in theatre, but also in television drama, whose evolution paralleled that of the theatre. By 1986, most staff and members in the Youth Theatre were from Oman. Secondly, in the mid 1980s, the group expanded, and was not satisfied with staging its works only in the capital, Muscat, but took shows to different regions of the country such as Salalah in Dhofar, Sur in Al-Sharqiyah, Sohar in Al-Batinah and Nizwa in Al-Dakhiliya. These tours gave an incentive to youth in these places to form their own theatre groups like the mother Youth Theatre group. Today, there are seven theatre groups scattered around the Oman regions, which annually stage between ten to fifteen performances and have their own annual festival. The first theatre festival in Oman was the Youth Theatre Festival in 1990. Those groups are working under the supervision of the General Organization for Youth, Sports and Cultural Activities. Thirdly, in 1987, the Youth Theatre Group made an important step by participating in the GCC youth theatre festival in the United Arab Emirates, with a play entitled, *The Ship is Still Wrecked*⁴. This was the first official performance of Omani theatre outside the country; it was followed by participation in various festivals and cultural weeks, in GCC and Arab countries⁵. Fourthly, the Youth Theatre was a laboratory for new theatrical experiences in different theories and schools and opened the door to the adaptation and Omanization from various Arabic and international texts. Fifthly, the Youth Theatre was the first organization in Oman to host Arab and international theatrical experts to present lectures or lead workshops on many theatrical topics. In general, the Youth Theatre firmly established the tradition of modern theatre in Oman by establishing the framework for production and specifying the role of each member in each play. There were no collective or overlapped responsibilities any more.

⁴ This play was written and directed by the researcher.

⁵ Abdulgafoor Ahmad was the producer who first led participation in the Cairo Experimental Theatre Festival, in 1995.

On the other hand, for many reasons, Youth Theatre Groups are still facing some difficulties in executing their work. In spite of its amateur framework, the Youth Theatre is so far the only official theatre group in Oman. Because of that, it has extended its active role to cover the majority of theatre functions and unite most theatre artists in Oman, even those who are semi-professional. These overlapping responsibilities raised many questions about the exact role of the Youth Theatre, and complicated the situation. The budget allocated for the Youth Theatre Groups hardly covered their amateur activities, when each group staged, free of charge, one or two simple productions annually. Therefore, when their activities expanded beyond that, they faced financial difficulties. Moreover, except for the Youth Theatre Group in Muscat, most Youth Theatre Groups still suffer from a shortage of facilities, such as proper places for rehearsals, suitable stages to present their performances and sophisticated sound and light systems. Although there is, at least, one academic expert with every Youth Theatre Group, most groups still suffer from a shortage of technical expertise in many theatrical tasks, such as make up, design, lighting, costume and decoration.

Other Efforts towards a National Theatre

Much television in Oman has benefited from the theatre by receiving skilled actors and writers, while the theatre benefits from television with publicity, not only in the sense of advertisements for specific performances, but also to disseminate the culture of theatre among the whole society. One of the great benefits that television provides to theatre is recording and broadcasting performances. Moreover, the television administration has always been willing to cooperate with theatre groups in order to support them, for example by providing materials or technicians.

Moreover, as the concept of theatre and the experience of the members of youth theatre groups matured, they began to establish their own private theatre groups in the second half of the 1980s, under the supervision of the Ministry of the National Heritage and Culture, as a continuation of the Omani theatre movement. For the first five years, those private theatrical groups did not present anything worth mentioning. However, in the late 1990s, some of them started to produce remarkable performances and participated in GCC professional festivals, winning important prizes⁶, as well establishing their local festival. Furthermore, the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture hosted a theatre festival for private professional groups in the GCC countries for the first time in Oman in 2001. In 2002, there were more than 10 private theatre groups. Moreover, a drama study section was opened at Sultan Qaboos University in 1990, with branches for Theatre Performance, Production, Criticism, and Décor. This section started to provide the theatre movement with graduates bearing academic qualifications. It also staged a number of highly technical theatre shows, which were directed by the professors of the section, who were mainly professional Egyptian directors.



From the University Theatre (1997)

Despite all these efforts to establish a strong foundation for the theatre movement in Oman, we cannot confirm that a real Omani theatre movement exists, in terms of either

⁶ The present writer wrote and directed two of those plays for the “Magan” private theatre group: first, *The Veils* (1997), second, *The Man who Returns from the Coming Time* 2001. The first was awarded the jury’s prize and the second was awarded the best directing and acting prizes. In September 2003, private theatre group from the Southern region of Oman (Salalah) awarded the first prize for the play “Humran Al-Ouoon” as a best production in the GCC theatre festival in Abu Dhabi.

theatre or audience base. There are a number of inter-related reasons. First, Omani theatre is still mainly amateur. Secondly, theatre shows are seasonal and related to specific occasions, so they may be seen as festival activity rather than real theatre work. Thirdly, audiences themselves, especially those who travel a lot and see remarkable theatrical performances around the world, are not satisfied, anymore, with simple theatrical productions. There may be some other more complicated reasons, but the main reason for Oman theatre's lack of a broad audience base is that the theatre in its western form is a modern art introduced in Oman, without roots in the local culture. Therefore, efforts must continue to develop an original indigenous theatre, reflecting the national artistic and cultural heritage. Nevertheless, this aim cannot be achieved unless all efforts; school theatre, club theatre, youth theatre groups, private theatre groups and university theatre, combine in the establishment of a National Theatre. Such an institution does not exist yet, but it is anticipated in the future. What is therefore important is to develop the current theatre movement in Oman is to set up a proper body, provided with suitable facilities and budget, under the administration of theatre experts who will be responsible for setting up a long and short term strategy and a plan to create National Theatre.

Evidence of Public and Experts Opinion via Questionnaires

The theatre movement everywhere depends on two integral parts, performers and spectators. Therefore, it is necessary to discover audiences' opinion of their theatre movement. Studies and researches in this field in Oman are very rare; the only relevant resource found is a questionnaire survey that was done in (1999)⁷. In this questionnaire, an attempt was made to explore audiences' opinions about the theatre movement in Oman. The questionnaire, in general, touches on trends in audience reaction, without

⁷ The present writer conducted this survey in conjunction with the Youth Theatre (1999).

going deep into the details. The sample, drawn from Muscat, the capital, was a hundred persons of both sexes, including those involved in some sort of theatrical work, and theatre audiences.

According to the results of this questionnaire, although only a quarter of the sample liked what they had seen in Omani theatre, the majority of them preferred to attend theatrical performance rather than a folklore show or musical programme. This highlights the responsibility and the challenge to the dramatists and practitioners in the theatre to establish and develop a strong theatre movement, to serve the contemporary public interest. As expected, "comedy performances" appeared to command the most public interest, while only a quarter of the selected group were looking for a good performance irrespective of the nature of the play and even fewer were interested in deep, serious drama. The same might be true in many other Arab countries, even those that consider the theatre as part of their traditional heritage. I have observed a similar situation in Kuwait and Cairo and discussed it in many forums about the theatre in Arab world. However, this matter may need more research. The majority of respondents indicated that the topic and issue that the play deliberates were what attracted them to drama. Looking at these trends, it seems that the public in Oman view the theatre from an intellectual angle more than artistic perspective; they are more concerned with interesting ideas than the artistic skill. The question arises here, whether the majority of the public in Oman are confused about the real nature of the theatre, as performance, rather than a literary form. Despite the development achieved by recent plays from the beginning of the 1970s until today, still the nature and traditions of society have a role in shaping specific ideas, and this may explain the above trend of thinking, which gave preference to intellectual concerns rather than any artistic element. It is hard to find rational answers to such a situation, because it would need specialized and careful study to find the origins of this viewpoint. However, for the time being, at least (if they

believe it needs to be changed) dramatists should be aware of this tendency and work hard to change people's attitude, in order to achieve a balance between artistic expression and intellectual content in plays. Furthermore, this aim cannot be achieved unless concerted efforts are made to develop the technical methods and theatrical elements in the plays, especially by developing original features that are meaningful to local public audience, such as heritage, myths, rituals and interacting relationships.

The result of the questionnaire showed that a quarter of respondents disliked lengthy performances and most of them disliked exaggerated, melodramatic performance. The questionnaire revealed a preference for performances taking place in the public squares, which are usually situated on the outside of the city, away from the residential areas. Such a preference is expected, because those squares are always the centre of public gatherings in Omani villages, towns and cities, on the various occasions and festivals. There were also a small number of people interested in having theatre performed at ancient forts, although the public are not familiar with such displays. What emerged clearly is that the majority of public viewed theatre performance as a foreign activity, which should be conducted at some distance, and not enter the heart of the local neighbourhood. This is an indirect expression of a type of feeling towards this foreign art, which was introduced recently and this also emphasizes the importance of originality in the Omani theatre.

People in Oman, through the questionnaire, showed as much enthusiasm to attend a play at the theatre as to attend a poetry evening, and much more than visiting a fine art exhibition, which may be considered an encouraging result. The result confirms that each field of art has its own public. What is especially important is the theatre's place among those mentioned activities, which places a responsibility on people, who are working in the theatre, to keep that position and develop it by forging more links with the local society.

The questionnaire also revealed that people like to watch drama in the theatre as much as on television and slightly more than in the cinema, which indicates that theatre can hold its own against the cinema and television, despite having less sophisticated technology. The majority of respondents expressed the view that theatre is an art of the present, while a quarter considered it an art of past and little more than one tenth considered it as an art of future, which may reflect an inner feeling that theatre as an art-form is out dated. This should sound an alarm to draw dramatists' attention to the theatre's need for their support through their creative works, to combat such a feeling.

Most of the people in the selected group asserted that they like theatre because it is live performance and one-third said they like it because it includes many art forms. The results received from the questionnaire as a whole are encouraging, although there are indicators of some causes of concern for those responsible for the theatre.

The questionnaire was a first attempt in its field, and no doubt contained weaknesses. Therefore, it is important to support the information received from it with additional studies to reject or confirm it. Nevertheless, this questionnaire offered a reasonable insight into opinion of theatre audiences in Oman. Finally, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the theatre movement in Oman has achieved great development in the last five years.

Subsequently, another questionnaire designed specifically for the purpose of this thesis, was sent to experts on Omani theatre, in order to discover the opinions of those who worked in that field on a regular basis. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore the opinions of these Omani people towards myths and how important they are in current life, in general, and in the theatre in particular. The questionnaire with full details is attached to this thesis as appendix 1. Those consulted emphasized that myth occupied a great deal of Omani attention in the past and has a considerably similar role in particular contexts in the present day. They, in general, were prepared to accept some slight

modification in myths for theatrical purposes, but not a major one. Some communities in Oman still have great respect for certain myths and treat them as fact or holy materials and do not accept any sort of modification to them. Myths in Oman are still mainly oral sources, with few exceptions, and this makes apparent the need for collecting and categorizing Omani myths before submitting them to further studies. The people of Oman, especially those who are working in the theatre or have direct contact with it, are aware of most important features in myths, such as the intellectual, metaphysical, historical and aesthetic dimensions, and recognize some important shared elements between myths and theatre, such as events and protagonists. However, the importance of employing myths in the theatre is not clear enough in Omanis' minds. This, as well the religious dimension and rituals in myths, are areas, which need to be studied intensively.

This chapter as a whole has demonstrated that although the theatre movement in Oman is still young, having amateur status and not yet having taken a mature form, it needs to be seen from two perspectives in order to achieve significant development. First, it can be considered as a part of the regional theatrical movement in the Gulf and Arab World, as well as part of the international theatre movement, so it should pay attention to international modern theories and try to benefit from them. Second, side by side with international theories, Omani theatre should focus on its roots and heritage, in particular myth, in order to develop a distinctive identity. In the following chapter, I shall explain why myth offers a useful, even powerful vehicle for development of theatre.

References:

- ABDUL LATIFE, Riza. 1987. Interview with the researcher in Muscat.
- AL-AHLI CLUB. 1977. *The Theatre in Al-Ahli Club*. Muscat: Al-Ahli Club. (In Arabic)
- AL-ATTAR, Habib Ghulum. 2001. *The Influences of Economic and Social Changes on Gulf Theatre*. Abu-Dhabi: U.A.E: Cultural Foundation Publication. (In Arabic)
- AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1988. *The Experimentation of Theatre in Oman*. Sultanate of Oman: Ministry of Education (In Arabic).
- AL-RAI, Ali. 1999. *The Theatre in the Arab World*. The World of Knowledge Series Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, & Literature (In Arabic).
- AZIZ, Tawfiq. 1987. Interview with the researcher in Muscat.
- IDRIS, Yusuf. 1974. *Towards Arabic Theatre*. Cairo: Dar Al-Watan Al – Arabi. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & YOUTH AFFAIRS. 1985. *Aspects of the History of Education in Oman*. Muscat: Ministry of Education. (In Arabic)
- SALIM, Ahmed. 1987. Interview with the researcher in Muscat.

Chapter 2:

Myth and Theatre; Vertical & Horizontal Interpenetration

In this chapter, the focus will be on myths. Here, the question may be raised, why myth? The answer is very simple. It is because it was from myth that drama first emerged in the ancient Greek period; it was from the womb of myth that the theatre was born (Al-Hawi 1980, 7). But what is myth? Does it have one definition in all cultures? In particular, is there any difference between the definition of myth in Western culture and Islamic (Arabic and Omani) culture? If so, what is this difference? This leads to a further question: is there any inherent relationship between the theatre and myth? What is the root of this relationship? In this chapter, three main aspects will be discussed. First, an overall view will be given of different definitions of myth. Secondly, different conceptions of myth in Western, Islamic and Arabic culture will be explained. Thirdly, the overlapping relationship between myth and theatre will be addressed by demonstrating the most important theatrical characteristics found in myths.

Definitions of Myth

What is myth? It seems a very simple question, but actually, it requires quite a complicated answer. Not long ago myths, in different cultures, were considered as a body of falsehoods, and nonsense, with no meaning and nothing to say to human beings as will be discussed later in this chapter. However, nowadays due to serious studies, most people have changed their attitude towards myths. In the encyclopaedic *Mythology*, 'myth' is defined as follows:

Myths can be understood as magic mirrors in which the reflection not just of our own hopes and fears, but also those of people from the earliest times can be viewed. Some of the stories are unimaginably old and were almost certainly recounted long before the birth of writing and dawn of recorded history. Collectively, the tales form the basis of much of the world's

literature, philosophy and religion, and act as a powerful document of the human imagination, (Mythology 2002, 6)

Those studies clarified that all nations and all peoples passed, in their long history, through a period of powerful myth making, in which they formulated their distresses, hopes, traditions, and struggle to survive. It is through myths in particular, that human beings expressed their feelings, passion, strength, weakness, insurrection, submission, love, hate, life and death. In the period of ancient Greek, Plato asserted that there is often some truth in myths (Cunningham 1973, 8, 9, 13). The researcher, Jan Pepin, indicated that myth seemed to Plotinus as well as Plato a useful expression for the most difficult thought processes and for those facts, which are very far away from any description (Jalalalden 1994, 42-44). Therefore, since the distant past, myth has attracted creative thinkers to deal with it as a source of inspiration for their works. Literature depended on mythological thought, before myths confronted a counter movement of opposition, the fanatical Christian religious thought of the Middle Ages. The church revolted against ancient myth, which it saw as backward and pagan, and urged its substitution by biblical stories which were taken to be factually accurate and which were later acted in the form of plays in streets, yards and halls. This rejection of the significance of ancient myth was re-affirmed by the 18th century European Enlightenment movement, which in its turn, favoured logic and intellectual judgement rather than myth and imagination. This movement effectively influenced literature and art. The attitude toward myth remained negative until, in the late 18th century in Europe, some studies of myth and its fate were undertaken as a response to the pressures of modern life by the Romantic Movement. There followed calls to study and understand myth and gain inspiration from it by deeper awareness. Even more, other voices demanded that new forms and ideas for myth be found, arguing that there was no use in

returning to the old definition of myth that existed in the past, but rather that it should be seen from a different point of view and with a different attitude.

Mircea Eliade, in his book *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, (1957) talks about myth as a stage of development of thought and a form of collective thinking that never vanished.

One tried to integrate the myth into the general history of thought, by regarding it as the most important form of collective thinking. And, since “collective thinking” is never completely abolished in any society, whatever its degree of evolution, one did not fail to observe that the modern world still preserves some mythical behaviour (Eliade 1957, 24).

The Arabic scholar Saed Jalal al-Din in his book, *The Lexicon of Idioms and Philosophical Illustration* (1994, 42, 44), describes myth as an imaginary explanation for different world phenomena and the conflict between human beings and supernatural powers, and cites many different explanations of myth including the view of Levi-Strauss that someday, people might come to believe that myth is founded on the same logic as empirical science, as part of the development of human thought. They may discover that myth is not very imaginary but it has its own system of logic, which can be recognized by researchers. Jalal al-Din mentions seven mythologists and anthropologists who attempted to explain myths, none of them Arab!

The theologian, Don Cupitt, defines myth in detail as:

Typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance, which is recounted in a certain community and is often linked with a ritual; that it tells of the deeds of superhuman being such as gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts; that it is set outside historical time, in primal or eschatological time or in the supernatural world, or may deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history (Cupitt 1982, 29).

He went on to note how the superhuman beings are imagined in anthropomorphic ways, albeit with supernormal powers.

The stories are often not naturalistic but fragmentary and dream-like, and that within a given body of mythology it is common to find apparent inconsistencies (Cupitt 1982, 29).

In Cupitt's view, the task of myth is to explain, to reconcile to guide action or legitimate it. He sees myth making as:

Evidently a primal and universal function of the human mind as it seeks a more or less unified vision of the cosmic order, the social order, and the meaning of individual's life. Both for society at large and for the individual, this story-generating function seems irreplaceable, because the individual finds meaning in his life by making of it a story set within a larger social and cosmic framework (Cupitt 1982, 29).

This might seem to be a perfect definition of classical myth, since it covers several aspects such as author, description, time, nature, form and the relation with rituals. Nevertheless, Laurence Coupe, in *Myth* points out three important terms to bear in mind when approaching myth, as follows. The first is the Paradigm. In other words, myth draws its power from paradigms, such as exist in the framework of fertility, cosmology, deliverance and superhuman heroism. He writes: "Just as one particular story may serve as the paradigm for one kind of myth, so one kind of myth may serve as the paradigm for mythology itself". He then cites the opinion of Sir James Frazer, who believed that fertility myths are the key to all mythologies, and Mircea Eliade, who thinks the key lies in creation myths. Coupe, however, agrees with Don Cupitt, that myth is indeed paradigmatic, but that there is no pure paradigm. Secondly, He mentions the term Perfection, arguing that, in considering myth and fact, we trace the stages by which the idea of perfection is generated and sustained. Coupe adopted the view of the literary critic, Kenneth Burke, that "Both making myths and reading myths imply a drive towards completion, an insistence on seeing things through to us near their full development as is practicable". Thirdly He talks about Possibility, here he refers to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, and argues that we must go beyond the modern view of myth as "false explanation" to a sense of its "exploratory significance and its contribution to understanding". Ricoeur described the "symbolic function" of myth, as a power of discovery and revelation (Coupe 1997, 1-13). Coupe concludes that:

In other words, while myth may be paradigmatic, and while it may imply a social and cosmic order, or perfection, it also carries with it a promise of another mode of existence entirely, to be realized just beyond the present time and place (Coupe 1997, 8, 9).

All these conceptions enrich myths and give them distinctive dimensions that can develop theatrical insight, as will be discussed later.

In the last century, some literary criticism has recognised in literary works embodiments of mythical types and structures or symbols that may return from time to time, but are related to no specific period. In this criticism, the qualities of literary features are not considered, as much as the marks of narrative or symbolism that are correlated to ancient myths. One of the most important resources for this criticism is Sir James G. Frazer's (1854-1941) *The Golden Bough* (1890-1907) in which Frazer supposes the cycle of death and rebirth in liturgies of fertility to be the cornerstone of many mythical texts. James Frazer gives an integral view of fertility myths defining their rituals and symbols and illustrates their similarity in different cultures even when they take different names with different protagonists. Frazer emphasizes the duality of life and death, going to the underworld then returning to life and struggling against the dry and for the fertile, mixing the myths and rituals of fertility with what is human and natural. He tries to explain myths in terms of what happens to human beings in their life, comparing it to what happens in nature over time. However, we will try to throw light on Frazer's ideas about the similarity between myths in different cultures as primitive forms of knowledge in many places in this thesis, especially in analysing mythical aspect in contemporary plays.

Northrop Frye (1906-1991) is one of the most distinguished critics in this field, who promoted this supposition to a complete model in his book, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), where he claims a relationship between the main narrative types and the cycle of seasons and where he studies more clearly the theory of Archetypal Criticism and its

relation to drama. According to this theory, any literary work can be evaluated in the light of its approximation to or deviation from primitive mythical samples. This concept will be discussed in more depth in chapter six, where some modern plays will be analysed. Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962), Richard Chase (1904-1988) and Leslie Fiedler (1917-2003), whose works have been translated into Arabic, are also very well known exponents of mythical criticism.

What is worth mentioning here that such mythical criticism is rejected by some Arab writings, for example, the famous Arab web site Ajeep. The basis of the opposition is the tendency of mythical criticism towards stereotyping. Ultimately, such criticism stereotypes texts in a specific way that leads one to ignore cultural and historical differences between the productions and the myths on which they are based, and to ignore their individual features.

Different Classifications of Myth

Researchers, for academic purposes, have classified myths into groups to facilitate their own task of finding proper definitions and explanations. Here are present some examples of those groups found in the works of Hooke (1993, 11-17), and others.

Literary myths

In this category, myth is considered as an accumulation of human creative thinking in the literary field. Those homilies delivered by wise men in ancient society, will recur time after time, taking into account that new narrators cannot resist the legitimate desire to add some new elements from their own imagination to suit contemporary circumstances. These narrative elements, over time, formed into a coherent structure, which was capable of expressing the artistic, literary thinking of a specific people or a particular nation. It presents to society theories of behaviour, morals, and social life (Al-Sawah 1989, 13).

Ritual myths

The aforementioned Sir James Frazer is the pioneer of this tendency. He cites, in many places his book, *The Golden Bough* that myth was drawn from rituals, as when he talks about Diana's worship at Nemi:

It needs no elaborate demonstration to convince us that stories told to account for Diana's worship at Nemi are unhistorical. Clearly they belong to that large class of myths which are made up to explain the origin of a religious ritual and have no other foundation than the resemblance, real or imaginary, which may be traced between it and some foreign ritual. (Frazer 1996, 6)

According to his theory, when a specific ritual has been practised for a long time, the connection with an older generation, the generation who established the ritual, has been cut. Therefore, the ritual seems meaningless and unjustifiable. Thus, as Firas Al-Sawah (1989, 14, 15) points out, myth becomes necessary to provide an explanation or justification for an old respected ritual, which people do not want to throw away. On the other hand, Ahmad Kamal Zaki (1979, 46), in his book *Myths, Comparative Civilizational Study* maintains that this sort of myth correlates with performances of worship. These performances depend on actual actions through which people approach the secret powers that command our natural world. Myths were the part of language, associated with rituals. Rituals in many myths are integral parts and they are significant elements of physical action that can be transposed from myth to theatrical performance.

Myths of creation and justificatory myths

Kamal al-Din Husayn (1993, 29) defines myths of creation as those which explain the creation of the world or cosmos and justify different natural phenomena such as wind, sun, moon, stars, and rain. These kinds of myth depend essentially on deities of nature.

This role of myth is described thus:

For the people who originally told them, the myths served many purposes. Not only did they provide answers to great philosophical questions – how the universe came into being, the nature of the forces operating within it, the origins of the first people and of the human community – but they also addressed more intimate issues, offering guidance on personal behaviour,

social rules and what might happen in the afterlife. In combination, they provide the mental foundations of understanding and belief on which individuals could build their lives (Mythology 2002, 6).

Symbolic myths

All people have an innate ability to form, unconsciously, some common symbols, which are defined by C. G. Jung as meaningful:

I have spent more than half a century in investigating natural symbols, and I have come to the conclusion that dreams and their symbols are not stupid and meaningless. On the contrary, dreams provide the most interesting information for those who take the trouble to understand their symbols. (Jung, 1978, 93)

Husayn (1993, 29) is of the opinion that symbolic myth is close to justificatory myth because it expresses metaphorically religious or cosmic thought. For this reason, it contains a number of symbols, which need to be explained. Similarly, the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in his book *The Wisdom of the Ancients* saw meaning in the ancient Greek myths, which he considered them as metonymy of philosophical facts (Bacon 1629, 13-20).

Historical myths

Al-Sawah (1989, 14) describes historical myth as a type of myth, which is not completely imaginary, but contains some comments about actual life and daily events related to real people and places in the period before written history. Therefore, it presents a valuable historical view about those more ancient ages (Al-Sawah 1989, 14).

Myths as psychological view

Myth attracted the attention of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and other psychologists. In his books, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud focuses on the similarity, in the way they work, between myths and dreams. He notes that they have similar symbols and that both of them are generators of unconscious psychological processes. In myth, as in dreams, we see events taking place absolutely free from the

constraints of time and place. In both of them, the hero takes extraordinary actions and is subject to miraculous changes, which reflect desires and inhibited aspirations. In both of them, these desires and inhibited aspirations are released from their fetters, far away from the supervision of the conscious mind, which plays its role as guardian of the unconscious (Freud 1991, 66, 69). On this basis, myths are full of symbols, which, if we can find a proper explanation of them, will provide us with a deep understanding of all-human secrets and inhibited desires. According to this concept, Freud explains the famous Oedipus myth in terms of real events that happened in a primitive tribe, when some sons plotted to kill their father in order to obtain his wives. They did what they had planned but, later on, were beset by feelings of regret and guilt, so they rejected their father's wives. Incest, Freud claimed, was the first law enacted for people, yet this experience has never vanished from human consciousness (Freud 1938, 152). It remains behind the inherited human feeling of sin, which everybody carries in his unconscious. Furthermore, as Al-Sawah (1989, 16) suggests, this was the foundation behind a group of myths, which narrate the sacrifice of the son of a god as a human being, by way of penance for a sin against the father. This perspective will be approached in analysing mythical aspects in many plays in the later chapters.

Myths as an expression of the collective unconscious

The psychologist C. G. Jung was as interested in myth as Freud, but in his opinion, all the efforts that had been made to explain myths did not contribute to our understanding of them. On the contrary, they increased the distance from the essence of myths and increased our confusion. Although he agreed with Freud that the human unconscious breeds myths, he dissociated himself from Freud when he decided that the unconscious form, which they breed, although emanating through a single human conscious, is the product of a collective unconscious, not the individual unconscious of a single human being.

Our actual knowledge of the unconscious shows that it is a natural phenomenon and that, like Nature herself, it is at least *neutral*. It contains all aspects of human nature---light and dark, beautiful and ugly, good and evil, profound and silly. The study of individual, as well as of collective, symbolism is an enormous task, and one that has not yet been mastered. (Jung 1978, 94)

In addition, as we go deeper into the human conscious we will find a world of pure simplicity disentangled from any individual characters. From the symbolism of myths, we can hear the world speaking and the deeper the symbols become, the closer we come to internationalism and human comprehensiveness.

Those theories, about the individual and collective unconscious, deriving from psychology, have had a strong influence on the theatre and on theatrical criticism around the world. Such influence will be highlighted where relevant in subsequent discussion.

Myths as conscious world

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) another follower of Freud, made a profound study of the relationship between myth and dream. Fromm claimed, unlike Freud and Jung, that myths and dreams are bred from the conscious world. Al-Sawah (1989, 17, 18) cites Erich Fromm to explain how myth be considered as conscious world. He argues that the human mind remains working and thinking, even in sleep, although it works and thinks in a different way and language, being released from the rules of reality. Fromm considered sleeping as a specific invitation to undertake a particular speculation, where the person can use a special language, the language of symbols. During sleep, we are free from the material world and can dedicate ourselves to our own spiritual processes, through which we acquire more clarity, transparency, and wisdom. From this perspective, sleeping is a situation of wakefulness and the language of symbols is based on experiences, feelings and inward thoughts, which are characterized by an important realm, the realm of internationalism and comprehensiveness. This realm goes beyond

the limits of time, culture, and race. Finally, myth, like dreams, gains its importance from messages that it presents to us through the language of symbols, which contain numerous, religious, philosophical and moral concepts. Hence, our task here is to discover and understand the symbols of this language in order to achieve a treasure trove of valuable knowledge.

Myths with a purpose

The anthropologist, Malinowski (1884-1942) found it necessary to explain myths' purposes. He argued that myths are not responses to quests for knowledge, nor are they correlated with rituals, or related to hidden psychological impulses. He declared that myth is related to the actual world more than any invisible realm, and it aims to achieve a practical end "Myth as it exists in savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction" (Malinowski 1992, 100). In another place, he suggests that myth "contains practical rules for the guidance of man" (Malinowski 1992, 101). Myths were narrated to set up specific tribal traditions or to sustain the power of a particular clan, family or social system. Myths are practical in their foundation as well in their aims (Malinowski 1992, 95-101).

Overall, in the last century many attempts were made to identify, classify and explain myths. Such mythological, anthropological and psychological explanations of myth open to the dramatist wide scope to adapt myths for the theatre from various perspectives, giving performances additional intellectual dimension.

So far, we have examined predominantly Western conceptions of myth. However, since the aim of this research is to focus on myths in Oman, as a specific country and culture, and since Oman's culture is Islamic and Arab, it is necessary to consider the meaning and conception of myth in the Islamic and Arabic world.

Myth from an Islamic Viewpoint

In the Arab World Islam has generally taken a cautious attitude towards myths. First of all, I shall use the word *Ustora* (my transliteration) as it is pronounced in Arabic, as synonymous with the word myth in English, as most dictionaries indicate. Secondly, it is very important to return to the Holy Quran, as the main authoritative source in Islamic culture as well as the origin of almost all legislation. However, in some places, reference will be made to some periods before Islam. In the Holy Quran, the word myth and its derived forms are mentioned about fourteen times. Nevertheless, the meaning of the word differs according to its form. The Arabian historiographer, Wajih Kutharani, in an article written in the *Al-Hayat* newspaper, distinguished two main meanings of the word myth, mentioned in the Holy Quran. He suggest that the word myth occurs in the Holy Quran in many verb forms, and in general, all these forms carry the same meaning as the English verbs 'write' or 'record'. The simple form of the verb as it is pronounced in Arabic is *Satara*. Here are some examples, with the target word underlined. In Surat ⁸ number 54 Al-Qamar, in verse Number 53, Almighty God warns people that all their actions are recorded: "Every Matter, small and great is on *record*" (Holy Quran).⁹ Another example is in Surat number 68 Al-Qalam, verse number 1. In order to remind people that everything is under his control, The Great God swears by the pen, which was the first thing he created and with which he writes all people's fates. "Nun, by the Pen and the *record* which men *write*" (Holy Quran). In the third example, surat number 17 Al-Isr'aa, verse 58, the Great God warns people that they will be punished because of their sins and faults, which are all written in a record. "There is not a population but we shall destroy it before the Day of Judgment or punish it with a dreadful Penalty: that is *written* in the 'eternal' *record*" (Holy Quran).

⁸ Surat means chapter or part of the Holy Quran

⁹ The Holy Quran. Translation of the Holy Quran: based on interpretation of Bin Kather and Aljalalyn, which issued a CD by Sakher Company for Computer Programs.

The word myth comes in the Holy Quran several times in the plural form of the noun *Asateer*, as it is pronounced in Arabic. Always, the word refers to ancient tales, which are counter to the truth told by God and his prophet Muhammad. For example, in surat number 8 Al-Anfal, verse number 31, Great God presents news of the infidel people from the *Quraish*, the tribe of prophet Mohamed, who ignore all God's Signs, and describe them as ancient tales. "When our signs are rehearsed to them, they say: We have heard this before. If we wished, we could say 'words' like these: they are nothing but *tales of the ancients*" (Holy Quran). Another example is in surat number 46 Al-Ahqaf, verse number 17, where the God warns undutiful sons who do not obey their parents and do not take their advice to believe in God and the day of resurrection. Instead of that, they mock and describe all these things as ancient tales. "But there is one who says to his parents, Fie on you! Do you hold out promise to me that I shall be raised up, even though generations have passed before me, without rising again? And they two seek Allah's aid, and rebuke the son: Woe to thee! Have faith! For the promise of Allah is true. But, he says, this is nothing but *tales of the ancients*" (Holy Quran).

Although such use of the word 'myth' in the Holy Quran leads to a generally negative attitude towards myths, it is necessary to bring to mind some other important facts. First, the Holy Quran considers myth as ancient tales - lies - in a specific particular situation, when compared with the truth told by God and his prophet Muhammad.

Secondly, one of the most holy, powerful principles in Islamic culture is belief in Monotheism. That means there is only one God. Everything in our life and in our fate after death is according to the will of the Great and Almighty God. No authorities or powers can be compared to Great God for any reason. God in the Holy Quran in Surat Al-Ana'am number 6-verse number 102 says, "That is Allah, lord, there is no God but he, then worship ye Him, and he hath power to dispose of all affairs" (Holy Quran). Moreover, in surat Al-Ana'am, verse number 106: "Follow what thou art taught by

inspiration from the Lord. There is no god but He; and turn aside from those who join gods with Allah” (Holy Quran). Furthermore, Allah, in the Holy Quran warned Muslims against polytheism, and threatened them with his anger. In surat An-Nis’aa number 4, verse numbers 48 and 116: “Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set with him; but He forgiveth anything else to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed” (Holy Quran). And “Allah forgiveth not 'the sin of joining other gods, with him; but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins than this; one who joins other gods with Allah, hath strayed far, far away from right” (Holy Quran). In another part, in surat Ash-Shura number 26, verse number 213: "So call not on any other god with Allah, or then wilt then be among those under the Penalty” (Holy Quran).

Muslims take a very strict attitude against any beliefs in polytheism, the religion of those who believe in more than one God. Such beliefs were widespread over all parts of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam, and were reflected in myths (Abdul hakim 1995, 54). Consequently, the distance between Islamic culture and myths was increased. Thirdly, before Islam, Arab tribes used to set up idols, which they used in their rituals. They believed those idols symbolized gods or at least could play an effective role as a medium between themselves and a god. In the Islamic religion, again, there is a very strict principle, which stipulates that there is only one God, who exists everywhere and is able to do everything, and all people must be oriented to him directly so there is no need to use any idols, mediums, or oracles. In the Holy Quran, in surat Al-Ankabut number 29, verse number 17 reads, “For ye do worship idols besides Allah, and ye invent falsehood. The things that ye worship besides Allah have no power to give you sustenance: then seek ye sustenance from Allah, serve Him, and be grateful to Him to him will be your return” (Holy Quran). This principle of Islam is at variance with myths where idols and oracles play main parts in the events. This dissimilarity widened the

gap between Islamic culture and myths. Fourthly, the Holy Quran did not deny the importance of ancient tales. The Quran confirmed the Benefit of ancient tales in some situations, although the word 'stories' was used in place of 'myth'. Furthermore, the Holy Quran employed stories as a reliable, effective means to transmit God's messages to human beings, as is clear in the following examples from the Holy Quran: In surat number 20 Taha, verse number 99: "Thus do we relate to thee some stories of what happened before: for we have sent thee a message from our own Presence" (Holy Quran). In surat number 12 Yusuf, verse number 3: "We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories, in that we reveal to thee this portion of the Quran before this, thou too was among those who knew it not" (Holy Quran). In surat number 11 Hud, verse number 120: "All that we relate to thee of the stories of the messengers, with it we make firm thy heart in them there cometh to thee the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe" (Holy Quran).

Myth from an Arabic Cultural Viewpoint

Some scholars, such as Muhammad Abazah in his study of myth and theatrical writing (1994) are of the opinion that myth had no place in ancient Arab life, or at best had only slight effect on some Arabs, because most of them were preoccupied with daily life. Certainly, when human beings have to struggle and fight for their existence, they have no time and energy for activities related to the world of imagination or metaphysics, which requires a great deal of concentration, comfort, and relaxation. The Arab poet Abu Al-Kasim Al-Shabi, who is considered the first Tunisian poet to employ myths in his poetry, supported this opinion. He added that the priority of thinking for Arabs was concentrated on seeking daily sustenance, more than exploring any metaphysical labyrinths (Abazah 1994, 6-8).

However, some early Arab writers had a more positive attitude towards myths, in particular, Greek myths. For example, the 13th century Arab physician, Al-Dumashki Ibn Abu Osaibea (1203-1271), translated many parts of the ancient Grecian myths and praised some of their Gods and traditions. However, most other early Arab writers adopted an Islamic attitude and criticized the polytheism of ancient Greek civilization, as did Ibn Jaljal (11th century) in his book, *Classes of Philosophers*, and Ibn Al-Nadeem (982-1047) in his book *The Bibliography* (Abazah 1994, 6).

From another perspective, Ibn Khaldoun (born 1332), the Arab historian, and one of the pioneers of sociology, defined history, by saying that history has two surfaces: first, the interior one, which is connected to the space of deep speculation, exact investigation and wide knowledge of reasons and causes, and second, the external surface, which plays more or less a different role, offering narratives about the olden days and ancient nations in which tales have grown up widely, and mixing several elements together to show how a nation achieved glory and then declined. From the tales of those nations and their disappearance, some lessons may be learned that may also be applied to contemporary circumstances (Ibn Khaldoun 2000, 4).

However, the important point, here, is to note the similarity between the previous definition of history, given by Ibn Khaldoun in his introduction, and the general view which considers myth as ancient tales. On this basis, the contemporary Arab historian, Wajih Kutharani, speculates that myth had absolutely the same meaning as history in ancient Arab culture before Islam. In order to support this notion, he draws our attention to the fact that no mention of the word history, *tarikh* in Arabic, appeared in any Arab cultural resources before Islam, or even in the Holy Quran, which reflected all the features of the Arabic language in its era. Therefore, most Arabic researchers agree that the word *tarikh* is a new word, which did not enter Arabic before the sixteenth or

seventeenth century. In addition, Wajih Kutharani consolidates his opinion by comparing the three following words:

- *Ustora*, the Arabic word which means Myth.
- *Istoria*, the Greek word that means History.
- *History*, the English word (Kutharani 2001)

He notes that the similarity in pronunciation between these three words is very clear. He concludes that myth in ancient Arab culture had several meanings. Besides nonsense tales, it also referred to writing, talks, news and history. He notes that even modern Western theories consider mythology as a reliable historical resource, to say nothing of myth as a valuable resource for anthropology and the humanities. Furthermore, he explains why Arab researchers put the word *tarikh* in place of the word *oustora*, which means myth. He ascribes the change to the use of the word *Ustora* in the Holy Quran, where it means lies, according to most commenters on the Holy Quran. Overall, this topic is a huge field, demanding research in such disciplines as linguistics, history and Quranic exegesis. For the present, this thesis will confine itself to the question in hand.

Now to gauge the modern Arabic view of myth, we can turn to the definition of myth in modern Arabic dictionaries. According to Ajeeb the well-known web site dictionaries, myth is a traditional story, emanating from an anonymous author. It explores social habits in a particular culture or explains the essentials of different human and natural phenomena on a metaphysical and very imaginative basis.

This definition is similar to the one adopted by most Western researchers mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter. Perhaps they depended on the same resources. Interestingly, while noting the use of the word *myth* in the Holy Quran in specific situations that gave the word a negative meaning and promoted a generally cautious attitude towards it, Arabic dictionaries add that, nowadays the critical attitude toward myths has changed. Myths are not seen as false beliefs, which contradict the truth.

Instead, there are now those who consider them to reflect a superior intuitive understanding of existence, which consists of deep facts expressing collective attitudes towards essential problems such as life, death, divinity and eternity. Those attitudes may be recognised as universal. Furthermore, words such as 'reality', 'fact' and 'truth' are so complex in their meaning that they cannot be simply put in opposition to myth. Ajeeb dictionaries also present some examples of Arabic poets who employed myth in their works. Some Arab poets have a tendency to utilize the mythical figurer in their modern poetry. Adonis, a famous contemporary Arab poet, used the myth of Sisyphus in his poem, *The Dead God*. Furthermore, Yusuf Al-Khaal, another Arabic poet, referred to mythical symbols such as Ashtoreth, Adonis and Baal. Ahmed Abd al-Muti Hijazi is another example of a poet who used the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus and Abu Al-Hawl (Sphinx) an Egyptian mythical symbol, in his poem, *The Martyr Who Does Not Die*. The same sort of thing is found in many other literary works, where the embodiment of myth appears frequently. As Ajeeb Arab dictionary points out, mythical texts contain several correlated myths embodying a group or people who follow particular religions. The present writer, for the purpose of this study, asked the famous Arab, Moroccan playwright, Abdulkarim Barshid, who is widely considered one of the pioneers of modern Arab theatre, in particular Ritual Theatre, about myth in Arab theatre ¹⁰. He asserted that myth has been employed in Arab theatre in various forms. However, the two main ones were myth as an image of universal non-scientific logic, and myth interpreted according to scientific methods, as Freud and his fellows did when they employed the myths of Oedipus, Antigone and Electra to emphasise psychological complexes. He added that the Arab theatre oscillates between those two forms. Nevertheless, the most popular way of employing myths in Arab theatre is the form in which myths are employed as a vessel to carry current political and social messages, as

¹⁰ An interview with the researcher in Abu Dhabi, UAE in 28/9/2003.

in the works of Ali Salim, *You Killed the Monster*, and Tawfiq El-Hakim, *Oedipus*, *Pygmalion* and *Isis*, criticizing the period of Jamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt.

Abdulkarim Barshid emphasized that Arab intellectual belief is realistic, far away from the concept of myth that existed in the ancient Greek culture, to the extent that the Arab used to make idols from sweetmeats or dates, but when he became hungry, he would eat them.

The Interrelationship between Myth and Theatre

The above explanations and particularly the reference to examples of the employment of myth in theatre lead to the question of how myth may be useful to dramatists. In what dimension can they help? What characteristics in myths can lend themselves to theatrical work, as form or content?

Reversible and non-reversible time

In an article on an Internet site, Mary Klages, Associate Professor of English, University of Colorado at Boulder draws attention to Levi-Strauss's concern with the question:

Why myths from different cultures from all over the world seem so similar, given that myths could contain anything--they are not bound by rules of accuracy or probability--why is there an astounding similarity among so many myths from so many widely separated cultures (Klages 2001).

Levi-Strauss's in his article "The Structural Study of Myth" (1955) answers these questions by drawing our attention to the structure of myths, rather than their content. The specific characters and events of myths may differ widely, Levi- Strauss argues, but their similarities are based on their structural sameness. To explain this argument about the structure of myth, Levi-Strauss insists that myth is language, because myth has to be narrated in order to exist.

Myth, as language, consists of *langue* and *parole*, the synchronic, historical structure and the specific diachronic details within the structure. Levi-Strauss points out that *langue* belong to what he calls “reversible time”, and *parole* to “non-reversible time”. He means that *parole*, as a specific instance or event, can only exist in linear time, which is unidirectional; you cannot turn the clock back. “Langue”, on the other hand, since it is simply the structure itself, can exist in the past, present, or future. A myth, according to Levi-Strauss, is both historically specific, in that it is usually set in some time long ago, and non-historical, meaning that its story is timeless. As history, myth is *parole*, as timelessness, it is *langue*. Such peculiarity enables myth to travel easily from time to time and from place to place.

The first adventure of the mind

In relation to Arabian myth Firas Al-Sawah (1989, 19), an Arab researcher, wrote a study of myth in Syria and Iraq *The First Adventure of the Mind*. In this book, Al-Sawah considers myths in ancient times as the first courageous human attempt to open up horizons of knowledge for human beings. Nevertheless, most of those questions raised by the mythmaker in ancient times, as Sawah suggests, continue to confuse human beings today. Despite his technological achievements, contemporary man cannot explain many natural phenomena, or detail any metaphysical powers standing behind them, controlling everything in the world. People still dread their unknown future and their unknown fate after death. People still seek to find a kind of reconciliation between themselves and the invisible powers. The first essential questions, ‘Why are we alive?’ ‘Why are we going to die?’, still need convincing answers. Men are still asking about justice and freedom, wondering whether those values exist in our world. Men are still concerned about good and evil, beauty and hideousness. What are the exact meanings of these words? Thousands of such questions still trouble the human mind. Myths dealt with these matters and presented some propositions in terms of the prevailing moral or

spiritual culture, which may be accepted nowadays or not. Potentially, myths can provide theatrical works with rich and varied original features. Those aspects are what theatre began with in the ancient Greek period. It is not however necessary to adopt the same ideas in the same forms. There is always the possibility of reforming them in different modes that suit modern spectators.

The raised dough

Conflict is the basis of drama, as it gives tension to the narrative. Myths provide theatrical works with various sorts of fundamental and universal conflicts, between human beings on one side and natural powers or metaphysical powers such as Gods and demigods on the other. In myths such as that of Oedipus, can be distinguished the conflict between the human being and his fate. Oedipus the king faces his fate, which has already been decided by the Gods, who deliver their decisions through the great oracle to the people of the country. Sophocles portrayed this myth in, *Oedipus the King*. In this play, Sophocles exposes the conflict between the political authorities and religious authorities, not merely as a myth or distant tale but as something that was a major concern in this period (Sophocles, 1978). Thus is the past used to illuminate the present. Likewise, Tawfiq El-Hakim, a famous playwright, wrote a play in 1955, *Isis*. Osiris and Isis is an ancient Egyptian myth reflecting the conflict between two brothers, the king Osiris who represents the God of good to the people and country, and his brother Set, who represents evil powers and who was a very ambitious and spiteful creature. El-Hakim employed this myth to portray the contemporary conflict between legal and illegal rule (E-Hakim, 1978). In the two plays mentioned above, the writer followed the general outline of the myth, with almost the same events and characters, except for small changes in the later play to add the realism expected by a modern audience. In some other examples, contemporary playwrights have used part of a myth to formulate their plays, as the Tunisian playwright Umar Bin Salim did, when he

employed in *The Tower of Babylon* an ancient myth from Babylon, the ancient Iraqi civilization. He adopted the myth of the Goddess Ashtaroth, the Goddess of love, fertility and beauty. Bin Salim made Ashtaroth a young beautiful girl who leads the people of the country, with her lover Beshron, in conflict against an arbitrary, tyrannical Sultan and his allies (Bin Salim, 1991). Furthermore, many European playwrights have written plays, which are modern in all their details but depend for their conflict on old myths. A good example of this type of play is *The Sport of my Mad Mother*, written by the British playwright Anne Jellicoe, in 1958. In this play, Jellicoe discusses many crises besetting the young generation, and shows problems and afflictions that face them in their daily life, such as rootlessness, loneliness and the need for a sense of belonging (Jellicoe 1958). This play was based on the ancient Indian myth of Kali in which a man is rejected by his mother's womb (Kali 1997). Hence, myths offer to the dramatist "raised dough", in other words, a very compliant, unlimited stock of dramatic themes. Potentially, the modern author can recast the cultural context by dramatizing the myth in any form that he or she finds suitable to the current society, drawing on the original resource and adding his or her own new personal vision.

Myths do not only provide primary conflicts, but also great narratives with plots, characters and events. Here it is appropriate to return to Levi-Strauss article "The Structural Study of Myth" in which he declared the ability of myth to accept different forms and types of arts. Levi-Strauss argues, "That myth also exists on a third level, in addition to *langue* and *parole*, which also proves that myth is a language of its own, and not just a subset of language". He explains this point in terms of the story that myth tells: "That story is special, because it survives any and all translations, while poetry is that which can't be translated, or paraphrased". Mary Klages (2001) uses the term *malleability* to describe this particular feature of myths.

The Treasure of Evocative Symbols

Myths always offer a valuable source of powerful symbols to playwrights. Not only is the performance of a play but also its language and events are metaphorical. As far as drama presents us with characters representing human beings in general, the acts of those characters can take on a significance that is deeper than their surface meaning on the stage. Symbols play a central role in myth, and many playwrights have drawn upon those evocative symbols. An example is the character of Oedipus, who depended on his popularity, rejected his preordained fate, and fought a god's will, transmitted to him through the oracles of the temple. On the other hand, he insisted on justice and knowing the truth, at any price, concerning the criminal who killed the previous king. He appears secure until he discovers the truth, that it was he himself who had committed the crime. He was the criminal who had killed his father, and married his own mother, as the oracle had predicted. Suddenly, Oedipus found himself the father and brother of his sons and daughters. As a result, he could not bear the situation and in accordance with the rule that he himself had issued, had to submit himself to punishment (Sophocles 1978). This myth, taken from ancient Greek mythology, has been used as a symbol for quite different things in different plays by different playwrights ranging from Sophocles to El-Hakim, for example, justice, crime and punishment, the power of oracles, the weakness of civilian leaders, deceptive pride, the perfidy of time, the overturned situation, self punishment, the forfeiture of motherhood, legitimate rule, the privation of childhood, and the power of truth.

A similar example of adaptation taken from the Arab world is the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, which has been utilized as a symbol for many political issues. (The myth is discussed in depth in a later chapter about myth and political theatre). This myth is very famous because of its importance in ancient Egyptian religion. The main event in the myth was the tragic death of the popular Osiris the King and good God of

Egypt who was killed by his brother, Set, and his bodily organs dispersed in various places. Osiris' sister and faithful wife, Isis, made a long journey to collect his organs, and returned to Egypt where she joined all the organs together, reformed her husband's body and breathed life back into him.

This myth has been employed as a political symbol in many plays. Tawfiq El-Hakim, the well-known Egyptian playwright, employed it in his play, *Isis*, in 1955, as a symbol of *obligation* in order to transmit a political message to the president of Egypt of that time, Jamal Abdul Nasser as many critics such as Husayn (1993, 149, 150) assert. Thirty years later, in 1985, the Egyptian director, Karam Mitawi, developed El-Hakim's play and the myth. Mitawi presented it in a form very close to a musical show, and constructed from the myth a symbol of Arab world unity. In addition, the symbolism was also used in order to ask the fighters from different factions to stop the civil war in Lebanon and save their country's national unity.

Another Egyptian playwright, Abd al-aziz Hamuda used the same myth in another play entitled *The People of Theaba* in 1981. In this play as Husayn (1993, 172-175) explains, the writer overturned the classical image of the main character of the myth, and presented the opposite view, making Osiris a symbol of dependence, who made the people of his country rely on him for everything. Here Osiris deceived the people of his country by making them bereft of will. The third play that used the same myth was *From Where Can I Bring People?* This was written in 1971 by the Egyptian poet Najib Surur, who structured the myth as a symbol of faithfulness shown by a brave woman towards her dead husband. In 1991, Umar Bin Salim, a Tunisian playwright, utilized the myth to refer to circumstances beyond his own nation. The play was entitled *The Tower of Babylon*. This tower was mentioned in many ancient Babylonian myths as the place where human beings arose for the first time. Therefore, the writer employed the Babylonian tower as a symbol of globalisation, and of the United Nations. In the play,

the writer has groups from different countries meet together to discuss their countries' contribution in civilization and the achievements of humanity (Bin Salim 1991). In general, the play is about a company who is organizing a tour to the ancient monuments of Babylon, which most myths cite as the cradle of civilization. Groups from different parts of the worlds join the tour, from East, West, Black, White American, Indian, German, Chinese and many others, under the roof of the United Nations. During the journey, strong disagreements appear on the surface. Many tough quarrels break out between different delegations that can be called civilizational and ideological collisions. However, by the end, the world of the powerful country has come to dominate everything, the company, other delegations, the place and the country where the monuments are located. Delegations agree with a list ranking the most important countries in order according to their military and technological achievements. The playwright has tried to feature the historical enmity that the developed countries carry against the Third World in a sarcastic style.

Rituals in Rituals

As Laurence Coupe (1997, 6) suggest, it is not always necessary for myth to be tied to ritual. There are many myths without rituals, although, there are very few rituals, which are not related to myth. In other words, as Ouyunasud (1995, 223) asserts, we might be able to prove that some myths grew from rituals, but it is impossible to prove that any ritual grew without the basis of mythology. Aristotle the Greek philosopher, in his book *Poetics*, expressed the view that the Dithyrambus was a poetic religious hymn chanted by ancient Grecian choirs, formed from fifty masked men, who performed it with dance and gesture around the sculpture of the God Dionysos. He ascribed to those rituals, the origin of theatrical tragedy (Al-Hawi 1980, 34-37). In addition, many modern playwrights and directors such as Julian Beck, Ariane Mnouchkine, Saadallah Wanoos, Ezi al-Din Madani and Abdulkarim Barshid consider theatrical performances as a

specific kind of ritual. Perhaps these rituals are not religious rituals, but social and aesthetic rituals. On the other hand, myths are mostly related to religious rituals, which give rise to some later traditions and customs. Religious rituals, in their turn, used a mix of actions, movements, dance, and gestures to convey wide metaphysical concerning. The role of this combination was to connect life and existence with an imaginable but secret world, on occasion to reinforce social and religious values. In this specific world of secret destroying and rebuilding, myth takes drama's role and can therefore easily become a valuable source for it. In addition, the theatre becomes a logical extension of myth in a mutual relationship between both elements. Myth and theatre play an integral role in the process of creation. The ritual, which has been transferred from religion to today's theatre practices, is not now employed in order to placate an angry God, but as a collective ceremonial behaviour, which primarily aims to satisfy human aesthetic tastes and offer imaginative resources. However, like ritual, this ceremonial will be focused on a particular human topic and will be experienced jointly and severally by human beings in a world that is full of instability, separation and violent struggles. Thus, it will, at least for the period of the performance, create a sense of social cohesion.

Rituals were and are able, by their verbal and dynamic energy, to offer human beings, even in our day, some measure of purification or catharsis. In his book, *The Story of Philosophy*, Durant describes how the ancient Greek philosopher Plato mentioned something about rituals when he told the story of the priest who treated some women, who had been stricken with hysteria, with music. He agitated them and pushed them to dance and dance until they fell down on the floor from exhaustion, and went into a deep sleep. When they woke up, they found themselves refreshed and totally cured of their illness. Plato concludes that "such activities make the unconscious mind quiet and relaxed" (Durant 1944, 36).

Originated Myth

Sometimes, playwrights and directors in the theatre so believe in the importance of myth in the theatre, that if they do not find a suitable myth to carry their ideas, they do not hesitate to originate their own. In the Elizabethan period, William Shakespeare (1557-1617) in many of his plays was affected by ancient myths, maybe because in his time grammar school and university education included Greek and Latin. He borrowed many elements from myths and created mythical atmosphere to deliver his contemporary message. In particular, in his play, *The Tempest*, Shakespeare tried to create a mythical atmosphere to embrace his originated myth of an isolated island, in an unknown sea, and of fictional wars and exile. In this content, he dealt with impious kings, the duty of monarchy and spiritual and invisible powers. Throughout, the play is full of poetic dialogue, rituals, songs, and dance and those elements, which echo ceremony, and ritual.

The play does not depend on a fabulous primitive or metaphysical idea, created by the collective imagination of a specific society through successive ages. It is the result of an individual playwright's imagination and presents to the audience intellectual concerns and aesthetically pleasing scenes. However, it does contain mythical elements in its framework, at least, if not in its entire nature. Also, while Shakespeare did not base his play directly on ancient mythology, and created his own mythic structure, he benefited in one way or another, both from literature and mythical heritage, its structure derived from the Court Masques created by such as Inigo Jones, which romantically portrayed mythical characters and situations. David Daniell, in his book *The Tempest*, attempted to find shared ground between art and myth in *The Tempest*. He argued that both art and myth are processes, movements of events, which relate to the profound experiences of human nature, and suggested that both have exactly the same elements, they both aim to be symbols of something altogether larger and universal (Daniell 1989, 56, 57).

Moreover, he suggested that even though Shakespeare did not adopt a specific myth, he was influenced in one way or other by ancient heritage and ritual:

At the time, humanity's great religions, and the supposedly even older folk-customs and rituals, seemed to provide stunning material with which to open up not just a new window into some plays of Shakespeare, but comprehensive understanding of the whole work (Daniell 1989, 58).

Overall, the most important points of the mythical structure in this play consist of the following: *The Tempest* is a play which represents a foray into the intangible universe, and a shamanistic encroachment into the influence of the invisible or spiritual realm, in order to correct and then return to the pattern of everyday human life. It expresses human frailty and the fear of the unknown. Furthermore, it involves a search for help from higher powers, whether gods or magicians. Prospero employs magic to reclaim his throne from his brother, Antonio. The events that occur by human will overlap with the events that occur by a higher will. G. Wilson Knight, in a short essay, 'Myth and Miracle', published in 1929, emphasized the importance of the spiritual features, arguing, "that spiritual quality which alone causes great work to endure through the centuries should be the primary object of our attention". He then adds, regarding Shakespeare's plays, "Here the words 'myth' and 'universal' are constantly applied to the four last plays, and particularly *The Tempest*" (Daniell 1989, 58, 59). The play starts, like most mythical plays, by introducing with a climactic event, a time of either revenge or salvation resulting from sins committed previously. Usually such revenge is the end of a long chain of events, which we learn about from the play's dialogue, as in this speech, in which Prospero is talking to his daughter, Miranda:

Prospero: Tell your heart, there is no harm done;
I have done nothing, but in care of thee,
My child, who art ignorant of what thou art;
But I will now inform thee --- pray attend:
This twelve years since thy father was the Duke
Of Milan ----- be not amazed, my daughter;

Thou art a princess of no less issue (Shakespeare 1969, 3).

The play concerns a superhuman protagonist, who is a symbol of superior royal attitudes and abilities. Prospero, the Duke of Milan, has suffered from the loss of his throne. Nevertheless, he possesses superhuman abilities, and although exposed to hard ordeals, like many mythical protagonists, is generally distinguished by patience and wisdom. *The Tempest* is a play, which features the plot of royal death and rebirth and fertility, as did ancient myth. David Daniell emphasizes the presence of mythic structures:

The very invitation which *The Tempest* extends seemed to be addressed to those critics who could write about the great and apparently universal symbols of Royal Death and Rebirth, of Vegetation Rites, of Fertility, and the rest (Daniell 1989, 57).

Such themes can be recognized in this speech from the final scene of the play:

Prospero: (to Alonso). Sir, I invite your Highness and your train to my poor cell, where you shall take your rest for this night; which, part of it, I will waste with such discourse as, I not doubt, shall make it go quick away- the story of my life, and the particular accident gone by since I came to this isle. And in the morn I will bring you to your ship, and so to Naples, where I have hope to see the nuptial of these our dear beloved solemnized; and thence retire me to my Milan, where every third thought shall be my grave (Shakespeare 1965, 77).

Moor (2000) in his article illustrates how *The Tempest* raises, as did ancient Greek tragedy some of the essential questions about human life. What is a human being? What is fate? Can a human being change his fate and, if so, by what ability, his natural ability or spiritual power? Moreover, it is characterized by diverse theatrical devices, dancing, singing, a dramatic plot, emotional issues and pleasant scenes, in order to communicate with the spectators and appeal to their aesthetic sensibility and intellect. In addition, the play, like most mythical plays, relates to political conflicts around historical noble cities such as Milan and Naples, which give the work of art suspense and contribute historical aspect. In conclusion, Shakespeare provided his play *The Tempest* with all the qualities

and atmosphere of a play which depends directly on myth and that is what gives the play a great part of its magnificence and universality.

In conclusion, myth was one of the bases on which theatre was established, and is still, up to the present day, one of its main sources. Myth can exist and grow without theatre, but if we believe Aristotle, the theatre would not have existed and would not have grown without myth. Theatre is connected organically with myth and from it derives its nature. It is hard to find a play empty of myth or a sense of myth, in that myth involves patterns of human experience of the world in relation to the needs of a particular culture. The myth might be the main event in the play, a side issue, or merely an undercurrent, but always it contributes shape, focus and metaphysical thoughts. Myth in the theatre is liberated material that need not be tied to a specific time order, form or strict rules. In addition, it is linked to creation, imagination and interaction between the material and unconscious worlds and this is the essence of theatre.

Myth may also be a source of historical knowledge. Researchers can extract from it many historical facts, study different nations' traditions, be introduced to their culture, and even analyse their psychological attitude as individuals or a society, although in a general rather than detailed sense. It is important, in this case, always to keep in mind the distance that divides myth and fact. Perhaps the myth contains some fact and fact contains some myth, but in the end, each has its own conditions and techniques. There is no need, however to worry about this gap in the theatre. Theatre is one of the very few places in the world where performers can mix myth with fact, because of the need to fill our characters and events with imaginative detail, which will make them live in the here and now before an audience. The question might be raised here, are all myths suitable material on which playwrights and directors in the Arab and Western theatre can draw in their works in any way they prefer? Are there any potential taboos? This is what will be discussed in the next chapter.

References:

- ABAZAH, Muhammad. 1994. *Myth and Theatrical Writings in Tunisia. Theatrical Studies Series*. Dar Sahar, No. 2. PP. 3-26. (In Arabic)
- ABD AL-HAKIM, Shawqi. 1995. *The Cyclopaedia of Arab Folklore and Myth*. Egypt: Maktabat Madboly. (In Arabic)
- AL-HAWI, Ilea. 1980. *Aeschylus and the Grecian Tragedy*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani. (In Arabic)
- AL-SAWAH, Firas. 1989. *The First Mind's Adventure*. Syria: Dar Alkindy, (In Arabic)
- ARABIC DICTIONARIES AJEEB. Myth. *Ajeeb Arabic Dictionaries*. Available: <http://literary.ajeeb.com/articles/Alef/A0059.asp> [Accessed 16/12/2003].
- BACON, Francis. 1905. *The Wisdom of Ancients and New Atlantis*. London: Cassell.
- BARSHID, Abdulkarim. 28/9/2003. Interview with the researcher in Abu Dhabi at GCC Festival of Theatre.
- BIN SALIM, UMAR. 1991. *Babylon Tower*. Tunis: Al-Dar Al-Tunisia Lilnasher.
- COUPE, Laurence. 1997. *Myth*. London & New York: Routledge.
- CUNNINGHAM, Adrian. 1973. *The Theory of Myth*. London: Sheed & Ward.
- CUPITT, Don. 1982. *The World to Come*. London: SCM Press.
- DANIELL, David. 1989. *The Tempest*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd.
- DURANT, Will. 1944. *The Story of Philosophy*. Beirut: Maktabat Al-Ma'arif. (In Arabic)
- EL-HAKIM, Tawfiq. 1978. *Isis*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani.
- ELIADE, Mircea. 1957. *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries*. London: Harper Torchbooks.
- ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: Available: <http://shakespeare.eb.com/shakespeare/micro/731/86.html> [Accessed 1/7/2003]
- FRAZER, James. 1996. *The Golden Bough*. London: Penguin Books.
- FREUD, Sigmund. 1938. *Totem and Taboo*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Modern Library.
- FREUD, Sigmund. 1991. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey. London: Penguin Books.
- FROMM, Erich. 1951. *The Forgotten Language*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- HOOKE, S. H. 1993. *Middle Eastern Mythology*. London: Penguin Books.
- HUSAYN, Kamal al-Din. 1993. *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre*. Cairo: Al-Dar Al-misria Allubnania.

- IBN KHALDUN, Wali al-Din. 2000. *The Introduction*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani. (In Arabic)
- JALAL AL-DIN, Saed. 1994. *The Lexicon of Idioms and Philosophical Illustration*. Tunis: Dar Al-Janob. (In Arabic)
- JELLICOE, Anne. 1958. *The Sport of My Mad Mother*. London: Faber & Faber.
- JUNG, C. G. 1978. *Man and his Symbols*. London: Picador.
- KALI. 1997. California, U.S.A. Ascension Research Centre. Available: <http://www.ascension-research.org/kali.html> [Accessed 8/7/2004]
- KLAGES, Mary. September 13, 2001. Claude Levi-Strauss: The Structural Study of Myth and other Structuralist Ideas. Available: <http://www.colorado.edu/English/engl2010mk/levistrauss.2001.htm> [Accessed 29/10/2003].
- KUTHARANI, Wajih. 2001. The Connection between History and Myth. *Al-Hayat Newspaper*. April, Sunday No. 13909. (In Arabic)
- LEVI-STRAUSS, Claude. 1955. "The Structural Study of Myth". Available: <http://courses.essex.ac.uk/lt/lt204/strauss.htm> [Accessed 8\7\2004].
- MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw. 1992. *Magic, Science and Religion*. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- MOOR, R. 2000. The Tempest. *Enotes Author Shakespeare*. Available: <http://www.allshakespeare.com/plays/tempest/> [Accessed 29/2/2004]
- MYTHOLOGY. *The Illustrated Anthology of World Myth and Storytelling*. General editor Littleton, C. Scott. 2002. London: Duncan Baird Publishers
- OUYUNASUD, Nizar. 1995. "Theories of Myth". *Alam Al-Fikar*. V.24. Issue 1, 2. Kuwait: The National Council of Culture, Art, & Literature. PP 213-232.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. 1965. *The Tempest*. London: Cambridge, University Press.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. 1969. *The Tempest*. London: J. & R. Tonson in the Strand.
- SOPHOCLES. 1978. *Oedipus the King*. Translated by Tawfiq El-Hakim. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani.
- THE HOLY QURAN. 1996. Translation of the *Holy Quran*: CD based on interpretation of Ibn Kather & Al-jalalayn. Saudi Arabia: Sakher Company for Computer Programs.
- ZAKI, Ahmad Kamal. 1979. *Myths, Comparative Civilizational Study*. Beirut: Dar Al-Awdah (In Arabic).

Chapter 3:

Holy and Unholy Myth

The right of playwrights or directors in the theatre to make changes in original myth, in order to make it carry some modern message or viewpoint that suits the contemporary theatre is a matter of ongoing concern across all cultures, as will be seen in this chapter. Those arguments existed in the ancient Greek period when myths were first depicted in plays, as well as in the present day. Conservative critics insist that playwrights and directors should save the mythical elements, sense of symbol and spirits of the myth in their original form, because those values are enduring and transcend time, while progressive critics argue that the playwright and director in the theatre have a right to make whatever changes they wish to myth, to present it from a modern viewpoint. To alter the myth of one's own culture may be viewed as almost blasphemy because such alterations may attack conservative values. In this chapter, there is an attempt to trace some factors that give "holiness" to myth, such as the extent of people's belief in it, consideration of it as an ancient cultural masterpiece, a historical record, for religious reasons, or the belief in the myth as fact which reflects modern conservative values. These factors will be extracted from myth in its ancient as well as various modern forms, and presented with examples for clarification.

Prehistory Era

In the ancient Greek period, many of the surviving plays of famous playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were based on ancient myths, in particular those, which were contained in two well-known epics, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Indeed most ancient Greek tragedies took their narrative and characters from stories to be found in

the ancient poems of Homer and other epic poets. The *Iliad* was, to the Greeks like a holy book, which was used to justify many of their metaphysical beliefs as Ilea Al-Hawi (1980, 36) explains, the Greeks read it, discussed it and competed with each other to memorize its events and present parts of it, accompanied by some rudimentary acting in the manner of the popular storyteller in other cultures including the Arabic. No doubt those characters were alive in the people's imagination, and everybody dealt with them according to his own understanding and cultural level. When a playwright handled one of those mythical characters, he placed him or her in the context of specific events and normally led him towards a fate that the myth prescribed. The narrative was considered realistic both to history and to life. Such an acceptable narrative enabled the creator to communicate with the public, who reacted readily and shared in the suffering that the play conveyed. Through the play's tragic structure in which the narrative was set, authors explored themes such as judgement, freedom and moral commitment, the impact being enhanced by pity and fear.

Certain mythical subjects recurred in the Greek theatre. For example, according to Nakah (1973), the myth of Oedipus was dealt with by twelve writers and there are fifty-six subjects from ancient myths that were handled by at least two writers, sixteen other subjects by five writers, and an additional two subjects were handled by seven writers. Nevertheless, the Greek playwright was not presenting myth literally. Rather, he was carrying out a creative operation, by taking the basic myth, and retelling it through interpretation and analysis, in a manner that suited the concerns of his contemporary audience. Over and above this, he developed characterisation and conflict, and invented supporting events that were not in the original myth.

Sophocles's play, *Oedipus the King*, mentioned previously, was a famous masterpiece that is well known worldwide today. It has been adapted for modern performance in Western countries and the Arab World, and it was one of the rare Greek plays, if not the

only one, presented in Oman in the late 1990s. Another example is the myth of Phaedra, which presents the tragedy of Phaedra, a woman who falls in love with her stepson Hippolytus. The first known play written about this myth was in 429 BC, by Euripides and entitled *Hippolytus*. Seneca, in the Roman era, used the same myth with a few changes in events that made it drama of human passion. This myth has inspired many plays throughout history to the present day, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Arabic critic Abd al-Muti Sharawi (1984, 17) describes Euripides' attitude towards myth, mentioning that the Greek dramatist did not, however, treat myth with such respect, although myths in his period still suggest the belief and religion of ancient Greece. He brought myth from heaven to earth by giving his protagonists the names of some mythical characters, but making them act like real people who lived in Athens in the 5th century BC. Then he gives an example, when Euripides presented the myth of Electra, he presented Electra as an ordinary girl who, in spite of her position as a princess, was compelled to marry a poor farmer and share his harsh life. Husayn (1993, 156,157) suggests that Euripides's aim in presenting myth in a form that is more realistic was to expand the exploration of ideas and offer new explanations that challenge his society. These examples illustrate how the ancient playwrights were courageous in dealing with their mythology. They show how the religion of ancient Greece accepted different adaptations of its popular myths, even those that dealt with essential religious issues like moral values, the gods and cultural traditions, and presented them in critical forms.

The Holy or Unholy Isis

An example from the Arab world is the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, which has been utilized in many plays. This myth is very famous because of its importance in ancient Egyptian religion. Although, today, it has no religious significance in the

modern society of Egypt, it has great value as part of the cultural heritage of the nation. Therefore, when this myth was employed in the modern theatre, beginning in 1957, it aroused huge controversy. The plot of the myth in more detail than that given earlier is that, because of a curse inherited from his grandfather, Osiris was born as a tortured and lacerated god. When he became king of Egypt, he married his sister Isis and made her a princess. Osiris did much for his people. He established justice, taught them agriculture and music, and built flourishing cities. For this reason, Osiris was known among his people as a good God. After he had done all these things for his country, he travelled with the God of wisdom and writing to Far Asian countries to unite them with his kingdom, and in search of knowledge. When he returned to Egypt, he found his country in a favourable situation, thanks to his wise wife, Isis. However, his brother, Set, who was jealous of his authority and power, attacked him, murdered him, and dispersed his organs in various places. Isis - the princess and faithful wife refused to accept this end for her husband, the king and God. She gave birth to a son, Horus, through spiritual contact with her dead husband, and brought him up to avenge his father. She then made a long journey to collect her husband's organs. She succeeded, with the God's help, in her task. Therefore, when she returned to Egypt, she joined all the organs together, reformed her husband's body and breathed life back into him.

The ancient Egyptian myth of Isis is widely referred to in the Egyptian theatre. Although this myth was put in the context of ancient Egyptian religion, it was utilized as a subject for many plays in the second half of the last century¹¹. The researcher, Kamal al-Din Husayn (1993, 147-177), argues that playwrights have dealt with this myth in two different ways, as direct and indirect inspiration.

First is the direct inspiration, which means to adopt the myth with all its original qualities, without any essential modifications in its events, characters and atmosphere.

¹¹ See chapter 5 of this thesis: What has politics done to Isis?

That does not mean all playwrights who followed this approach presented the same reading of the myth. Tawfiq El-Hakim, who employed the myth in his play entitled *Isis* in 1955, and Abd al-aziz Hamuda, who used the myth in another play entitled, *The People of Thebes*, in 1981, both adopted the same original myth, but they presented different readings as Husayn points out. El-Hakim tried to give the myth realistic dimensions. Isis, in his play, is no longer the ideal character of a patient, faithful wife; she is a political woman who is prepared to do anything, legal or illegal, in order to win the battle, on the basis that her enemy is strong, and a swindler, and has given himself a free hand to use any kind of weapon. The focal question that El-Hakim featured is whether the ruler should be idealistic or realistic. It may be difficult to find an obvious link between this point and the original myth. To make this argument clear, as Watfa Hashim (1996, 83) asserts, El-Hakim, in the play, although he kept the essential event, did not hesitate to add to and omit from the myth. In particular, he eliminated the metaphysical events, in order to accommodate the myth to his modern view. Consequently, El-Hakim made the myth carry his up-to-date message, more than its original one.

In a debate about a performance of this play in 1957, reported by Husayn (1993, 148), Louis Awad, the Egyptian critic, argued that El-Hakim exceeded his rights as a playwright in dealing with an ancient myth, which is considered as the heritage of the entire nation, by modifying some of its vital concepts, which had a negative effect on the myth and its meaning. The playwright's role, he argued, should be limited to interpreting what really exists in the myth, without adding or omitting anything that transmutes the myth from its original content and its inherited essential meanings. Kamal al-Din Husayn in his book *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre* also criticizes El-Hakim, suggesting that he started his play without any clear plan except his desire to change the face of the myth as an attempt at renovation, and Husayn

argues that this does not justify destroying the mythical spirit and humanizing the events and characters of the myth. Because of his concentration on contemporary political issues, El-Hakim presented the myth without its mythical elements with all their significance, such as the birth of Horus, the son of Isis, and the second journey of Isis, in order to collect the organs of her dead husband body. Husayn argues even more strongly that El-Hakim's modern realistic form of the myth presented ancient Egypt as a country with an autocratic regime full of conflicts, evil deeds and witchcraft, nothing more, whereas the original myth presented ancient Egypt as a distinguished civilisation. Husayn summarised his opinion on such employment of myth in the modern theatre by saying that there should be some limits to employing classical myth in the theatre, that no playwright should go beyond there, because such myths do not express a personal view, so much as reflect the whole culture of the nation. He adds that, usually, a dramatic character has three dimensions: psychological, sociological and physiological. In myth, there is one more, the dimension of heritage. This dimension and its significance are stored in the collective conscience of the people, which gives it a metaphorical firmness that should be respected. However, Muhammad Mandur, another Egyptian critic, has a different opinion. In debate about a performance of this play in 1957, he maintained that the playwright has an unlimited right to deal with myth in his work in any way that he considers appropriate and he should be applauded for his attempt.

It is understandable that El-Hakim exploited the ancient myth to express his support for knowledge in its conflict with politics. Of course, this is not one of the original themes in the ancient myth, but one may accept the playwright's intention to feature the mythical characters in a new form that seems more human. Al-Hakim himself in the later comment on the play declared that this had been his intention. (E-Hakim 1978, 155)

Abd al-aziz Hamuda is another Egyptian playwright who has overturned the classical image of the main characters of the myth. Osiris, in his play *The People of Thebes*, is not a good God and king who is concerned about his people, but a person who controls everything in the country, which makes his people wholly dependent on him so that they lose their ability to work and produce as individuals. On the other hand, Isis is portrayed as a very bad, traitorous character. When her husband Osiris places the country under her supervision and travels as a messenger to foreign lands, in his absence the country is destroyed, fields are laid waste, dams are demolished and the people are left in misery, while the priests and ministers, along with Isis and her retinue, become wealthy. When Osiris returns to his country, Isis does not hesitate to conspire with the chief priest, to murder him. Although Osiris knows about the conspiracy, he postpones retribution for some other time, and goes to attend to his brother, Set, where another conspiracy is waiting for him. Another great modification in this play is in Set's character. He is not an evil person who craves the throne, but a social conciliator who tries to rescue the people of the country from the damage done by Osiris' regime. After the killing of Osiris and the scattering of his organs in different areas, there is a face-to-face fight between Isis and Set. Isis has brought her son, Horus, who was born after spiritual contact with her dead husband Osiris, and does her best to collect her husband's body and breathe back life into him for the sake of revenge. Set, in his twenty-year rule, organizes life for the people in the country, teaches them democracy and urges them to participate in national responsibilities. Again, in this play, the political message predominates at the expense of myth, that is to say, the writer sacrifices all the mythical elements in this myth for the sake of presenting a contemporary political issue¹². By the end of the play, the readers or audience discover

¹² These political issues will be discussed widely in a later chapter about myth and political plays.

that all the mythical events in the play were no more than big lies. The people of the country fail Set, they are still sluggish, not willing to work or bear in any responsibilities, and waste their time in silly jokes and spreading rumours. The birth of Horus as well as the event of collecting the organs of Osiris's body turns out to be a story made up by Isis to deceive the people of the country to get them on her side so she can return her husband to the throne.

It is obvious that Abd al-aziz Hamuda went even beyond El-Hakim in the changes that he made to the myth of Isis. Kamal al-Din Husayn (1993, 164-170) in his book, in relation to historical facts, considers what Hamuda has done to be unjustified in at least two respects. First, he presents the people as toys in the rulers' hands. The rulers do to them whatever they want, without any disincentive. This situation, he argues, is far from the truth in ancient times as well in the present. Second, the play empties the myth of every single element of its mythical mission. It was constructed to conserve collective memories, religion and traditions, as well as presenting explanation. Husayn added, that Hamuda and El-Hakim both imposed on symbols, which have an established meaning in the myth, contemporary issues that have nothing to do with the original. For this reason, in his opinion, it would have been better for them to leave the myth alone and invent their own modern symbols to convey their political messages.

In the current writer's opinion, although simplifying mythical elements might deprive a myth of its original meaning, the playwright should address his readers or audience in language they can understand, and present them with topics that relate to their current concerns, even if this is at the expense of the myth. Theatre can always give life to an ancient myth, but it has never caused the death of a myth. Even if there are shortcomings employed in a play, it is enough for the play to draw people's attention to the myth and motivate them, in the light of its discrepancies, to think about and take some attitude towards a contemporary situation.

In Kamal al-Din Husayn's opinion, the dramatist can also draw indirect inspiration from myths. Indirect inspiration means utilizing part or some element of a myth in the play, but not the myth in total. In other words, the play here is not built on the basis of myth, but has another plot in which myth partly interacts in order to feature some ideas or values. He suggests that the play, *From Where Can I Bring People*, written in 1974 by the Egyptian poet Najib Surur, is a suitable example of indirect inspiration. The play is based on a well-known folk song in Egypt, Hasan and Naima, the story of two lovers in some rural area. Naima, the young girl, who belongs to a very conservative family, falls in love with Hasan, a humble folk singer. Their story is spread by word of mouth and finally reaches Naima's tribe. According to the tradition of the village, such an event is a great scandal that nothing can wipe out, except blood. The tribe kill Hasan; they cut his head from his body and hide it. The folk song tells that after Hasan's death, Naima lives for one purpose, to get back Hasan's head and bury it with his body, because she believes that is the only way to give him rest is death. In Egypt's current religion, Islam, as well in the ancient religion, the dead person should be buried as a whole body in order to be comfortable in the other world.

Surur, in the play, couples myth and folk song, as well as linking characters like Isis and Naima, and Horus and Hasan. While Kamal al-Din Husayn criticizes El-Hakim and Hamuda for their use of the events and characters of the myth in a different sense from the original one, in order to convey their contemporary political message, he finds Surur's blending of the myth and folk song a perfect example of how myth should be utilized in modern drama. He argues that Naima is an extension of Isis and both represent the faithfulness of Egyptian women. Also, Hasan is an extension of Horus; both of them fight against the corruption in their country, Horus by the sword and Hasan by songs. Such an opinion of Surur's play might be accepted, but I would raise the question here, of whether Surur saved the myth in its original sense and form as an

event and characters? Actually Surur made changes, but in the opposite way to El-Hakim and Hamuda. While they drive the myth from its mythical elements to the reality of contemporary political issues, Surur rooted the reality of a popular local story in ancient mythical elements. In both approaches, some events and characters were changed, and in that sense, their meanings were changed. Both ways seem to be justifiable in the theatre, as long as they use the myth in an artistic way and add to it some different concepts. All the mentioned plays bring the myth to life again to say something different. None of them harm the myth; the original myth still exists as it was in the ancient period, and for those who want to engage with the original myth, they can forget the plays and go directly to the myth; the Holy Myth.

Religious Holy Myth

Some myths are part of religions. People believe in them as real fact because they are authenticated in their religious holy books. Some religions are very conservative. They do not allow the media, including the theatre, to deal with religious issues. Others are willing to interact with the media, under specific conditions. However, religious people mostly are not satisfied with the way media productions, including theatre, use their religious symbols because they inevitably alter what is considered to be fact and truth, while performers are not happy to have constraints imposed on them. In the following paragraphs, the focus will be on several different experiences of myth from the perspectives of theatre and religion.

Peter Brook and the Trap of the Foreign Holy Myth

Peter Brook (1925-) the British director is probably the most famous experimental director in Europe. He has not contented himself with Western culture, but has invested effort in exploring different cultural heritages, as in his famous production *The Mahabharata*, based on Indian mythology. India as a nation is proud of the

Mahabharata, considering it as a treasure of values and explanation. In some views, it is not just an epic of India, but also an epic of the whole world. *Mahabharata* is arguably the longest poem in any language.

The *Mahabharata* (composed between 300 BC and 300 AD) has the honour of being the longest epic in world literature, 100,000 2-line stanzas (although the most recent critical edition edits this down to about 88,000), making it eight times as long as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together, and over 3 times as long as the Bible (Chaitanya vii). According to the Narasimhan version, only about 4000 lines relate to the main story; the rest contain additional myths and teachings. In other words, the *Mahabharata* resembles a long journey with many side roads and detours. It is said that "Whatever is here is found elsewhere. But whatever is not here is nowhere else (Brown 2001).

Vyasa, the original author of *Mahabharata*, tried to depict the Great War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas¹³.

Another of Brook's works is *The Conference of the Birds*, which was based on Persian mythology. Laleh Asher describes the myth:

The allegorical framework of the story is as follows: the birds of the world gather and are led by the hoopoe to find their ideal king, the Simorgh, who lives far away. After their initial enthusiasm, each bird makes excuses about going on the journey, which the hoopoe counters with anecdotes, which at first seem obscure. The final question the birds ask before proceeding along the way is about the length of the journey, to which the hoopoe responds, with a description, *The Seven Valleys of the Way*. The obscurity of the hoopoe's answers is intentional, the reader is being asked to look at a problem in an unfamiliar way, with logic deliberately flouted, so we are teased into understanding, analogous to the paradoxical koans of Zen Buddhism. The birds' final arrival at the court of the Simorgh depends on a pun, as they realize that there are only thirty (Si) birds (Morgh) left. The thirty birds meet the Simorgh, and realize that the goal of their quest, the Simorgh they have been looking for, is none other than themselves (Asher 1984).

Farid Al-Din Attar, the original author of *The Conference of the Birds*, tried to present the essential philosophy of Sufism, which believes that the only value in life is to subjugate it for the love of God. The myth here is concerned not with events, but with thoughts and feelings, and that is what makes it difficult to grasp. The mythical situation

¹³ The present writer saw the play on video.

is when a human being could love God more than anything in life including himself. It is a sort of profound philosophy related to deep beliefs, as in these words of Attar:

To each atom, there is a different door, and for each atom, there is a different way, which leads to the mysterious being of whom I speak... In these vast oceans, the world is an atom and the atom a world... (Attar 1971, 4-6).

John Heilpern (1977, 44, 45) describes Brook's methods in dealing with the play. Brook started his task, not by explaining Attar's ideas, nor analysing his poem. He just led his team on an extraordinary journey to Africa, crossing deserts and hundreds of primitive villages, interacting with their inhabitants, in order to discover the concealed meanings of the Attar's poem through practical experiences, which were supposed to be richer than any theory. Basarab Nicolescu (2001) argues that Brook should be thanked for his efforts; whether he and his team were successful in understanding Attar's philosophy or not, and whether they performed it perfectly or not, at least they brought the poet and his mythical philosophy into the light, and to worldwide attention. In addition, they gained valuable experience of his ideas.

Brook is not only a famous theatrical producer, but he is one of the pioneer researchers in the modern theatre, since he established The International Centre for Theatre Researches in Paris (1970). He has explained that the main aim of this centre is to examine the conditions in which theatre can arise; depending only on what is essential. He considers the centre as a meeting point for different cultures to interact with each other. He and his company travelled extensively to experience different cultures, even those that do not practise any kind of theatre (Williams 1991, 3-5). Therefore, his decision to present myths from different cultures in the theatre reflects his belief that myth is an essential element in the theatre shared among all cultures around the world, which can produce a common language through symbols, gestures, voices and images. Challenging myth was not one of Brook's aims. On the contrary, he tried to preserve the myth, the *Mahabharata*, as a piece of antiquity in a museum. He made minimal changes

to adapt the myth to the theatre in 1980, and later in a film, produced in 1989, in association with Channel 4 Television¹⁴, trying to use similar atmospheres, traditions and costumes whenever possible. His challenge was not to demolish the ancient myth in order to rebuild it in a new theatrical form and philosophy, but rather to prove that this masterpiece is capable of being transferred from its Indian culture and language to western culture and language, without losing any of its beauty and ideas. Therefore, he and his group did their best, through many visits and workshops, to explore the Indian mythology and culture in order to unite with it before presenting the play on the stage. To what extent he succeeded, is a matter of debate. Although few people in India saw Peter Brook's production and most of them saw the film on television, not the real play itself, some Indian religious leaders, as well as some researchers, accused him of deforming the legend and dealing with it superficially, ignoring its nature and depth. Some described Brook's production as a one of the most blatant appropriations of Indian culture in recent years.

...It is appropriation and reordering of non-western material within an orientalist framework of thought and action, which has been specifically designed for the international market (Bharucha 1988, 229).

Of course, such an opinion was to be expected. Although Peter Brook respects the religious element and cultural aspects, those matters are not his first area of concern. However, Brook realized that such arguments might be raised against his production. Therefore, he did his best to liberate the epic from its mother culture. He tried to internationalise the topic by emphasizing some phrases, which express issues relevant to humanity in general and would be accepted very widely, such as "there is no good man entirely good and no bad man entirely bad" and "make you see the good in the bad and the bad in the good". Furthermore, he even tried to feature in the script some

¹⁴ The film was produced 1989, in association with Channel 4 Television Co. Ltd, The Brooklyn Academy of Music and the assistance of Le Centre National de La Cinematographie. Based on play and directed by Peter Brook. My view of the play depends on this film.

philosophical phrases extracted from the events of the epic, such as, “anger kept me young” and “Can one belong to someone who has lost himself?”. Even more, he borrowed some words used by the original author in the preface to the epic: “It is about you, if you listen carefully, at the end you'll be someone else” (Floren 2003). Overall Peter Brook may have won the international community to his side as a pioneer director who, with his group, leads remarkable theatrical experiments, which are intended to utilize a variety of cultures from around the world, but he and they never satisfy those who belong to the epic and to whom the epic belongs in religious terms.

El-Hakim and the Story of Holy Quran

If there were anybody who should be mentioned, as a playwright who laid the foundation stone of new Arab theatre, on the textual level at least, this person, undoubtedly, would be Tawfiq El-Hakim (1898 - 1997). Tawfiq El-Hakim was a writer who emerged from the depths of Egyptian life proscribed by habit and strict traditions. Through acquaintance with international culture during his study in Paris, at the peak of its active cultural life in the first half of the last century, his talent was gradually consolidated until it reached a peak of maturity when he returned to Cairo, where he wrote most of his most famous plays. His writing was concerned with human thinking, philosophical argument and intellectual speculation, so that the reader finds as great an enjoyment by reading his plays as when observing them on the stage. Yet he never neglected the dramatic side, which he enriched with intensified events, even though those events appeared, sometimes, in his works as less shining than the exciting intellectual argument. El-Hakim, in his 48 plays, addressed many of the social and political concerns of his age and employed all the knowledge available to him from human history and popular heritage, especially myth. He found myths lent themselves to answering the deep existential and intellectual inquiries about the essence of man's existence that preoccupied him. So El-Hakim in four of his plays at least, used the myth

in its ancient Greek form: *Oedipus Rex* (1949), *Pygmalion* (1942), and the Egyptian myth *Isis* (1955) mentioned previously in this chapter, and *The Seven Sleepers* or *The Cave Companions* (Ahl al-Kahf) as El-Hakim entitled it (1933), which will be discussed below.

The first dialectical matter raised by *The Cave Companions* is whether the story of the seven sleepers, which came in the Holy Quran and elsewhere in other cultures and religions, can be considered as a myth or not, bearing in mind that many Arab commentators see myths as absolute superstition, the reverse of fact and truth. The researcher Hamid Alawi argues that myths, in general, are not created out of nothing, but arise from some kind of incident or disaster, such as a natural astronomical accident, a historical or social event or a religious event or distinctive tradition, which give it a mythical nature (Alawi 1995, 81). According to this explanation, the fact that the story has a true basis does not contradict its mythical aspect, as it implies that what happened, was the result of the action of a higher will, beyond the ordinary will of mankind and beyond its abilities of explanation and justification. The play is concerned with three men who secretly believe in one God, Marnush and Mishlinia, the agreeable ministers of the emperor, and the shepherd, Yimlikha. After their secret is revealed, all three, and Yimlikha's dog, flee to a cave, to protect themselves from the tyranny of the idolatrous emperor who persecutes believers. Then, as a miracle from God, the men and their dog remain sleeping in the cave for a period of about three centuries. The play starts when they have just woken from their sleep in a new era with a new emperor who has the same name as the previous emperor but is different from him, as he believes in God while all the people of the country have also become believers. The people of the country are attracted by the story of the cave companions and follow the development of their story curiously, considering them to be virtuous saints. Among them is Briska, the daughter of the present emperor, who bears the same name as her grandmother, the

daughter of the previous idolatrous emperor. Through the dialogue of the play, we discover that there was a noble, emotional relationship between old Briska and Mishlinia and that she believed in God, like him, but kept her belief from her father to avoid his anger. The shepherd Yimlikha leaves the cave to find out what has happened to his sheep, the source of his livelihood, and discovers that the sheep perished centuries ago, so he returns to the cave, his sole shelter. Similarly, Marnush goes to search for his family, his wife and his son, but he discovers that they have died long since. He also returns to the cave a ruined man. However, the pivotal event in the play is the meeting of Mishlinia, the young man who is full of the passion of his earlier love, with the new Briska who has the same appearance and personality as her grandmother. The relationship develops and the granddaughter replaces her grandmother. This love makes Mishlinia the only one of the cave companions who desires the continuation of his new life.

The question here is how long can this emotional relationship, which contains no lack of loyalty or belief, be continued between them, defying the temporal barrier of many centuries. This is the intellectual argument of the play. It is not long before Briska discovers that the love that Mishlinia feels is not for her, but for her grandmother. After being shocked by this, Briska becomes more realistic. She recognises that while not taking into account the spiritual dimension, the gap of time is a material consideration. She finds a big difference between her tender body of twenty and Mishlinia's body that dates from the era of her grandmother. In addition, she cannot bear the idea that she is competing with her own grandmother, who died centuries ago. Here, Mishlinia's conflict against time and history appears, as he tries to convince Briska that love is stronger and more permanent, and urges her to accept in her soul the triumph of human existence. At the end of the play, Briska accepts his idea that the time must not be a barrier between them. She follows him to the cave, but it is too late, she finds Mishlinia

in the last moments of life. When he sees her, happiness glitters in his eyes before he dies, joined by his colleagues, Yimlikha and Marnush. Briska faces the reality, which seems to be the end of the dream and the splitting of the past from the present. However, there is one way the lovers can be joined for all time, in death. Briska chooses to be buried with the cave companions. She sneaks into the cave, the walls of which are subsequently demolished, so that the rocks cover the cave companions' bodies forming their grave and a shrine that people will often visit. As a conclusion, Briska and Mishlinia's love triumphs and is immortalized, even by what is effectively a tragic end.

In Hamid Alawi's (1995, 88) view, El-Hakim utilizes, in many of his works, myths and fairy tales, because they provide a metaphysical climate loaded with secrets and symbols. He is fond of artistic symbols and prefers symbolic expression to direct expression. Therefore, each of his dramatic characters represents a specific value and is a clear symbol. For example, in the play *The Cave Companions*, Yimlikha symbolizes instinct, Marnush symbolizes the mind, and Mishlinia symbolizes the heart and emotional life. Yet in the case of Mishlinia the heart, the love, manages to conquer time and escape its domination. Consequently, Mishlinia becomes a protagonist parallel to the mythical tragic protagonist in his liberation from the domination of time and place. In addition, he symbolizes, even by his death, the victory of subjective strength confronting the external universe.

Alawi also recognises that El-Hakim was influenced by western writers such as Ibsen, Pirandello and, especially, by Maurice Maeterlinck who, like him, searched for a nobler existence in life, which disdains the daily reality under the inspiration of the eternal laws emanating from an unknown invisible realm. However, El-Hakim, despite his affection for the literature and the mythologies of ancient Greece, differs from the western writers in his perspective on tragedy. For example, he does not accept the idea of conflict between man's will and a higher will, such as Fate. As a Muslim, he refuses

to subject fate to inquiry and doubt. As Alawi suggests in his thesis, El-Hakim substitutes this conflict with another one, whereby man struggles against a concept. The obstacle is represented sometimes by time, at others by place or a cruel event.

E-Hakim studied the presentation of this story in the Holy Quran, Surat Al-Kahf. Then he turned to the exegesis on the story's incidents as Hashim (1996, 142, 143) asserts. He then extended his research to what was similar to that story and other stories of disappearance and resurrection in different cultures to create the ending of his play, *The Cave Companions*, supplementing what was missing in them from his imagination. So, the important point in this pattern is to notice how El-Hakim was careful to match what is in the Holy Quran concerning the story with the events of the play, which he entitled, *The Cave Companions*, using the same Quranic phrase. Furthermore, he was careful to preface his published text of the play with verses from the Surat Al-Kahf (*The Cave*), Verses 11, 12¹⁵.

11] Then we drew (a veil) over their ears, for a number of years, in the Cave, (so that they heard not):

[12] Then We roused them; in order to test which of the two parties was best at calculating the term of years they had tarried! (Holy Quran)

However, some details in the Holy Quran were not specified, but left open to many possibilities, like the number of companions in the cave, as in verse number 22, Surat Al-Kahf:

[22] (Some) say they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; (others) say they were five, the dog being the sixth, doubtfully guessing at the unknown; (yet others) say they were seven, the dog being the eighth. Say thou: "My Lord know best their number; it is but few that know their (real case)." Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about (the affair of) the Sleepers (Holy Quran).

¹⁵ Translation of the Holy Quran: based on interpretation of Bin Kather and Aljalalyn, which issued a CD by Sakher Company for Computer Programs (All following Verses).

El-Hakim in his play shows only three characters in the cave, the dog being the fourth among them. This number does not contradict the Holy Quran; meanwhile it matches the requirements of dramatic intensification. The same applies to the temporal period that the seven sleepers spent in the cave. This is mentioned in the Holy Quran in verses 25 and 26 of the chapter of the Cave:

(25) So they stayed in their Cave three hundred years, and (some) add nine (more).

[26] Say: "Allah knows best how long they stayed: with Him is (the knowledge of) the secrets of the heavens and the earth: how clearly He sees, how finely He hears (everything)! They have no protector other than Him; nor does He share His Command with any person whatsoever (Holy Quran).

Thus, we find El-Hakim in his play indicating a temporal period of about three hundred years without specifying the exact number. El-Hakim espouses the explanation that came in the Holy Quran to justify why the seven sleepers' bodies do not disintegrate during the period when they are sleeping in the cave. There is, therefore, agreement in the play with what is in the Holy Quran, verse number 17, Surat Al-Kahf:

[17] Thou wouldst have seen the sun, when it rose, declining to the right from their Cave, and when it set, turning away from them to the left, while they lay in the open space in the midst of the Cave. Such are among the Signs of Allah: he whom Allah guides is rightly guided; but he whom Allah leaves to stray; for him wilt thou find no protector to lead him to the Right Way (Holy Quran).

And the dialogue given to shepherd, Yimlikha, one of the cave companions in El-Hakim's play, are these words:

Yimlikha: ... Outside the cave ... I found by the door ... It is near us and we do not know ... But there is something strange ... The heat and the light do not enter to us from it ... The sun turned away from the door in her departure and return (El-Hakim 1984, 24).

Then El-Hakim uses the same Quranic description of the companions of the cave when they appeared to the people, who were surprised by their appearance, as mentioned in Surat Al-Kahf verse 18:

[18] Thou wouldst have deemed them awake, whilst they were asleep, and We turned them on their right and on their left sides: their dog stretching forth his two fore-legs on the threshold: if thou hadst come up on to them, thou wouldst have certainly turned back from them in flight, and wouldst certainly have been filled with terror of them. (Holy Quran).

At the end of the play, also, El-Hakim is consistent with what is in the Holy Quran, about the people's desire to bury the cave companions in their cave and to make that place a shrine to be visited repeatedly, as mentioned in Surat Al-Kahf verse 21:

21] Thus did We make their case known to the people, that they might know that the promise of Allah is true, and that there can be no doubt about the Hour of Judgment. Behold, they dispute among themselves as to their affair. (Some) said, "Construct a building over them": their Lord knows best about them: those who prevailed over their affair said, "Let us surely build a place of worship over them (Holy Quran).

This play was written in 1933 and presented in the Egyptian National theatre in 1935. Its first performance, which was directed by Zaki Tulaymat, it failed in terms of audience attendance (Al-Julandani). Some writers who represent specific Islamic groups have attacked it, even in the present day. Suhayla Zayn lab-Abdin, a Saudi Islamic activist writer, in an interview with Muhammad Barrakat (2001), expressed the view that Tawfiq El-Hakim is a secularist writer who works against Islam, that is, Islam, as she perceives it, and in the play, she finds clear evidence to prove her accusation. In her opinion, El-Hakim has departed in several respects from what is described in the Holy Quran. First, he made the three cave companions not as faithful as they were originally represented, and second, he made Briska, as a religiously faithful woman, bury herself alive with the cave companions, and such an act is not acceptable in real Islamic values. Third, she claims, he denied that the story really happened, but she does not give any reason why she thinks this. Fourth, El-Hakim recreated Greek mythology, which is reflected in the conflict between human and God's will. Fifth, he neglected the main theme of the story, resurrection, and made it a side issue. Sixth, he phrased the play in a way that condemned the past in general while Muslims are proud about their past and

ancestors. In this context, he appears to be criticizing the holy past and supporting secular modern ideas such as socialism.

What is missing in Suhayla's argument is the recognition that El-Hakim wrote a play, not a religious book, nor a theological or philosophical study. A fair-minded reader who reads the play is able to conclude that the cave companions were religiously faithful, if this is the central problem, but faith does not mean stopping their minds from thinking about life issues, the miracle that had happened to them, the philosophy of life and the new religion which they had come to believe in. This is natural and is not in contradiction with the Holy Quran. Regarding the second point, it is true that Briska buried herself with the cave companions at the end of the play, but this event should be seen as a theatrical event, which carries a metaphorical meaning, rather than a real event. It is a symbol to assert that faithful love in human life is a great value, which remains alive despite time, place and even death. This is, at least, an idea worth thinking about. Readers may agree or disagree with it, there is nothing wrong in that. The writer should be appreciated for the success that he achieved in encouraging his readers or audiences to think about such an important topic. In relation to the accusation of political bias, I can see only one reference to human values in general, not socialism in particular as Suhayla would have it, even though such values can always be explained differently according to the interpreter's viewpoint. In addition, it is not a critical matter if El-Hakim was influenced by Greek mythology. It is common for civilizations to influence each other. This is not the point here; the point is in what way was El-Hakim influenced? In the current writer's opinion, he did not borrow the conflict between mankind and God's will, as Suhayla claimed, from Greek mythology, but did his best to avoid such conflict by highlighting other conflicts like the one between love and time. What El-Hakim really borrowed from Greek theatre is the technique of employing a story in a play and giving it a new reading, which does not cancel the original one, but

adds other dimensions. Furthermore, revivification is one of the main themes in the play, but it is also discussed from different viewpoints, one of which is to convey the shock that happened to the people because of the Cave Companions' miracle. Finally, it is an indicator of success in any play that people can draw different ideas from it, whether these ideas satisfy them or not. It is not the nature of art to set some fixed conclusions and work according to them. That would be close to propaganda.

Mahjub Adam, in his study, entitled "The Cave Companion Play between the Quran Text and Theatrical Deliberation" (April 2001) reports that many famous Egyptian writers and critics prized El-Hakim for his play *The Cave Companions*. For example, Taha Husayn (1982, 419-422), who is known as a pioneer of modern Arab literature, described the play in 1933 as an important event in Arabic literature. By this play, he asserted, a new genre in Arabic literature was established and new door was opened, as this was the first dramatic narrative in Arabic literature. Umar Al-Dasuqi was another writer who praised El-Hakim when he admitted that in this play, El-Hakim had laid the foundation for prose plays in modern Arabic literature. Also, Najib Al-Kilani, one of the well-known writers on Islamic literature, praised El-Hakim as one of the pioneers of Arabic theatre and said that it was a matter of pride to have such a writer in Arabic literature. On the other hand, Adam also quoted some writers who criticized the play, like Mahmud Amin Al-Alim, who found the return of the cave companions to the cave at the end of the play a kind of fabricated event imposed upon the play, and not a part of its natural progression. He described this action as one taken by those who do not want to face their problem; instead, they were willing to die weak and obedient.

Although Adam stated as a conclusion of his study that El-Hakim adapted the story from the Holy Quran, not from any other foreign source, he also asserted that El-Hakim had made many changes in its events, in order to modify it to the form of Greek tragedy, and this made the story take a different direction from the Quran's meaning. In

particular, the main characters seem uncertain about their faith and are too concerned about day-to-day matters; one about his goats, another about his wife and children, and the third about his 'mistress' - this is the word used by Adam, while the word 'lover' was used by El-Hakim (Adam 2001, 95 – 125).

In another part of the study, Adam wondered, to what extent the author has a right in religious terms, to modify a story that came from the Holy Quran, to carry his own view and meaning, which fit the circumstances of contemporary life more than the original philosophy. Was it appropriate to do as Western writers did with their myths? Of course, his answer was clear from the way he had formulated the question. He seems to be denying the right of dramatists to borrow any stories from the Holy Quran unless they relate the exact events, nature, characters and meanings. In practice, that means there is absolutely no right, because no writer could, even if he wanted to, fulfil all these obligations.

However, this raises the question of why almighty God put stories in the Holy Quran. If it were to carry a specific limited message or directive, it would have been better to state the message overtly and not metaphorically. I tend to the explanation that God put stories in order to stimulate people's thought and imagination, so that they can extract lessons and wisdom from them. Of course, people are not the same in their speculative ability and in the skill of extracting lessons or wisdom. Consequently, people come away from a story with different understandings, so why should the dramatist be denied the right to express his own reading. The second question, perhaps even more fundamentally is, is it necessary for a religiously faithful person to be perfect in every single detail? Is it necessary for a faithful person to forget everything about his present life and only focus on the life after death? Many Muslims, myself included, understand that Islam encourages us to live our present as we will live forever and act today as if we were going to die tomorrow. There is balance in Islam's view, so why should Adam

want El-Hakim to neglect this balance in his play? Furthermore, is it always right to see things in their limited literal dimension? Why should we not see them in a metaphorical dimension? Why do we not see the goats, wife, children and lover as symbols of some values? This is the more defensible when we know that the writer is employing metaphor to express the conflict in the play between love as a value and time as an obstacle, thus making everything in the play a matter of interpretation.

The article, "Pioneers of Theatre", reports that El-Hakim explained the failure of the play's première in 1935 by reference not to such matters but rather to the nature of the audience who were used to attending socially realistic comedies and not intellectual, metaphorical ones like *The Cave Companions*. Nevertheless, the play gained widespread popularity after that, not only in Egypt, but also in the wider Arab world, especially in schools, universities, and youth theatres. Few of them dealt with it on the basis of religion; most of them explored its mythical and intellectual aspects.

No doubt El-Hakim, when he wrote this play, was influenced by Western culture in more than one aspect. First, he was influenced by the values of love and forgiveness, which are central to Christianity. Briska's act of burying herself with her lover might be more highly valued in western, than Arabic or Islamic culture. Secondly, although El-Hakim did his best to avoid making any changes to the original story, which came from the Holy Quran, he created another myth and put it side by side with the Quran story. This new myth was the character of Briska, the beautiful faithful princess who remained alive in the same form for three centuries, not in the cave, but on the earth, under the sun. This stands out as being, from a realistic perspective implausible and should be viewed from a mythical perspective. One can see that El-Hakim created this character, Briska, from the influence of ancient Greek tragedy. There are obvious similarities between Briska, Antigone and Electra in their faith, spirit of challenge, brave attitude and acceptance of their fate. Moreover, Briska's act in burying herself with the cave

companions recalls that of Haemon, the son of King Creon, in Sophocles' play, Antigone. He also killed himself to be buried with his lover, Antigone, who in her turn followed her faith and buried her brother then she was walled up in a cave. In fact, the character of Briska is a device that gives El-Hakim a free hand to present his own ideas at a distance from the story of the Holy Quran, and explains why Briska appears to speak with his voice. It is obvious that El-Hakim was obliged to keep the main events in the play in agreement with the Holy Quran, but he added a new character and dimension to the plot in order to explore his thoughts about love and time when time became no obstruction to the face of real love. El-Hakim in this play presented one of the earliest structurally consummate dramas in the Arab world, which is full of sentimental and intellectual issues. He opened the door widely for the following generation to create theatrical works by employing their own culture and traditional heritage. In addition, he provided a remarkable example of how the playwright could enrich his society with intellectual concerns.

Myth is Holy because it is Fact: *the Bewitched Girl*

As was discussed in an earlier chapter, some modern definitions of myth, consider myth as a creation of the human imagination to meet some social or psychological need. No one knows how many myths are devised every day to cope with such needs, how many of them will remain and how many will vanish, but the certain thing is that some of these myths in some societies, for some reasons, remain alive in human conscience as fact. Moreover, because some influential people in a society believe in these myths as fact, nobody in society can argue with them, and the myth will be under their protection from any misuse. From this viewpoint, myth attains a cover of holiness. Such events are very common in developing countries. The idea that a person can be bewitched is an

example of a myth, which is considered as a fact in some people's minds, and which has been exploited on the Omani stage.

Death is an issue that has worried human beings from the beginning of human existence. It was the subject of many of primitive myths in various religions and has appeared in fiction and philosophy to the present day. For example, the well-known Polish director and playwright Tadeus Kantor (1899-1991) made death the main topic of all his plays, and indeed called his theatre The Death Theatre. Although art, philosophies and religions try to provide people with some explanations, simple people, when they face unusual cases of death, like a young girl of eighteen dying suddenly without any obvious reason, use their imagination to create a sort of myth around it, such as saying that she did not die or that she was bewitched. They then expand the myth to talk about other people who have been bewitched and live in isolated caves in the mountains and come into inhabited areas from time to time because they long to return to their normal lives. In the interior regions of Oman, such myths are widespread. The Omani writer, Said Salim Al-Ma'mari employed one such in his play *The Bewitched Girl*¹⁶ (1996). The play tells the story of a beautiful girl, the flower of the village, who dies accidentally, without any understandable reason. Her death causes painful shock, not only for her family, but also for all the people of the village, who start to create rumours, and make fanciful stories about her disappearance. Some of them claim that an old woman, who used to be a "witch", has bewitched her, and kept her out of sight, in revenge for the indifference of the girl's father. Others claim that the body that was buried in the grave was just a tree log. Although her father accepts what happened, as Almighty God's will, the whispers of the people and their rumours begin to affect him, and his family. Their life is turned into a real hell. Under the huge pressure of the people, the father takes his pickaxe to dig up his daughter's grave to find

¹⁶ The present writer read the text of the play and saw the performance in the Omani theatre.

her body. He is frightened when he does not find the body in the grave. He goes back home, wracked with doubt. To make things worse, he hears that some people have seen his daughter and recognized her, and that she is living in another village with another family, but nobody is sure where this village is or who the family is. For many miserable years filled with grief, the father never ceases asking about his beloved deceased daughter. Eventually, he meets a man who claims to have seen the girl with his own eyes, and to know where she is, because he has spoken to her and identified her. Furthermore, he claims that the girl misses her parents very much and wishes to come to see them, but not before getting permission from them. The man indicates that he is willing to go and bring her if they give him permission, as the girl has asked. The parents are on the edge of losing their minds, they are so astonished, and despite their fear and unbelief, they ask the man to go and bring their daughter on a certain date to the village centre square, to kill any doubt and end the whole issue forever in the presence of all people of the village.

On the appointed day, all the villagers gather in the central square of the village. The father, mother, brothers and sisters of the girl stand in front of all the people, waiting apprehensively. After a long wait, the man appears from far away, with a girl walking by his side. As they come closer, the features of the girl become increasingly clear. Finally, they arrive close to the gathering. Although seven years have passed since the girl died, people still remember her. She is clearly the same girl. All her family members rush to hug her, but the mother races to stop them.

The play ends by indicating that what happened was only a dream seen by the girl's father in his sleep, after fighting with the woman known as a "Witch". The people had warned him that this fight would not pass peacefully and that the anger of the old woman would not rest, and she would take revenge on him. The man had been affected

by what he had heard and when he went to sleep, his mind was so occupied with it that his thoughts turned into a nightmare.

In fact, the nightmare idea, although it has become a cliché, is here a way for the writer to escape the critical ending. Such a myth would have been really too difficult to deal with, if he had kept the original ending, which would have meant totally identifying with the myth. To do this would have been to deliver a message to the people that would encourage them to treat such a myth as fact, not as a matter for speculation, and this, in current writer's opinion, would not have been a correct message, because it would have misled the public. However, the dramatist, by including reference to dream, also escaped the open ending, which might leave a doubt in people's minds as to whether this myth happened in real life. Therefore, to end the play, as a dream, was the more acceptable solution, compared to the other two. Because some people still believe in them, such myths should be challenged from the beginning, explicitly or implicitly. It is a big risk to keep events presented as fact throughout the term of the play and leave the audience to interact with it up to the end, before telling them that it was a nightmare. People in this case tend to believe the myth, because it has more impact than the artificial ending. On the other hand, one may say it would be too great a challenge to many people who believe in the myth, to demolish it cruelly from the beginning.

In this play, the necessity for playwrights and directors in the theatre to be aware how to deal with a living myth is obvious. It is not a question of art, beauty and liberty, but the question is whether to enlighten or mislead the public. Perhaps it is good idea for playwrights and directors to turn this kind of myth around in order to feature its psychological and sociological aspect before altering it to material for speculation that gives them many choices other than from standing on the threshold of holiness.

From the era of prehistory, myths have played an essential role in human life and performance has been a medium through which they are conveyed. Some contemporary

experimental directors such as Peter Brook see myth as the essence of the theatre. Myth may take a position of holiness in some societies for many reasons, such as being considered part of the national heritage, history, religion and fact, but that does not mean myths should not be used as a basis for theatrical works, as long as the theatre is aware of its society's culture and beliefs. Greek civilization experienced ancient myths, in the context of these factors, and succeeded in providing humanity with great masterpieces and a theatrical heritage. However, as the Greeks showed us, when theatre employs myths, some changes may be made to those myths and as in the case of Euripides. The playwright may add something or offer a different explanation, but by doing so, they are able to provide myths with a new and vital cultural role rather than merely a retelling. Above all, theatre can never destroy the original concept of myth, because it is deeply rooted in the people's subconscious.

In the next chapter, the focus will be on examples of how playwrights and directors have chosen to challenge myth in the theatre, rather than identify with it.

References:

- ADAM, Mahjub. April 2001. "The Cave Companion Play between the Quran Text and Theatrical deliberation". *The Magazine of the College of Teachers in Riyadh No. 1*. (In Arabic)
- ALAWI, Hamid. March-1995. *The Employment of Myth in Tawfiq El-Hakim's Theatre*. Masters Degree thesis, University of Batinah, Algeria: *The Magazine of Theatre*. Pp. 79-91. (In Arabic)
- AL-HAWI, Ilea. 1980. *Aeschylus and the Grecian Tragedy*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani. (In Arabic)
- AL-JULANDANI, Ahmad Sulayman. Tawfiq El-Hakim. *Pioneers of the Theatre*. Available: <http://www.squ.edu.om/stu/tht/pioneers/hakeem.html> [Accessed 18/12/2003].
- AL-MA'MARI, Said Salim. 1996. *The Bewitched Girl*. In the researcher's collection.
- ASHER, Laleh. The Conference of the Birds. Adapted from introduction by Afkham Darbandi & Dick Davis. *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid Ud-Din Attar Penguin Books, England 1984 Lines 3475. Available: [http://www.mycweb.com/megillah/jul2000/the conference of the birds.html](http://www.mycweb.com/megillah/jul2000/the%20conference%20of%20the%20birds.html) [Accessed 18/12/2003].
- ATTAR, Farid ud-Din. 1971. *The Conference of the Birds*. Translated by C. S Nott. Boulder: Shambhala.
- BARRAKAT, Muhammad. December 2001. "A Woman by a Thousand Men". *Al-Sakher Forums* (Interview in Arabic). Available: <http://www.alsakher.com/vb2/showthread.php?threadid=24650>, [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- BHARUCHA, Rustom. 1991. "A View from India". In: David Williams, ed. *Peter Brook and Mahabharata*. London & New York: Routledge. p. 229.
- BROOK, Peter. 1989. *The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration: 1946 – 1987*. Kuwait: The National Council of Culture, Art, & Literature.
- BROWN, Larry A. November 2001. The Mahabharata. *Web pages for discussion of mythology and theatre*. Available: <http://larryavisbrown.homestead.com/files/xeno.mahabsynop.htm> [Accessed 18/12/2003].
- EL-HAKIM, Tawfiq. 1978. *Isis*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani.
- EL-HAKIM, Tawfiq. 1984. *The Cave Companions*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani. (In Arabic)
- FLOREN, Gloria. 20 September 2003. The Mahabharata, a Film by Peter Brook. Available: <http://www.miracosta.cc.ca.us/home/gflore/mahabfilm.htm> [Accessed 18/12/2003].
- HAMUDA, Abd al-aziz. 1981. *The People of Thebes*. Cairo: The Egyptian Organization for Books.
- HASHIM, Watfa. 1996. *The Heritage and its Influence and Employment in the Theatre of Tawfiq El-Hakim*. Lebanon: Dar Bin Rushd. (In Arabic)

- HEILPERN, John. 1977. *The Conference of the Birds*. London: Faber & Faber.
- HUSAYN, Kamal al-Din. 1993. *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre*. Cairo: Al-Dar Al-misria Allubnania.
- HUSAYN, Taha. 1982. *Chapters in Literature and Criticism*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi. (In Arabic)
- NICOLESCU, Basarab. 9 April 2001. Peter Brook and Traditional Thought. *Gurdjieff International Review*, V. 4 (2). Translated by David Williams. Available: <http://www.gurdjieff.org/nicolescu3.htm> [Accessed 18/12/2003].
- SHARAWI, Abd al-Muti. 1984. *Euripides*. International Theatre Series. Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, & Literature. (In Arabic)
- THE HOLY QURAN. 1996. Translation of the *Holy Quran*: CD based on interpretation of Ibn Kather & Aljalalyn. Saudi Arabia: Sakher Company for Computer Programs.
- VERNANT, Jean-Pierre and VIDAL- NAQUET, Pierre. 1973. *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. Paris: Masberu.
- WILLIAMS, David. 1991. *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata*. London & New York: Routledge.

Chapter 4:

Identification or Confrontation with Myth

Myth is a raw material for those involved in theatre, who must decide how, as playwrights and directors; they are going to deal with it. In this chapter the focus will be on identifying with or challenging myth and those approaches that fall between them or combine the two through allusion to the experiences of pioneer directors in modern theatre, and plays of some Western, Arabic and Omani playwrights.

Grotowski and Mnouchkine: Notable Practical Experiences

The first example is the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, who established in 1959 a “Theatre Laboratory”, in which he explored the potential of what that is theatre shorn of the technical devices and realistic performance of the contemporary European theatre, he called this “The Poor Theatre”. What is important in his work, in relation to this research, is that he attempted to push his actors to their absolute physical and mental limits to make them rid themselves of any memorized stereotyped sound, actions or former styles to become a ‘via negativa’. He also pushed them to discover their inner psyche. In his view, when human beings experience a psychological shock, a moment of horror or happiness, they do not behave naturally, but will use different sorts of vocal and physical signs. Those are the primary terms of expression, which communicate with the audience through the hidden structure of signs and the contrasts between gesture and voice, voice and word, word and thought or will and action. Despite being shaped by a contemporary materialistic consciousness, through such practices, in Grotowski’s view, we can discover shared roots, and the true effects of ritual and myth. He argues that myth is a primitive attitude, yet at the same time is a complex matter, which has an

independent existence in the psychology of the societies, which suggests collective behaviours and orientations.

Then I clearly saw that myth was both a primeval situation, and a complex model with an independent existence in the psychology of social groups, inspiring group behaviour and tendencies (Grotowski 1968, 22).

He argues that the traditional forms of myth are always changing; they disappear sometimes and return in new forms at other times. Moreover, spectators in modern theatre respond as individuals in their relationship to collective myth. That means it is very difficult to create shock in the inner psyche and, hence, to unite the individual's "truth" and the collective "truth" of myth.

The spectators are more and more individuated in their relation to the myth as corporate truth or group model, and belief is often a matter of intellectual conviction. This means that it is much more difficult to elicit the sort of shock needed to get at those psychic layers behind the life-mask. Group identification with myth – the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth – is virtually impossible today (Grotowski 1968, 23).

He concludes that, for this reason, our task in the contemporary theatre is to confront the myth, not to identify with it. In other words, we have to continue trying to convey the myth, while retaining the reflection of personal experience, to understand how our individual problems are intimately connected to our roots or to general human truths.

In my work as a producer, I have therefore been tempted to make use of archaic situations sanctified by tradition, situation (within the realms of religion and tradition) which are taboo. I felt a need to confront myself with these values (Grotowski 1968, 22).

He maintained that myths within plays are brought out in performance by 'profanation'. Nevertheless, the question here is how the myth can be challenged in the modern theatre. This is one of the important issues, which will be discussed in this chapter through discussing the experiences of many directors and playwrights in modern theatre.

An example of another director who challenges myth, as will be shown, is Ariane Mnouchkine, one of the most famous women in the world of French theatre today. She established her experimental theatre, Théâtre du Soleil, in 1964. Since the early days of her career, Mnouchkine has tried to distinguish her theatrical productions by employing creative approaches that would capture the audience's attention. She formed a multicultural company, which was established spontaneously without any previous plan. Her works with this company have always been influenced by Asian philosophies, in particular, Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition, she employs many Eastern elements in her works such as traditional dance, music, costumes and even Japanese acting style that is absolutely different than the classic Greek 'Aristotelian' tradition (Goetsch 1994). She is very keen to make the spectator of her performances realise that the barrier between him and the performers is no more than an illusory line. She tries to produce a magical theatrical world in which barriers between performers and audience and between people from different nationalities dissolved (McDonald 1992, 243 – 244). In addition, Mnouchkine sees in ancient myth the best ground to plant her dreams.

Mnouchkine has a long history of presenting classical theatrical works such as those of Shakespeare, Molière and Gorki, from a fresh viewpoint. These early experiences have led her to present since 1991 several tragedies including one, *Les Atrides* based on Oresteian trilogy by Aeschylus. The trilogy narrates a myth of murder and revenge which has led to the murder of the King Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegistheus, who himself is avenging Agamemnon's sin against his father. Agamemnon had sacrificed his daughter Iphigeneia to assure him of fair winds to Troy. The pattern of revenge continues with his daughter Electra, who encourages her brother Orestes to murder both Clytemnestra and Aegistheus, until the cycle is finally broken by the intervention of the Goddess Athena. Although Mnouchkine based her production *Les Atrides* on this play, she created new meanings. Marianne MacDonald (1992, 242 –

243) of the University of California describes Mnouchkine's production as one that talks about the present through symbol and metaphor from the past. It portrays grief for the role that has been played by men in power to achieve their ambitious aims, at the expense of women and children, who are always the victims. She believes that Mnouchkine succeeded in using theatre magic instead of direct preaching to illustrate that these actions are not new; but have existed since ancient times. Therefore, the show's pain stems from old, sad memories. Mnouchkine reveals that her theatrical company learnt much from this performance, especially regarding the meaning of sacrifice, as Iphigenie was willing to sacrifice herself for her country's sake. She intended this as an allegory of the French resistance in the Second World War. Mnouchkine, in the performance, used the ancient myth to show sympathy for women, especially when she featured the reasons why Clytemnestra killed her husband, Agamemnon. In contrast to Aeschylus, Mnouchkine presented Clytemnestra as a sensitive woman and an agonized mother because of her daughter's death, suffering from a sin committed by her husband. In contrast, she presented Agamemnon as a hateful totalitarian who wanted to make Clytemnestra, as a wife and mother, behave as he desired, and agree with him in anything he intended to do. This aim was however never realised as Clytemnestra was portrayed as an autonomous person.

The Oresteian myth was the basis for many European theatrical productions in the last century. Professor Anton Bierl (1998) has made a study of ancient Greek tragedies presented in the European theatres in the period 1900 – 1995, focusing on ten European incarnations of Aeschylus' *Oresteian Trilogy*. His book addresses theory as well as history, illustrating how each performance attempted to convey its director's or actor's ideological position. According to their themes, Bierl divides these productions into three main ideological categories. He calls the first one the "evolutionary" or "affirmative" model, in which most features of tragedy and myth have been neglected

for the sake of a political message, such as Hans Oberländer's 1900 Berlin production, which, he says, "Served as a celebration of the newly-created Prussian state with its emphasis on law and order" (Bierl 1998).

Another example referred to is Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1960 production of the Teatro Popolare Italiano (TPI), an employment of myth to indicate the triumph of communism as the final stage in the establishment of a classless society. Bierl also reviews Peter Stein's 1980 production, which was an invitation to leave behind the bloody past and create a modern life where law rules the people in all the issues of their lives. Bierl asserts that all three productions used tragedy to express their shared ideology and optimistic view of a glorious future.

The second category contains an ambivalent group, which were not really sure about their attitude. Bierl gives two examples of this category, both of which developed their attitude from an affirmative to an ambivalent one. Pier Paolo Pasolini, the poet and filmmaker who directed the 1960 TPI production, made an Aeschylean sequel in 1966 and a film, *Appunti per una Orestiade africana* in 1969, when he had lost sympathy with the Italian communist party. He became more realistic than idealistic and recognised the fragile and provisional nature of modern life, even in Moscow itself. Peter Stein used the play to critique post Soviet society. In 1994 he restaged his original 1980 production set in post-Communist Moscow. In the earlier production, it was seen as the ideal place compared with Western countries, but in the later production, life was shown to be more complicated and subject to serious problems. Bierl offers this explanation: "Stein's production opened only a few months after Yeltsin's violent dissolution of the Duma in October 1993" (Bierl 1998). Bierl puts Ariane Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides* in a third category in which drama features more than any other element. Although such a performance adopts a pessimistic view in general, it employed the essential values of ancient tragedy and myth. Even the intellectual arguments are

employed to serve the drama, not to expand beyond it, so many questions remain open, seeking answers.

In the United States, another production of the Oresteian trilogy shared features with the Ariane Mnouchkine's production. Richard E. Davis (1994), of the Department of Communication at the University of San Francisco, was interested in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* for over thirty-five years, first as a student and then for over twenty years as a Professor who taught it in his classes. He records that his main question had always been how this play, based on an ancient myth, could be presented successfully in the theatre for a modern audience. He found the answer through his own production, as well as from the example of Mnouchkine and the Theatre du Soleil. Both productions shared some important features such as the language and themes. "At the same time the language of the two plays and their themes would have to be maintained so as to not violate the intent of the playwrights as I saw them" (Davis 1994). He shares Mnouchkine's view of Clytemnestra, as the focal character in the play, considered as a victim, not a felon. "Clytemnestra is the central figure in the *Agamemnon* and if she represents anything it is not evil incarnate but justice" (Davis 1994). Davis illustrates how the two plays sided with women, Clytemnestra, against men, Agamemnon. "It is also easy to see how the women of the two plays grow during the progress of the evening while the men stay static, essentially the same at the end as at the beginning" (Davis 1994).

Although Davis draws attention to the fact that both productions began with Euripides' *Iphigenie at Aulis* then continued with *Agamemnon*, he explains that whereas the performance time of Mnouchkine's play was ten hours that of his play was only two, because he made significant cuts in order to fit into the standard evening of theatre.

To what extent an audience may agree or disagree with Mnouchkine and Davis' viewpoints is not the point in the context of this research. What is really important is

that, although Mnouchkine and Davis keep the myth's form, event and main characters, they do not yield to its message, but modify the message to address their audience with a new viewpoint. Thus, these productions show how myth, even an ancient one, can be a vital topic in modern theatre, interacting with different cultural elements, and can carry messages related to current issues.

Phaedra from Racine to Kane

In relation to plays which adopt or alter classical myths, Racine's *Phèdre* and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* offer a useful illustration. One of the most famous of Greece myths is the myth of Phaedra, in which Phaedra falls in love with her stepson Hippolytus, the son of her husband by his first wife. Because Hippolytus rejects her love, Phaedra hangs herself, leaving a note denouncing Hippolytus as her seducer. Subsequently his father Theseus, who learns belatedly of his misjudgement but is unable to regain his son from death, banishes Hippolytus. According to Greek mythology, this story exposes "the revenge of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, on Hippolytus for neglecting her in favour of Artemis, the goddess of chastity" (James 1994, 1). The first known play written about this myth was in 429 BC, by Euripides and entitled *Hippolytos*, and this was the first attempt to identify with and confront the myth. He identifies with the myth in that he took from it his raw material, then confronted it by adapting that material according to the technical demands of a play, emphasizing the impact of religious mysteries on Grecian life, besides the sexual imperative as an outward topic of the myth (Euripides 1974, 3). The events of the play are depicted as a well-crafted plan by the goddesses Aphrodite and Artemis. The first introduces the plot at the beginning of the play, while the second confirms to Theseus, at the end, that the sin took place (Euripides 1974, 17, 18, 77, 78). Seneca, in the Roman era, used the same myth with a few changes of events, but apart from Neptune, the Gods

have no role in Seneca's play, which has become a drama of human passion (James 1994, 2). He strengthened the narrative by making Phaedra remain alive after her plot, which caused the death of Hippolytus, and at the end of the play, she confesses her guilt and in despair commits suicide. Here, the playwright mostly identifies with the myth and confronts it slightly, by making some changes in the events at the end of the play when he uses it somewhat to explore human nature.

In the French neo-classical period of the 17th century, Jean Racine (1639-1699) was influenced by ancient Greek and Roman myths in plays such as *Andromaque*, *Iphigenie* and *Phèdre*. In his *Phèdre* (1677), Racine adapts the ancient myth to create a play in harmony with his period. Hippolytus becomes the young lover of a partially invented figure, Aricie, an enemy princess, and potential pretender to the throne of Athens. Although Phèdre suffers from the pain of jealousy when she learns that Hippolytus is in love with another woman, she does not prepare a conspiracy against him, but yields to the resolve, which had been taken by the gods. In spite of that, after Hippolytus's death, she is filled with remorse, and finally, she takes poison and dies in despair. The question that may be asked here is what distinguishes Racine's play from other plays, which were written by his contemporaries in the seventeenth century, around the same myth, such as the *Hippolytus* (1573) of Robert Garnier, the *Bellerophon* (1672) of Philippe Quinault, or the *Hippolyte* (1675) of Bidar? James and Jondorf attribute the difference to Racine's employment of an incestuous relationship as a focal point in the structure of the myth, while the others flinch from dealing with this topic, which deprives the myth of its special force, the sense of tragic guilt. Furthermore, in Racine's play;

All characters are bound together by tight family connections which not only help to create a sense of intimacy but also form an element in the design. In Act One, Theseus is absent and we meet only two members of his family, his son and his wife. At the end of the play, both of these are dead and Theseus is seen trying to reconstruct a family by giving Aricie, who is his kinswoman, a place she should have been able to claim as Hippolytus' wife, a place as his daughter (James 1994, 21-22).

Generally, Racine identified with, rather than confronted the myth or, at least, his approach fell somewhere between.

In the twentieth century, the British playwright Sarah Kane used the myth of Phaedra in a contemporary play entitled *Phaedra's Love* (1996). She, through the play, destroys the mask of equivocation and demonstrates the limitless levels of violence and incestuous relationship hidden in the soul of modern civilized society at the end of the twentieth century. Kane does not abstain from going into the details of the sexual and emotional desire of Phaedra towards Hippolytus, yet she attempts to elucidate it in an effective depiction. In an explicit scene, scene four, Phaedra gives expression to her flaming sexual desire for Hippolytus, her stepson, who lies down on the sofa and yields to her with a silent doubtful refusal and gross laziness. As we read in the text description:

They both stare at the television.

Eventually, 'Phaedra' moves over to Hippolytus.

He does not look at her.

She undoes his trousers and performs oral sex on him.

He watches the screen throughout and eats his sweets.

As he is about to come, he makes a sound.

Phaedra begins to move her head away - he holds it down and comes in her mouth without taking his eyes off the television.

He releases her head (Kane 1996, 76).

So, in the description of this scene, we find in the setting, things such as a sofa, television, and sweets. In setting, it is the present with obvious appropriate props and atmosphere. However, it repeats an old sexual obscenity, extending the sexual act to its lowest level, of “oral sex”.

Hippolytus in this play is not, as in earlier plays, a handsome young man. He is a flabby, bored, lazy youth, a dyspeptic who never tires of eating sweets and fattening snacks. He is unemployed, sleeps a lot, and does not practise any activity during the daytime except watching television programmes while prostrate on the couch. Nevertheless, in spite of

all these faults, he is able to obtain a woman's appreciation and admiration. Girls compete, without any sensible reason, to offer him gifts in order to get close to him and have sex with him. Therefore, we read in the play that Hippolytus tells Phaedra:

Hippolytus: I know what you meant.

You are right. Women find me much more attractive since I have become fat.

They think I must have a secret.

I am fat. I am disgusting. I am miserable.

But I get lots of sex. Therefore...? (Kane 1996, 73)

Hippolytus invents his own philosophy, that women like fat miserable men; it does not matter if there is any logic behind it or not. Words are a human creation, invented to present lies and hide facts. Why should every word carry a meaning? Most words have no deep meaning and deliver everything except our real feelings. After all, life itself has no logic, and death, in a moment, ends everything. Here, as well as in many other scenes in the play, hints of absurd theatre can be found.

The problematic point here, which strengthens the plot of the play, is that Phaedra's daughter, Strophe, is one of those girls who have affairs with Hippolytus. Therefore, Strophe, in this text, is the competitor of her mother, Phaedra, for Hippolytus's love. She becomes a source of anxiety for Phaedra and a cause of her annoyance with Hippolytus. Therefore, there is no astonishment when, in revenge, she commits suicide, leaving evidence accusing Hippolytus of seducing her and engaging in an incestuous relationship with her.

During his investigation and trial, Hippolytus does not defend himself, ignoring Strophe's entreaties. He seems to be a lost character, not sure about anything. He is not sure whether he had a real incestuous relationship with Phaedra or not. He is not sure whether she tempted him or he himself tempted her. After all, there is nothing true in life. Life and death, according to him, are duplications, or at least they are two faces of one currency. Although he believes that his crime has at least defined him as an

individual, he is not sure whether he is desirous of life, which lacks to varying degrees psychological balance, or desirous of death, which in all cases will come sooner or later. Furthermore, he is not satisfied with earthly punishment, but also refuses the mercy and forgiveness of heaven. When the priest comes to make him beg God for forgiveness, he answers that he does not believe in God or the afterlife. Not content with that, he cannot avoid the priest's seduction, so that he gets involved in a despicable sexual practice with him. In scene six, we read this dialogue:

Hippolytus: I cannot sin against a God I do not believe.

Priest: No

Hippolytus: A non-existent God cannot forgive.

Priest: No. You must forgive yourself.

Hippolytus: I have lived by honesty, let me die by it.

Moreover, at the end of this scene we read:

Priest: There is a kind of purity in you.

Hippolytus: He cannot make me good.

Priest: No.

Hippolytus: Last line of defence for the honest man.

Free will is what distinguishes us from the animals. (*He undoes his trousers.*)

And I have no intention of behaving like a ... animal.

Priest: (Performs oral sex on Hippolytus)

Hippolytus: Leave that to you. (He comes. He rests his hand on top of the Priest's head)

Go.

Confess.

Before you burn. (Kane 1996, 90)

In this play, there are no Gods influencing human life directly, but there is a priest who represents them. Priests, in Kane's opinion, are not pure, but are full participants in sin with human beings, or even more, they initiate the sin and involve human beings in it. By depicting such an image of priests, Sara Kane criticizes not only contemporary religious clerics, but all clerics throughout history, and perhaps the religious

establishment in general, as a power that in some periods controlled all human being's lives and still affects some of them. This is one of the most important features of contemporary theatre; there is no limit, no taboo, on the thoughts and images.

Nevertheless, it seems that Kane is unwilling to end her play there and none of her main characters is devoid of sexual sin. She wants to tell us that sin, in her perspective, is a main feature in the configuration of the human soul. So she creates another shock when she reveals another old forbidden sexual relationship, between Strophe and her stepfather Theseus, Hippolytus's father and Phaedra's husband. Theseus appears suddenly after a long absence to demand retribution and punishment for his son regarding the seduction of his wife. Therefore, he is quick to approve the death penalty imposed on his son. In the last scene, we see Hippolytus carried along outside the court where the people swarm from amongst the audience around Theseus and Strophe. Hippolytus breaks free from the police officers holding him and hurls himself into the crowd, who start tearing his organs to bits. He also falls into the audience suggesting that they too are implicated in the situation. Strophe tries to protect him, but Theseus kills her during the melee without recognizing her, then participates with the public in cutting off Hippolytus's reproductive organs and burning them in the fire. Then Theseus kills himself by cutting his own throat. The play ends with the protagonist's body lying in death, as if the writer wants to tell us that nothing can obliterate the sin except fire or death.

This play by Sarah Kane is an attempt to draw our attention to the human soul and how it is stained with tremendous sin. Whatever we try to cover it with, a luxury garment or a tender mask, the sin remains beneath the cover. In this play, we find that the sin is doubled. Moreover, the feeling of loss is doubled as well. The mockery, by the writer, encompasses all the principles and human values agreed by contemporary society. The writer practises a deliberate destruction of all kinds of barriers and restrictions,

instigating premeditatedly all latent desires in the conscious and unconscious human mind. This play has a hidden political agenda from the first scene, the crowd outside the court shouting, protesting and doing everything except knowing the facts, and this representation of the public at various points in the play make it also a social play. But predominantly it expresses, in the development of its events, the dreams and internal apocalypses of the unconscious mind, thus the elements of Surrealism and the Absurd.

Kane did not care a lot about the metaphysical aspects of mythical thought, nor its ritual aesthetics. Those matters were not what mainly concerned her when she drew on an ancient myth. What she drew from the myth was the subject, which was specifically about forbidden incestuous adultery, a perpetual subject through history. On the artistic level, she took from the myth its dynamism in development and the pattern if not the detail of the dramatic events and plot.

This modern British play incorporates an ancient myth recast after a lapse of more than 25 centuries. As readers or audience, we discover that the myth still has meaning and significance, in spite of the change of time and society, and can be an important resource for an effective play. Finally, Kane demolished the myth and rebuilt it according to her time and viewpoint keeping the essence of the myth but developing its implications. This play reveals how the modern theatre can freely and boundlessly confront ancient myth.

***Don Juan* the Nature of Myth and the Nature of Play**

In *Don Juan*, Molière not only uses myth as a resource in a play, but also alters its to turn a tragic myth into a comic play. In this play written in 1665, Molière employed the myth of Don Juan to satirize the manners and ideas of his time. The myth of Don Juan originally came from the Spanish folk tradition. The story concerns Don Juan, a controversial figure with contrasting characteristics of personality. On the one hand, he

is a very intellectual person with a good command of logic and philosophy; on the other hand, he is an absolute villain, a famous lover who achieves more than a thousand sexual conquests. In one of his mythic adventures, Don Juan tries to seduce the young noble woman, Donna Ana, but unluckily for him, her father, the Commander, discovers his attempt, and in his anger, challenges Don Juan to a duel. In the duel, Don Juan kills the Commander and escapes. Although Donna Ana and her fiancé, Don Ottavio, try their best to catch Don Juan to exact revenge, they are unable to do so because of his wily nature. Later on, as Don Juan is passing by the tomb of the dead Commander, he hears a voice coming from the statue on the tomb, warning him that he will be punished for the evils he has done. Don Juan's reaction is ironic; he jokingly invites the statue to have dinner with him. Here, the plot takes a mythological aspect, when the statue comes to life and arrives at Don Juan's house at the promised time. Don Juan, continuing to play his role as a brave man, accepts the invitation of the statue to a different banquet. Whether or not he is aware he is walking into a trap, as the statue leads him, a fiery pit opens and the statue drags Don Juan off to hell.

Although the play *Don Juan* depends, basically, on the well-known myth, in line with Molière's style, the play's form departs widely from the mythical aspect, for the sake of the intensification of the satirical comedy. David Whitton in his book, *Molière's Don Juan*, argues that what attracted Molière to this story "was doubtless it is proven box-office" (Whitton 1995, 2). Elsewhere he comments that "the need for a new play to revive the repertoire must have been very pressing" (Whitton 1995, 2) and he concludes "the comedy in the play offers few pointers to how we should evaluate him – indeed, it compounds the ambiguity of Don Juan as a character. In satire, laughter generally serves to direct criticism" (Whitton 1995, 5). The mythical aspects, in Don Juan as a character, lie in his superhuman sexual appetite, which enable him to seduce more than a thousand women and deceive them. This idea was not brought up in the play as a

philosophical or symbolic issue, but rather as a matter for comic amusement. The same thing happens with the return of the statue to life. The return to life is explored to create a humorous situation, more than as a matter for intellectual meditation or metaphysical concern, such as is usually the core in myth. Molière concentrated on Don Juan as a comic character, which would appeal to his contemporary audience more than as a mythological protagonist. Whitton describes how Molière modified the character: “Molière transfers the interest from the Don’s sexual exploits, which are reduced to illustrative incidents, to his psychology. He endows him with a powerful intellect and allows him to justify his actions in terms of a systematic programme of rational free-thinking” (Whitton 1995, 3). He comments elsewhere, however, that the character “may simply be using his professed philosophy as a convenient cloak for a selfish way of life” (Whitton 1995, 3). He argues, “The play functions at one level as a comedy of manners. At another level, in keeping with the classical interest in human nature, it becomes a portrait of an individual” (Whitton 1995, 3).

Molière wrote a comic masterpiece, which continues to attract the attention of theatre companies to the present day. In order to do this, although he had great opportunity to enrich his play with mythological values, he simplified those values in the interest of creating a comedy, which does not tend to deal with the metaphysical but with the physical. Therefore, Molière presented in his play, *Don Juan*, a mythic narrative or character without a metaphysical dimension. Molière is neither identifying with the myth nor confronting it but merely employing it as a narrative device.

Experience from Oman: *The Lament of the Monster*

In Oman, there are numerous kinds of myths, some of which have strong roots in the society’s beliefs, and this makes the task of directors and playwrights more complicated if they decide to employ them in the theatre. The essential question relevant to this

chapter is, whether they should identify with the myth or confront it. In each case, there are some advantages as well as perils. The advantage of identifying with myth is to make peace with the society and interact with the audience in the way they like and support. For example, a great number of people still believe in jinn, a spirit in Muslim mythology that could take on human or animal form, and who penetrate the human spirit and cause different kinds of illnesses. For that reason, they do not go to the hospitals and clinics to visit a physician when they become ill; instead, they go to sorcerers who deceive them, pretending that they have the ability to fight the jinn. These beliefs are reflected in Omani folklore in many forms, as will be explained in later chapters. Many nations worldwide lived under circumstances of similar beliefs in some stages of their development. Many plays and comic sketches, hundreds or maybe more, in Oman deal with that myth. The great majority of them take the same approach, ridiculing these people and phenomena severely. A few identify with the myth and treat it as fact. Both ways are inconsistent with the theatre's essential role in influencing the nation's consciousness. Identification with such myth is not acceptable because it misleads people with wrong concepts, so the way left is to confront this myth. Here, the fundamental question is, how could we confront it? To confront such myth in the theatre, first we have to confess that this myth is an integral part of our culture; otherwise, there is no point in dealing with it. Second, we have to accept the concept that every myth has its particular advantages, so it is our task to find what advantages exist in the myth as a phenomenon and reinforce them. However to apply that to the mentioned example, it is also important to enlighten people about the need to visit physicians, while also drawing their attention to the fact that their practices with sorcerers might make them feel better for several reasons. First, most people in Oman are committed to Islam in their beliefs and that makes them feel comfortable with sorcerers who often recite verses from the Holy Quran and some popular charms.

Secondly, in many cases, the problem is psychological more than merely physical, or even if there are physical problems, people have psychological side effects. Therefore, when sorcerers ask them to perform certain actions to fight the jinn and defeat it, patients do it sincerely, and when they finish, they feel a kind of release. In that way, the ritual of myth is consistent with the theory of ancient drama; such effects of purification were well known in ancient Greek drama. This effect is also consistent with modern psychological theories like those put forward by Freud and others in the early period of last century and which were mentioned in the second chapter of this research. Therefore, the theatre's task here may be to enlighten people about these matters, not in order to abolish the myth and ritual, but to preserve and consciously exploit them.

Very few plays in Oman deal consciously with myth. One of them is *The Lament of the Monster*¹⁷, which was written by the Omani playwright, Muhammad Al-Rahbi, in 1998.

This play employs a very popular myth, especially with those people living in coastal villages. No doubt, similar myths exist in some other countries with a similar environment. Such villages depend for their lives on the sea, fishing and travelling. Sometimes fishermen as well sailors and travellers go to the sea and never come back. The public's collective conscious comes up with a myth of a monster in the sea that eats people, as a kind of explanation, thereby fulfilling one of the features of 'mythification'. The play takes place in one of these villages where many local people are missing at sea. News spreads about a monster that is not satisfied with eating people in the sea, but attacks villages on the seaboard. Some people in the village, including a dwarf, swear they have seen it around the coast. People gather around the "Sheikh", the leader of the village, demanding that they band together, arming themselves in order to fight the monster. The Sheikh, whose house is in a safe area, far away from the coast, does not want to bother himself with such a struggle. Therefore, he tries to calm the crowd by

¹⁷ This play is not published. It was presented on the stage in 1998.

exaggerating the nature of the monster and belittling their abilities. Finally, he dismisses them with a promise that he will devise a perfect plan to save the village from the monster's offences. Day after day goes by, but the plan never appears, and more people disappear, and young men leave to live elsewhere. The village remains sad and hopeless. The Sheikh neglects everything except his family and his own welfare. The only person retaining the will to fight the monster is a young girl belonging to a very humble family in the village. She is beautiful and all the young men in the village have their eyes on her, hoping to marry her, including the Sheikh's son. She returns his love, saying she will not marry anyone unless he pays her dowry by killing the monster. The girl is depressed when none of the young men accepts the challenge, even her lover, and the Sheikh's son. Most of them prefer to emigrate from the village rather than face the monster. In this crucial moment, the girl makes her great courageous decision; she will face the monster alone, face-to-face. Many local people, including the Sheikh's son, try to dissuade the girl from her decision. Even the dwarf asks her to rethink and tries to scare her by describing the monster as a powerful creature, beastly, merciless, who cruelly eats his victims, but the girl will not listen to anybody, she holds fast to her idea. So after midnight, she leaves the residential area in the village and goes towards the shore and stays there, waiting for the monster to approach, while all the people of the village are hiding, watching her from a distance. After a few critical moments, the monster appears in a very frightening shape, roaring continuously and trying to scare the girl and make her escape, but she remains firm. Gradually, the monster moves closer, roaring louder, but the girl bravely confronts it, and finally they come face to face. The monster calms a little, looks at the girl, and begs her to run away. At this moment, the girl finds herself strengthened with courage that makes her dare to attack the monster, her hands penetrating his body. The bombshell is that the body of the monster is made of paper. As soon as the people of the village realize this fact, they rush

towards the monster and tear away the paper, until they are surprised to see the dwarf sitting inside the body, crying. The final part of the play concerns the trial of the dwarf by the villagers, who try to find out why he did these things. The dwarf answers that this was his revenge on them because they mocked him and wronged him by ignoring his right to be an equal member of the community. When they tell him that this does not justify killing people, the dwarf defends himself by saying that he did not kill them, they were killed by fear, which was embedded in their psyches. He argues that the girl was the only person who had no fear, and this is why she defeated him. Then he confesses that he loves the girl, because she was the only person in the village who cared about him. With this scene, the play ends.

Regarding the employment of the myth in the play, some important features should be mentioned. The writer identifies with the myth from the beginning of the play until just before the final scene. He seems at first glance to have adopted the myth as it is, but the readers or audience realize at the end when he reveals that the monster was no more than the lowly dwarf, that he was working consciously against identifying with the myth, in other words, he was confronting the myth not face to face, but indirectly. Such a strategy in dealing with myth in the theatre succeeds in some plays, like *The Lament of the Monster*, because it does not directly challenge the readers or audience in their strong beliefs in myth, yet it puts them in the situation where they, themselves, discover another facet or facets of the myth. However, side-by-side with the myth, the writer raises issues of reality, which is actually much more his concern than the myth and, obviously, such concerns spontaneously penetrate from the writer to the readers, to the extent that it might be said that readers and audience, for a while during the play, forget about myth and pay all their attention to the aspect of social reality. Such moments are required in any play that deals with myth, in order to join the past with the present and distinguish what the fiction is trying to tell us about life. Although the inclusion of

moral lessons in the play, in particular the one illustrating that what happened in the play was merely a result of bad treatment of the dwarf, might be criticised, it is acceptable from the point of view that this play was presented to a society which has limited experience of theatre and which would expect a moral conclusion.

In conclusion, whether to identify with or confront myth is always of concern in those plays, which are based on myth. Those plays may, of course, identify with or confront myth to different extents, in either form or content. It is understandable that the contemporary playwright or director who re-presents an ancient myth is going to present it with some of his own views, influenced by his character, era and circumstances. Theatre can adapt myth to identify with it, featuring its beauty and ideas, but it is necessary, as was suggested above, in some cases, not to show it as fact. On the other hand, theatre can always confront myth by re-employing its beauty, raising its essential questions and mixing it with other cultural elements, in order to change the attitude towards it partly or totally. Although there is no specific limit to what extent playwrights and directors can identify with or confront myths, it is important sometimes as myths usually represent socio-cultural values, if the audience are not to be alienated, to protect the essential concerns and nature of myth, in particular in known ancient myths. Perhaps for the latter reason, in no place more than the world of politics have myths been exploited as a valuable source for use in propaganda. This is what will be discussed in the next chapter.

References:

- AESCHYLUS, 1956. *The Oresteian Trilogy: Agamemnon, Choephoroi, Eumenides*. Translated with introduction by P. VELLACOTT, London: Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- AL-RAHBI, Muhammad. 1998. *The Lament of the Monster*. In the researcher's collection.
- BIERL, Anton. 1997. Anton Bierl, Die Orestie des Aischylos auf der modernen Bühne. Hays, Gregory, ed. *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 98.5.21. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Available: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/1998/98.5.21.html> [Accessed 17/12/2003].
- DAVIS, Richard E. 1994. Creating Clytemnestra. *Didaskalia Ancient Theatre Today*. Department of Communication, University of San Francisco. Available: <http://didaskalia.open.ac.uk/issues/vol1no3/davis.html> [Accessed 17/12/2003].
- DON JUAN. Available: <http://www.theatrehistory.com/French/donjuanoool.html> [Accessed 10/10/2003].
- EURIPIDES. 1974. *Hippolytos*. Translated by Robert Bagg. London: Oxford University Press.
- GOETSCH, Sallie. October 1994. Fusing Greek and Asian Drama. *Didaskalia Ancient Theatre Today*. V. 1, 4. The School of Theatre Studies. University of Warwick. Available: <http://didaskalia.open.ac.uk/issues/vol1no4/goetsch.html> [Accessed 17/12/2003].
- GROTOWSKI, Jerzy. 1968. "Towards a Poor Theatre". In Eugenio. Barba, ed. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen.
- JAMES, Edward & Gillian, JONDORF,. 1994. *Racine's Phèdre*. London & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- KANE, Sarah. 1996. *Blasted & Phaedra's Love*. London: Methuen.
- MCDONALD, Marianne. 2000. "Life and Death in Mnouchkine's Theatre". In: SELAIHA, Nehad, editor, Forum Magazine. *The Exposition, Dismounting, Ideology and other studies*. Egypt: Egyptian General Organization for Books. PP. 242-267. (In Arabic)
- WHITTON, David. 1995. *Molière's Don Juan*. London: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Chapter 5:

Myth and Political Theatre

Politics can be seen to penetrate everyday life. In other words, every thing in life has a political dimension. Consequently, every play has a political dimension, as long as it deals with human life. On the other hand, politics has never been far from myth, in either the ancient era or today. Although there is a lot to say about the differences between political science and myth, there are some shared elements. In this chapter, through analysing some examples, I will attempt to demonstrate how political theatre applies myths to its current message.

Myth and Politics: Twins from the very beginning in the Epic Theatre

Since myths in early history were associated with Gods, demigods, other supernatural powers, kings and Empires, politics were integral to them. Ancient myths always carried instructions, from supernatural powers or kings to the people, either to modify some previous situations and behaviour or develop something new. However, critics use the term political to describe those plays or myths, which deal with two specific topics. First, the myth or play describing the struggle of a nation against a foreign enemy in the form of colonisation or military invasion, for example when Agamemnon, the king of Thebes, led a war against Troy in the Oresteian Trilogy¹⁸. Secondly, the myth or play describes the outbreak of civil conflict because of a crisis over governance, especially between the legal ruler and a rebel, as in the conflict in the myth of Isis. Sometimes the conflict arises between the king and priests or diviners, as in the myth of Oedipus.

¹⁸ See previous chapter 4, Ariane Mnouchkine.

However, the modern use of the term political theatre has a different meaning. It means, mostly, plays which represent left wing politics. This dramatic form was established in the twentieth century particularly by the German director and dramatist, Piscator and Brecht, and became known as 'Epic' Theatre.

Epic Theatre, works on different principles than those of aesthetically experimental theatre. It is primarily utilitarian. The pioneers of this form asked themselves the essential question, do people any more need to be involved with the illusion of drama? Their answer was a clear no, there had been enough illusion that only mystified the audience. They emphasized that the era in which they lived was one needing intellectual facts and rational thought, in which there was no place for only emotional feelings or wild imagination (Brandt 1998, 224 – 231). In order to create theatre that targets thought over emotion, they employed various unconventional devices like banners, films and slide projection, as well as traditional dramatic devices such as a chorus or a narrator. The aim, in their productions, was always to keep audiences in a state of awareness, focusing on the political issues, which they discussed on stage through several non-illusory methods of performance. They sought to narrow the gap between the performer and the audience. In Epic Theatre productions, audiences were surprised to see the performers address them directly. They considered theatre as a means of education, so they gave priority to the political message rather than the story or the plot of the play. The narrative tied the actions together but performers did not hesitate to break the flow in specific places in order to stress some political concerns or to prevent the audience from drifting with the events of the story. In other words, in the Epic Theatre, the technique depends on encouraging the audience to keep a distance from the emotional influence of the story and concentrate on the overall concept, seeking into the depths of political reality more than following the simple narrative.

Epic Theatre also aimed at a 'Verfremdungseffekt', which means a way of 'making strange'. The structure of the play was organized to focus on a political situation from a different viewpoint. Overall, the Epic Theatre did not present shows primarily to entertain or affect the feelings of the audience, although it did use elements of practice such as song or comedy to keep the audience's attention, but to drive them to think and move to action. However, one can argue that every performance somehow aims to make audiences share its viewpoint. That is true, but in the Epic Theatre, this target is the main aim and is meant to provoke and activate rather than produce a passive response, while in regular theatre it takes place side by side with the plot and the emotional dimension.

At first glance, it seems that the Epic Theatre, which deals with intellectual political issues, is far away from myth or any mythical features, but this is not always true. Myths have been used in modern political plays especially in relation to the concept of 'Making Strange', badly translated as 'alienation'. This is one of the most important features of Epic Theatre. As mentioned above, 'Making Strange' means putting events in an alternative context in order to focus on them from a different viewpoint. This prompts the audience to see those events and their implications anew. Myth can make a significant contribution to 'making the dominant ideology strange' and was therefore an important element in Brecht's Epic drama.

Caucasian Chalk Circle

The Caucasian Chalk Circle (1948) by Brecht is an ideal example of epic theatre. This is a play within a play, which contains an historical narrative which tells about Prince Kazbeki, who leads an uprising against the legal governor, his brother Georgi Abashwili and kills him. During the upheaval, Georgi's wife, Natella, leaves her baby son Michael and runs away. Grusha, the poor girl who finds the baby, feels that her responsibility is to save him from being killed by the Ironshirts. She takes the baby and starts a very long

and arduous trip. She abandons her fiancé, fights the soldiers, bears the insults of her brother's wife, who beats her for being unmarried with a baby, and marries a dying man in order to find a father on paper for the baby. The man recovers and demands his right to have sexual relations with her, so she submits to him.

After two years, the Grand Duke puts down the coup of Prince Kazbeki, and everything returns to normal. At this moment, Natella approaches and claims that the boy who lives with Grusha is her son, Michael, who is supposed to inherit the estate of his father, the previous Governor, Georgi Abashwili. Grusha insists that the boy is her son. The new ruler appoints Azdak, a corrupt judge, to deal with the case. Azdak, although seems always to accept bribes, in many cases also makes controversial judgments in the interest of some poor people against wealthy owners. The popular opinion is that Azdak will judge in favour of Natella, the woman who has influence and is able to pay a bribe; even Grusha is pessimistic. However, Azdak's judgment is very strange. He orders a chalk circle to be drawn on the ground and puts the boy in the centre. Then he asks the two women, each to hold one of the boy's arms, and says that the woman who can pull him outside the circle to her side will be proved to be his real mother. Azdak repeats the competition twice; both times Natella pulls the boy out of the circle. Finally, Azdak judges that the boy belongs to Grusha as she was not prepared to injure the child.

Brecht was a man who believed in Marxism, and his political message in this play is obvious. The land belongs to the person who can cultivate it; who can deal with it best, not just own it from historical right. He even emphasises this message in a prologue scene at the beginning of the play, when he presents two communities in conflict after the Second World War over a Caucasian valley. One community owned the valley before the war and used it as pasture for their goats. The other community took over the valley after the war and used it to plant fruit, which is a better use and more profitable. When they see how the valley is flourishing and fruitful under their use, a delegation

from the State Reconstruction Commission favours the latter group. Even though the other community is astonished, they accept the judgment that gives the land that they owned to their opponents.

Brecht used the play within a play by employing the technique of a storyteller. He used the storyteller as a narrator to link events and to stop the audience, at specific points, from getting too involved in the illusion or emotion of that narrative. He also used the technique of the sudden shock, which led the audience to expect that a specific thing would happen, according to some prior incidents here and there in the play, and then had something opposite take place instead. This happens in particular with the character of Azdak, who does not act as a judge would be expected to do, and thereby draws attention to the view that justice for poor people does not exist in capitalist societies. However, Azdak then demonstrates by his actions that in some circumstances it can be achieved.

Although the play at first glance seems to deal with Marxist ideology and has nothing to do with mythology, in fact it reflects more than one influence. First, the play is drawn from Chinese mythology, at least in its narrative, as mentioned by the characters of the play in the first scene.

The Old Man right: Is it going to be one of the old legends?

The Singer: A very old one. It is called 'The Chalk Circle' and is derived from the Chinese. But we will recite it in a changed version. (Brecht 1963, 8)

Secondly, the focal event in the play, the judgment of Azdak, can easily be referred to the religious story of the prophet king Solomon, who judged a similar case. As Alfred, D. White writes.

The motif of the chalk circle is ancient and widely known. The quarrel of two women before a wise judge over which is the true mother of a child goes back to the judgment of Solomon (1 Kings 3, 16-28). (White 1978, 148)

Two women with a child came to Solomon, each woman claiming that the child belonged to her, and because neither of them had any proof, King Solomon ordered the child to be divided in half, and for each woman to take her part. One woman refused to allow her son be divided, and gave up her claim in order to save the child. Solomon realized that this woman was the real mother of the child and gave her the child. Of course, the contrast here is clear, between Solomon as an ideal symbol of justice who is very popular in religious literature and Azdak, the judge who deals with the reality of corrupt life. The second contrast is that the woman who wins the case is not the real mother, but is the woman who really loves the boy. It is another example of 'making strange' leading to seeing anew. Thirdly, the play is filled with Christian references; religious themes are adapted in several scenes, for example, the conflict between the Governor and his brother can easily be referred to the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible. Many other incidents in the play allude to the Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church, which are represented on a silver chain as a sign of engagement: Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. There is an implicit comparison between the marriage of Grusha to a dying man, Jessup, in order to save the child, and the marriage of Mary to Joseph when she was already pregnant, according to Christian religion. Fourthly, Brecht was influenced by Western folklore, and this can be seen by the similarity of the character of Azdak to "Robin Hood", the British mythical hero who took from the rich to give to the poor.

Although Brecht did not identify with one particular myth, and did not regard any mythology as holy, even a religious one, he could not present his play and political message without referring to some mythical stories, either to criticize them or to create a situation of making strange by putting a new idea in contrast to an old one. He also sees myth as the narrative of the present class.

The Ancient Myth of Antigone in the Modern Political Theatre

Antigone is part of the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus, used in drama by Sophocles around 2500 years ago. The myth tells how Oedipus, the cursed king, kills his father without knowing who he is and marries his mother without knowing who she is. When he becomes aware of his sin, punishes himself by gouging out his eyes and makes himself an exile, blinded and disgraced, from his country, Thebes. The people of Thebes elect his two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, to rule the country in turn year by year. Nevertheless, Eteocles at the end of his term refuses to leave his brother Polynices to rule the country in his stead, as their agreement stipulated. So, they fight each other and bring the entire country into terrible conflict, which ends in tragedy, as both brothers are killed. Their uncle, Creon, who is declared king of the country after their death, considers Polynices a traitor to the city because he sought help, during the conflict, from the city of Argos, the enemy of Thebes, against his brother and his motherland. So, Creon the king forbids the body of Polynices to be buried. Sophocles' Antigone portrays it thus:

Creon: ...

The other, the outcast, the exile...

His brother Polynices, who returned here

At the head of a foreign army, to destroy

His homeland, to burn down the city

And reduce the people to condition of slavery,

Or kill them in the streets – I have ordered

That he is to have no grave at all.

No one is to bury him, or mourn for him. (Sophocles 1991, 140)

This means, according to the beliefs of those days, that his soul would be kept in torment. This act greatly distresses Antigone, Polynices's sister. Therefore, she challenges the king and insists on burying her brother's body.

Antigone: (talking to her sister Ismene)

...

I intend to bury my brother
And if I die in the attempt, I shall die
In the knowledge that I have acted justly
What greater satisfaction than that,
For loving sister to embrace a loving brother
Even in the grave: and to be condemned
For the criminal act of seeing him at peace! (Sophocles 1991, 136)

Although the younger sister Ismene is upset, she cannot bear the anger of her uncle the king. However, Antigone, the weak helpless girl, faces the highest of authority of the state alone. She buries her brother. Then she was walled up in a cave. Creon, the totalitarian ruler, is nevertheless ultimately beaten by Antigone. Haemon his son who is in love with Antigone kills himself.

The play employs the myth to portray a conflict between two characters, who represent two different viewpoints. The first character is Antigone, who believes that the law of God should be obeyed more than the orders of the state, as Don Taylor explains:

Conscience is above the law. Spiritual realities, long-held human values, the laws of the Gods, call them what you will, have a lasting validity which is ultimately superior to man-made laws, which change from day to day, reflecting the needs of the men who make them. There comes a time for everyone when, if the deepest-held beliefs are pronounced to be against the law, then the law must be broken; indeed, it is the duty of the honest man or woman to break it (Sophocles 1991, 47).

The second character is King Creon, who thinks all people should respect the law of the state, as Taylor summarizes:

A state must have laws, and they must be obeyed if human society is not to decline into anarchy. Individuals cannot be allowed to obey the laws or not to

obey them, as they please, obeying the ones they approve of, disobeying the ones they disapprove of (Sophocles 1991, 47)

The myth already has its own deeply political aspect and carries timeless lessons about the relationship between a ruler and his people, as well as keeping open the argument to what extent a person can follow the state law when this law contradicts religious law. Therefore, it is no wonder that this play is one of those that has been most often revived since it was first written around 2500 years ago, and no wonder that there were many adaptations of this play during the last century, especially in period of conflict such as the First and Second World Wars. Of course, each playwright employed the play to carry his own political message, even though in most cases, the message was at the expense of the mythical features. It therefore offers an excellent example of the range of ways that myth can be employed in drama. Kyle Brenton (2000), in his article entitled, "Acts of War", tries to highlight the political messages with their difference in five remarkable examples of employing the myth of Antigone in theatrical performances, by Walter Hasenclever, Jean Anouilh, Bertolt Brecht, Judith Malina and Miro Gavran. Affected by WW1, the German poet and playwright Walter Hasenclever adopted the myth of Antigone to criticize the war and its tragedies and injustice after his practical experience in the German army and long hospitalisation when he was wounded. Hasenclever seemed to be convinced that the war was fated by God and he adapted the concept of the ancient myth, that the family of Oedipus inherited a curse, to denote a fate that nobody can change. Kyle Brenton, in his article, comments on the play.

Towards the end of the play, Hasenclever's broken Creon willingly relinquishes his power to the people of Thebes, but his democratic gesture is subverted when a supernatural voice announces that God has already passed judgment upon the city (Brenton 2000).

Brenton found that many adaptations appeared synchronically with and after the WWII; one of them was the play of Jean Anouilh, which was presented in Paris during the Nazi

occupation. His implicit political message was to motivate people against the invaders. Because his message was too dangerous to express openly in that period and such circumstances, he tried to emphasise some other issues in the play such as those of family and love, while he presented Creon as a responsible ruler who did his best to save the unity of his country, as well as trying his best to save Antigone from her sad fate.

In 1948, Bertolt Brecht wrote his play to portray the Antigone myth according to his view, in which he strongly and violently attacked totalitarianism. As usual in all his plays, he invested the play with Marxist economic considerations in relation to the capitalist system by focusing on the shortage of metal in Thebes as the real reason for the war and showed that the elders' main concern was with the treasure wagons which were supposed to be coming from Argos.

The Elders: The wagons of booty are coming! The victory loaded with plunder to make Thebes forget the war. (Brecht 1990, 20)

Creon in this play is an evil character who planned the whole conspiracy in which he encouraged the brothers to fight each other and attack the enemy in Argos, which led them both to their ends.

Antigone: Here it is: our two brothers, Both dragged into Kreon's war for the grey iron ore of distant Argos, and both killed. (Brecht 1990, 17)

Although Judith Malina and the Living Theatre adapted, in New York in 1967, Brecht's play, Brenton noted that she presented the myth of Antigone in the form of a ritual dance, including the battle between Thebes and Argos in which the audience found themselves playing dramatic roles side by side with the army that was attacking Thebes. Her aim, which accorded with the Living Theatre theory, which she co-operated in establishing in New York with her husband Julian Beck, was to put the audience in a position where they would experience the *feeling* of the tragedy of war. Such

involvement, she considered made the audience more likely to take an attitude that would lead them to express their opinion loudly or even act publicly against war, in this case the war in Vietnam. Judith Malina, in the preface of her translation of Brecht's (1990, vii) adaptation of *Antigone*, commented on the many ways in which this text could be produced:

The Living Theatre's bare stage-Artaudian form is only one of many. As it yields to the sense of the contemporary politic, so *Antigone* allows for an endless variety of production forms---the realistic, the surrealistic, the classical, the not-yet-dreamed-of---Antigone speaks with an ancient voice that is present wherever there is a willingness to speak out against conventional strictures and punitive laws, and to invoke the boundless human potential.

Malina mentions that the Living Theatre performed *Antigone* over a period of 20 years in 16 countries, describing the play as "appropriate to every struggle for freedom".

The fifth example cited by Brenton, was the production by the Croatian playwright Miro Gavran who used the myth of Antigone (1990) to expose the bad face of tyranny and corruption in the political world, which led to the war-torn Balkans. In this play, Creon is a totalitarian ruler who imprisons a fearful girl, Antigone, and tries to force her to participate in a play similar to Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which Antigone dies onstage. Nevertheless, Antigone refuses to take part in the play, arguing that she is not willing to commit suicide. This attitude was expected, even planned by Creon, who sought an excuse to get rid of the girl, who was threatening his regime. Creon is satisfied with this evidence that Antigone has no wish to follow in the heroic footsteps of her namesake, and no longer sees her as a threat. This adaptation simplifies the myth and suggests that it was merely a conspiracy fabricated to prevent Antigone from intervening in state affairs.

Nancy Keystone, the American Director and actress who wrote a thesis on Judith Malina, especially her translation and production of Brecht's *Antigone*, later produced the play herself for the Los Angeles Theatre and played the character of Antigone. In an

interview, she indicated that playwrights and directors in modern theatre had tried to interpret Antigone's behaviour against the declaration of the King Creon. She then divided these playwrights and directors into two groups. The first, to which she belonged, saw that the motivation of Antigone needed no explanation beyond the religious aspects. The second party were those who read in her behaviour an incestuous relationship between Antigone and her brother. Keystone asserts that she could not detect this aspect in the myth. However, Steffen Silvis (1993) suggests that those playwrights and directors, second group, might have been influenced by some contemporary psychological theories. Nancy Keystone did not, however, mention a third group, those who explained Antigone's behaviour as an act of political rebellion, as politics is an indisputable feature of the play.

Numerous versions of the Antigone myth have been performed around the world and it may be useful in exploring the use of myth in modern drama to mention another two remarkable productions that used the myth in different ways. The first is the adaptation by A. R. Gurney, directed by Milton Zoth for the New Jewish Theatre, in which he explores the relationship between a female student who has prepared a play based on the Antigone myth but with some new views and who thinks that her play is perfect, and her Professor of Drama, who dislikes her work, and uses his authority to force her to take a more traditional view. Russ Thomas (2003) in an article, comments that the play tends towards comedy rather than adopting its original dramatic form as a tragedy. The comparison between the professor and Creon on the one hand and the student and Antigone on the other, is obvious and the conclusion the play attempts to convey is that both characters were stubborn and did not consider that there was any possibility of learning from each other.

The second example is a Latin American production entitled, *Furious Antigone*, written by the Argentinean playwright Griselda Gambaro and directed by Susan Schaefer.

Schaefer (2010) herself describes the play in an article: Again, in this production the myth is used to condemn war, in this case the 'Dirty War', which happened in Argentina during the dictatorship of 1976 – 1983 and resulted in the loss of more than 30,000 people who simply disappeared. The new element in this production is that the playwright phrases the new play in an absolutely invented form that takes only one powerful image from the original myth. The play contains only three characters. Two upper class residents of Buenos Aires are sitting in the café having coffee and watching Antigone, who is in a metal cage, waiting for the body of her brother so she can bury it. Of course, during the dialogue, there is also a lot of criticism of the military regime and the cycle of violence that included all the people of the country, but the image of waiting for the 'disappeared' is the main concern of the play.

In relation to the concerns of this thesis, those versions of the myth of Antigone described above give a clear idea how the myth either original or embodied in plays have been 'raised dough' in the hands of modern theatre producers, who have made it carry various political messages by altering the nature and dramatic structure of the myth's presentation. It is obvious that some of them, like Walter Hasenclever, tried to re-invent even the metaphysical concept of the myth, to make God or fate the prompter of the decision to go to war. Others, like Bertolt Brecht, tried to abolish such a concept by putting all the responsibility in the hands of totalitarians in order to condemn them, for their actions. The third party, like Judith Malina, considered that the key to stopping war lay in the people's hands and nowhere else and so she sought to involve her audience physically and emotionally in some of the dramatic action as if they were responsible for the war and were really participating in it as aggressors. On the other hand, some writers like Jean Anouilh explored the whole basis of the totalitarian phenomenon in society's morals and values, while others were satisfied with discussing the corruption of the regime in a narrower context.

Even though the playwrights and directors gave priority to contemporary political issues, they were united in their attitude against war and totalitarianism, and mainly depended on the qualities and originality of the myth to express an attitude, which was an integral part of its essence. To conclude, a myth like that of Antigone can always be presented successfully alone, without any additional political messages, but as the examples above illustrate, political messages can gain tremendous dramatic impact when delivered by a powerful myth, which in various forms may already be part of audiences cultural awareness.

Sartre's *Flies*

In the last century, numerous other playwrights based their plays on ancient myths in order to carry specific political messages in addition to some philosophical ideas, even when those ideas seems, at first glance, to be in contrast to myth's nature. '*The Flies*' by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre provides a good example of this. A website describes it thus:

Sartre uses the classic Oresteian myth as a vehicle for his existential philosophy. The play revolves around the return of Orestes to his homeland, Argos, several years after the murder of his father at the hands of his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Rejecting the sense of guilt, which the murderers have forced upon the people of Argos, and established as the state religion, Orestes avenges his father's death and liberates his homeland. Sartre's political message was clear: do not hesitate to kill not only Germans but also French collaborators if this is the only means of liberating France. (Jean-Paul Sartre)

That myth was derived originally from the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, and was a basis of many plays throughout history. Perhaps the earliest was the ancient Greek playwright, Aeschylus's *Oresteia* of 458 BC. Sartre in his play, *The Flies*, uses the same myth, preserving it in traditional form with most of its characters and events as well as its Gods, rituals and general climate. However, he extracts from it a contemporary political

message that suits his situation and all of the emotions provoked in him as a result of the Nazi German occupation of his country, France. Sartre himself tried to explain why he wrote this play:

By writing my play I was trying by my own unaided effort, feeble though it might be, to do what I could to root out sickness of repentance, this complacency in repentance and shame. What was needed at the time was to revive the French people, to restore their courage. The people who were revolted by the Vichy government, who regarded it as an abject thing, all those in France who wished totally to reject domination by Nazis, understood the play remarkable well. (Contat 1976, 193)

The myth of Orestes, undoubtedly, carried the spirit of revenge and an invitation to take revenge in the course of its events. Nevertheless, was this utilization of the myth to serve another political circumstance with different features and specific aspects, an appropriate and effective use of it? It is not easy to answer such a question decisively. What Sartre did not make clear, or perhaps he wanted to neglect it deliberately, is that the myth did not bring up the idea of revenge as an open invitation to release. What appeared in the myth was a series of revenge cycles displaying the ugliness of such actions, as if to convey the message that hatred causes nothing but hatred, and that revenge is followed by nothing except revenge, and that if blood is shed, more will stream after it. Moreover, in the original myth, Orestes himself was forced to take the path of revenge by the metaphysical powers, which reached him through the oracle, who warned him that if he did not take revenge he would live rejected and dismissed by the gods and the people. So, what sort of powers incited Sartre that he should demand revenge? This was undoubtedly the power of the contemporary existential philosophy, which sees life on earth as the end of human existence and holds that no other life comes after it, in which gods can establish the complete justice that humankind fails to achieve. In the following dialogue from the play, Orestes and his stepfather argue about obedience to Zeus, the God of Gods:

Aegistheus: What is right is the will of God. You were hidden here and you heard the words of Zeus.

Orestes: What do I care for Zeus? Justice is a matter between men, and I need no God to teach me it. (Sartre 1946, 75)

Likewise, characters in many places in the play, even the God, voice Sartre's thoughts:

Zeus: Once freedom lights its beacon in a human's heart, the gods are powerless against him. It is a matter between man and man, and it is for other men, and for them only, to let him go his gait, or to throttle him (Sartre 1946, 74, 75).

Even when Sartre borrows the theme of fate from the myth, he modifies the concept of fate to suits his ideas. It is no longer the case that human beings act according to God's will; their actions are based on their own decisions. This is what Orestes declares in front of his people:

Orestes: My people, I love you, and it was for your sake that I killed. For your sake, I had come to claim my kingdom, and you would have none of me because I was not of your kind. Now, I am of your kind, my subjects; there is a bond of blood between us, and I have earned my kingship over you (Sartre 1946, 102).

Furthermore, in the original myth and earlier versions of the play, we find that Orestes, after killing Aegistheus, and his mother Clytemnestra, as an act of revenge, is afflicted with the feeling of sin. The Greeks abhorred the murder of a parent and viewed it as an act of extreme impiety and evil that needed purification and the offering of sacrifices. This concept is what Aeschylus explains in the old play. The fact is also that the myth and Aeschylus's play move to conciliation and forgiveness, because they reach the conclusion that any murder is a serious offence, even if it was committed in the interests of justice. Orestes is a rebel who becomes a killer, the killer of his mother. Why does Sartre overlook this valuable lesson in the myth, without which the myth remains deficient? This is an essential question and Sartre provides the answer:

My intention was to consider the tragedy of freedom as contrasted with the tragedy of fate, In other words, what my play is about can be summed up as the question, how does a man behave toward an act committed by him. For

which he takes the full consequences and full responsibility upon himself, even if he is otherwise horrified by his act (Contat 1976, 187).

At the end of the play, Sartre summarizes his message to the people of France in Orestes' words, as the ancient Greek playwrights used to do in their plays:

Orestes: Farewell, my people. Try to reshape your lives. All here is new, all must begin anew. And for me, too, a new life is beginning. (Sartre 1946, 102)

What is of concern here, however despite all these issues, is that ancient mythology was able to become a vital element of a contemporary play to carry the idea of revenge, freedom and humanity in sequential dramatic and intensified events, despite the reservation that may be raised against the inappropriate overlapping of mythical events and the contemporary political issue.

What has Politics done to Isis?

In the Arab world, the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis, who collected the organs of her murdered husband Osiris and breathed life back into him in order to face the killer who was his brother Set, is widely employed in the Egyptian theatre¹⁹. Although this myth arose in the context of ancient Egyptian religion, it has been utilized as a subject for many political issues²⁰.

Tawfiq El-Hakim, the well-known Egyptian playwright, employed this myth in his play *Isis* in 1955, as a symbol of obligation in order to transmit a political message to the President of Egypt of that time, Jamal Abdul Nasser. Husayn (1993, 149, 150) declares that El-Hakim wrote the play when the Egyptian July revolution was passing its first crisis with the educated elite. El-Hakim removed from the main figure in the play, Isis, the ideal character she had in the myth. Isis in the play does not hesitate to bribe some

¹⁹ See chapter 2; Treasure of Evocative Symbols.

²⁰ See chapter 4, "Isis" was identified with and Confronted in the Arab World.

leaders in order to get her husband returned to power, as is his legal right. The clear message from El-Hakim to Abdul Nasser through the play was to encourage him to use all means, whether legal or illegal, to fulfil his obligation to save the regime and country.

Thirty years later, in 1985, the Egyptian director, Karam Mitawi, turned to the same play and the myth. Mitawi presented it in a form very close to a musical show, and structured from the myth a symbol of Arab world unity. However, the symbol was also used partly in order to ask the fighters from different factions to stop the civil war in Lebanon and save their country's national unity. To achieve this aim, the director focused on a specific part of the myth, that which describes Isis's journey from Egypt to Balbis and other cities on the east coast of the Mediterranean, where she went to seek the remains of her husband, Osiris.

The Egyptian playwright, Abd al-aziz Hamuda (1981) used the same myth in another play entitled *The People of Thebes*. In this play, the writer overturned the classical image of the main character of the myth, Osiris, as a good and kind leader who worked hard to develop his country. Instead, he presented the opposite view, making Osiris a symbol of dependence, who made the people of his country rely on him for everything. He deceived the people of his country by making them bereft of will. Husayn (1993, 165, 166) comments: This play was written after the death of Jamal Abdul Nasser to carry a new political message that nobody remains leader forever and people should not rely on one person in all matters of their lives.

The third play that used the same myth was, *From Where Can I Bring People?* in 1974, by the Egyptian poet Najib Surur, who structured the myth as a symbol of faithfulness, shown by a brave woman towards her dead husband, blending it with another folk story of village girl, Naima, who insisted on finding her lover's head in order to bury it with the rest of his body as most religions stipulate. His political message, as Nehad Selaiha

(1986, 142) sees, was to emphasise the unity of Egyptian people over historical periods, in particular in the collective conscience that is illustrated in the inherited folk tradition. What is significant in these three plays is that all of them employed the same ancient myth to carry different, perhaps even contrary, political views and thereby illustrate the potential in mythic stories to be reshaped dramatically to lend their power to a variety of messages.

Is Al-Lat Suitable to be the Arab Armies' Leader?

Another useful example of the use of myth in the Arab political theatre is the play entitled *Al-Lat Day* (1979), written by the Tunisian writer Umar Bin Salim. This brings up the question of how far a myth should and can be altered to carry a contemporary political message. The author takes us to the Arab Peninsula, specifically, to the Al-Taif Mountain, where we meet the well-known Arab goddess, Al-Lat, to whom a military religious ritual is performed involving dance and singing. This play depends on ancient mythology from the Arab and Islamic legacy. Al-Lat idol, whose worship, with the advent of Islam, became extinct, was one of the famous old idols of the Arabs in the pagan period. It is even mentioned in the Holy Quran, in the chapter of An-Najm verse 19. Some researchers affirm that it was the main deity and show evidence that its worship was widespread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The most famous Al-Lat temple was in Taif and was in the shape of a square rock. It puzzled the people because they heard sounds coming from inside it. Consequently, they believed a spirit inhabited the rock. They started worshipping that spirit and made vows to gain its satisfaction and avoid its anger. Sometimes Al-Lat was symbolized by the image of an old woman with bushy hair, at other times by the image of a gazelle. The second image is the one that the contemporary dramatist Umar Bin Salim espoused; consequently, he seeks the affection of his murdered gazelle in order to return her to life and glory. Furthermore, he

bestows on her a human streak and dedicates to her a specific day when she leads the soldiers to revenge for offences against Arabs and Muslims, especially in Palestine. Consequently, the author, from the myth, derived a play that included a political and ideological opinion rather than any philosophical or aesthetic view. Perhaps his use of an old Arab symbol from the depth of the Arab Peninsula was meant to remind the Arabs of their past and their joint patrimonial culture, as well as to give the Palestinian cause more strength by implying that theirs is a universal Arab cause. Over and above this, he wanted to give the Arab/Israeli conflict as historical aspect, deep-rooted in antiquity, to intensify its significance.

It is possible to agree with the Tunisian critic Muhammad Abazah (1994, 11-13), who wrote regarding the play, about the right of the dramatist not to be bound by the myth as recorded in the history books. Rather, it becomes necessary for the author to exceed what was reported and memorized in the collective imagination, by granting to the adaptation new aspects, suggestions and indications that express his ideology, opinion and aesthetic view. Nevertheless, it is not easy to agree with Abazah's opinion that the author was very successful in his selection of symbol, poetry and dance as expressions of the anger and readiness for war that sounds its drums in the play. Is the old goddess Al-Lat, who has been changed by the author to a young Palestinian girl, plausibly appropriate as a commander of the Arab armies in the war? The play also provokes further reservations. Employing a goddess from the ages before Islam, as a symbol of Arab integration today, to achieve victory in the Arab Israeli conflict, is deficient because it eliminates a very important aspect in this conflict, the Islamic aspect, which recent events have proven is the most important one. Undoubtedly, the Palestinian cause is simultaneously an Arabic and Islamic issue in terms of popular sentiment, even though some Islamic countries' governments take neutral or nonchalant attitudes towards it. Even in the historical context, before the advent of Islam, the Jewish religion

coexisted alongside idolatrous religions, of which the worship of Al-Lat was one. With the advent of Islam, the conflict blazed between Moslem Arabs and Jews, which resulted in the removal of Jews from the Arab Peninsula. Therefore, the symbol here is made to bear more than is appropriate to it. The case is a complicated one and its confused aspects cannot bear this simplification into a symbol.

Another problematic point is that the author uses a female deity to integrate the Arab armies and lead them to achieve victory. Such a matter needs some consideration, as women in the Arab and Islamic culture in general are not candidates for army service even in the present day, so what was the situation of women in the age of paganism, when girl babies were buried alive? It could be suggested that the author wanted to present women with a higher status in order to make a comparison between the situation of Arab women in pagan times and that of the Arab Nation in the present day, by showing both as vulnerable and then giving victory to both of them together. However, this concept clearly was not his aim. And, even if this was the case, it is not viable to combine two such diverse and complicated issues.

Finally, Al-Lat was not known as a pagan goddess of war, but was well known, in the ancient Saumur civilization, as a goddess of the lower worlds, death and darkness, and was known to the Arabs, especially the people of Mecca, as a goddess of the summer and the burning sun, with the drought and thirst it causes. So, what kind of victory can be expected from the goddess of death and thirst? We may ask, why does the author insist on using this goddess, as a symbol of a matter that has no connection with it, especially since the Arab heritage, the old and the new, is full of expressive symbols for the fighting soul and the invitation to war? Artistic symbols are imaginative and far from reality, but there must always be a minimum level of credibility and a clear relationship is required between the symbol and the situation or the subject matter, which it symbolizes.

The Forty Years War for the Sake of “Al-Basus’s Camel”

Aminah Rabi'a Salmin is an Omani playwright who surfaced in the 1990s and represented a new style of writing in drama that can be counted as more modern than classical, at least in this example, *The Stab*, which is based on an ancient Arabic myth spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. It is the myth of Al-Basus who was popular in the Arab World as a symbol of the woman who actually caused a long war, unlike Umar Bin Salim's personal interpretation of Al-Lat, in which he imposed the aspect of war on the myth.

Shawqi Abd al-hakim (1995, 102- 107) reports that Al-Basus is a mysterious character that appears in many ancient Arabic myths and folk tales. She is always portrayed as an evil character and people ascribe to her different names and ages, she is a young beautiful girl when she needs to seduce somebody, an old wise woman when she wants to persuade someone, but her real face is a wicked, plotting hag, more like a witch than a normal woman. One of the stories about her tells that her name was Su'ad and she was a very attractive young girl, eloquent and an excellent fighter and horse rider. She said that she would never marry any man, except one who could conquer her on the battlefield. The great king Saad Al-Yamani of Suro heard about her and accepted the challenge. He fought her and conquered her, so she married him and went with him to his country, where she ruled side by side with him for ten years. Then the king gradually lost his sight and became totally blind, which left Su'ad to rule the country alone. At that time she heard that her brother the king, Tuba Hasan Al-Yamani had been killed on his wedding night at the hands of Kulayb Bin Murah, who deceived him, cut off his head and hung it on the seven gates of Damascus. She left everything in her kingdom and started a journey of vengeance. Whether this or something else was the

reason, Al-Basus or Su'ad travelled between the Arab tribes to spread conflict and troubles, in order to achieve her revenge. She achieved her aim when she finally induced Kulayb Bin Murah to kill her camel, which she intended to pasture in Kulayb's grove. Then, exploiting the local traditions, she could convince prince Jasas to kill her enemy, Kulayb Bin Murah, who was also his cousin and his wife's brother, because the camel was killed in his territory and she was under his protection. Consequently, the camel of the hag, Al-Basus, caused a ruinous war and cycle of revenge between the Arab tribes that lasted for forty years; thousands of people and tribal leaders were killed. Therefore, no wonder the story of Al-Basus' war, Al-Basus' character and her camel became a popular myth in the Arab heritage, overlooking the extent of reality and fiction in it. Many modern literary works in the Arab World were inspired by this myth, such as the play entitled, *Al-Basus War*, written by the Egyptian Islamic playwright, Ali Ahmad Bakathir, in which the writer, after the defeat by Israel in 1967, tried to highlight the implied reasons for the defeat, such as the subjugation and mastery of the regime over people's freedom.

However, *The Stab*, Salmin's play was based on the myth of Al-Basus and the poem of the famous Egyptian poet Amal Dunqul (1940-1983) entitled *No Reconciliation*. Dunqul, at the beginning of his poem, drew his readers' attention to Al-Basus' War, in particular, the scene when Kulayb Bin Murah was thrown down on the ground after being stabbed by Jasas. He asked one of his good slaves to pull him close to the brook where he could write his recommendations to his brother, the prince Al-Zir Salim. Then Dunqul wrote his poem as if in Kulayb's words, ordering his brother never to be reconciled with the enemy for any reason, even if they gave him treasures of gold and made him king, even if the war cost a lot of blood and sadness, even if tribal leaders and allies told him that they would attain victory over an enemy armed with better weapons. He must not reach reconciliation even when they told him that the reconciliation would

be for only a short period until they had strengthened themselves. There were ten pieces of advice encouraging Al-Zir Salim to avoid any sort of conciliation with the enemy and it was strict advice that made the war last for forty years. Dunqul, through the poem, delivered his political message to Anwar Al-Sadat, the president of the Arab Republic of Egypt, who was establishing reconciliation for the first time with Israel in 1988.

Amal Dunqul is well known as a poet who employs myths in his works. The Egyptian critic and professor in the University of Cairo, Sayid Al-Bahrawi, considers Dunqul one of best poets of the time, who was able deeply and actively to employ myths as an integral part in his poem's web.

Aminah Salmin (1995) in her play depended mainly on Dunqul's poem. She borrowed many of his lines and interwove them with some events from myth. In this way, the play took an open literary form that cannot be considered mere poem, play or political oration. Both of them, Dunqul and Aminah later on, ignored the features of myth and gave priority to the political message. Nevertheless, one can ask about the reconciliation between the original myth and the modern poem or play, where it seems that the poet and the playwright have adhered to the principle that they asserted in their adaptation, no reconciliation. The popular concept of the Al-Basus War in Arabic literature is that it was a ridiculous and critical event that happened before Islam that made Arab tribes fight each other for the sake of revenge for forty years. This myth has been used as a symbol of useless war. So why did the poet and playwright encourage Arab people to borrow its concept in their conflict against Israel? Such an invitation over-simplifies the conflict as a mere matter of revenge, not a matter of homeland and people. This gap, between the myth on the one hand and the poem and play on the other, exists because neither the poet nor the playwright regarded the myth as highly as they did their political message. Harmony between their aim and the concept of the myth was lacking, especially when the playwright used direct events from the myth without restructuring

them to fit her aim. The gap was extended to such a degree that one could say that the message received was contrary to that intended. That is to say, it is not only a myth that can be wronged by employing it in support of political circumstances alien to its nature and concept; but the political message also may receive the same fate.

It is true that myths in the ancient era were linked to political issues, but it is also true that those political issues had the same nature and acted as a part of the web of the myth, not as something imposed upon it. There was an obvious harmony between myth and politics in those days, to an extent that the spectator could easily recognize it and could never imagine that the myth could be presented without this particular political issue. Similarly, the political issue seemed such that nothing could convey its complete dimensions as well as or as powerfully as the myth did. That explains why every incident, in the ancient Greek tragedies, is so coherent to the main plot. There was integration between myth and political issues. Nevertheless, this integration between myth and political issues mostly does not exist in modern political plays, because an ancient myth and a modern political issue are different in their roots and nature. Of course, in certain circumstances, the combination between them might work, but this is an exceptional case and mostly not in the interest of myth.

Modern politics is identified as an art of reality and possibility, while ancient myth is an art of unlimited imagination and a world where nothing is impossible, so how could those different natures meet with each other without one losing to the other? Because the modern political playwright, in most cases, gives priority to his political message over any aesthetic or intellectual elements, the loss will be at the expense of myth. It is understandable that the first thing the playwright will do is to simplify the myth by omitting its fantastic mythical features, in order to convey his own political message. However, political theatre is one of several forms in the European and Arab theatre of the late 19th and 20th centuries, there are many others which may broadly be divided into

realism and modernism. How mythical features have been embodied in these forms will be the topic of the next chapter.

References:

- ABAZAH, Muhammad. 1994. Myth and Theatrical Writings in Tunisia. *Theatrical Studies Series*. Dar Sahar, No. 2. pp. 3-26. (In Arabic)
- ABD AL-HAKIM, Shawqi. 1995. *The Cyclopaedia of Arab Folklore and Myth*. Egypt: Maktabat Madboly. (In Arabic)
- AL-BAHRAWI, Sayid. A Study in the Modernism in Amal Dunqal Poem. Available: http://www.nizwa.com/volume5/p81_89.html [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- ANOUILH, Jean. 1957. *Antigone*. Translated by L. Calantiere. London: Methuen.
- BAKATHIR, Ali Ahmad. 1990. *Al-Basus War*. Cairo: Egyptian Library.
- BIN SALIM, UMAR. 1979. *Al-Lat Day*. Damascus: The Union of Arab Writers.
- BRANDT, W. George. 1998. *Modern Theories of Drama*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- BRECHT, Bertolt. 1963. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Translated by James & Tania Stern & W. H. Auden. London: Methuen.
- BRECHT, Bertolt. 1990. *Sophocles' Antigone*. Translated by Malina Judith. New York: Applause.
- BRENTON, Kyle. 14 November 2000. Antigone; Acts of War. *American Repertory Theatre*. Available: <http://www.amrep.org/past/antigone/antigone5.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- CONTAT, Michel & Michel RYBALKA. 1976. *Sartre on Theatre*. London: Quartet Books.
- DUNQUL, Amal. 2004. No Reconciliation. *Arabandalucia*. Available: <http://www.arabandalucia.com/index.php/1267> [Accessed 12/7/2004]
- EL-HAKIM, Tawfiq. 1978. *Isis*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani.
- HAMUDA, Abd al-aziz. 1981. *The People of Theabes*. Cairo: The Egyptian Organization for Books.
- HUSAYN, Kamal al-Din. 1993. *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre*. Cairo: Al-Dar Al-misria Al-lubnania.
- JEAN-PAUL SARTRE. Available: <http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc39.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- SALMIN, Aminah Rabi'a. 1995. *The Stab*. In the researcher's collection.
- SARTRE, Jean/Paul. 1946. *The Flies and in Camera*. Translated by Gilbert. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- SCHAEFER, Susan. 12 April 2001. Furious Antigone. *Dailyprincetonian Art*. Available: <http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/archives/2001/04/12/arts/2906.shtml> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- SELAIHA, Nehad. 1996. *The Theatre between Art and Thought*. Cairo: Egyptian Book Organization.

SILVIS, Steffen. An Interview with Nancy Keystone. *Willamette Week Online*
Available: <http://www.wweek.com/html2/perf022101.html> [Accessed
19/12/2003].

SOPHOCLES. 1991. *Antigone*. Translated by Don Taylor. *The Theban Plays*.
London: Methuen.

THOMAS, Russ. Another Antigone by A. R. Guney. *New Jewish Theatre*.
Available: <http://www.kdhx.org/reviews/anantigone.html> [Accessed
19/12/2003].

WHITE, Alfred D. 1978. *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays*. London: Macmillan.

Chapter 6:

Myth, Realism and Modernism

Researchers usually divide modern theatre, according to its forms and essences, into two main schools, realism and modernism. In this chapter, an attempt is made to understand the nature of these schools and explore the role of mythical features in their concepts. These features will be illustrated with some international, Arab and Omani examples.

Part One: Realism

In the late 19th century, the emergence of realism and naturalism in European drama meant that playwrights employed prosaic language of everyday life and, although plays continued to focus on essential human concerns, they expanded their attention to various social issues and incorporated details of everyday life. Spiritual issues became of less interest than concrete reality. Furthermore, in modern theatre productions, the hero could be and usually was, an ordinary person rather than a God, a semi-god, superman, king or prince.

Realism in theatre means the representation of everyday reality, through, psychological character development, stage setting, narrative. It is a case of art imitating life and presenting the playwright's ideas in an interesting and original way, in order to raise awareness of contemporary social and moral issues. In the theatre of realism, ordinary people express their suffering, try to improve their lives, and work to enhance their future by all possible means. A message stimulates moral thought and stirs reaction by presenting issues, which audiences can identify with.

Although initially this basic definition of realism would seem to preclude it, several contact points with the concept of myth can be found, in the form or in nature. With regard to the dramatists' aims, it might be said that the inclusion of a moral message may be one of the similarities between myth and realism. Although, at first sight, myths seem concerned mainly with metaphysical issues, the message that they carry is a moral one, at least according to the values of their time, and myth aims to improve the life of human beings and their society, exactly as realism intends today. However, a number of playwrights who are considered to belong to the realist school sometimes used realism to question material reality, as if they want to say to their audience, there is no constant objective reality, there is no absolute fact. This idea will be explored further, shortly, when we discuss Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

Archetypal Criticism

To illustrate the mythical dimension in a play or theatrical work especially those within the realist school, it is appropriate to explore them through Archetypal Criticism. The fundamental approach of Archetypal Criticism is a school that the critic understands and evaluates literary and theatrical works by referring them to original and primitive samples, and tries to compare characters from modern plays with ancient mythical ones. The well-known Arab director and critic Hani Mitawi (1993, 172 – 175), in a study of Archetypal Criticism, relates it to the thoughts and achievements of psychologist Carl G. Jung, especially his theory of the Collective Unconscious, which provided the base on which the critical methodology was built. The core of this theory states that civilized man still unconsciously retains primitive knowledge, which was formed in the Bedouin era, before recorded history, and myths are repositories of such knowledge. This theory explains, as Willbur Scott noted (Mitawi 1993, 174), why people like to listen to mythical stories in spite of their extraordinary events that have no direct religious or

cultural association. The anthropologist, Sir James George Frazer, played an essential role in the formation of this critical school, especially in his book, *The Golden Bough*, in which he asserted that myths are sources of primitive knowledge. The book was a study of witchcraft, religions and myths. Frazer followed the roots of many myths to ancient times when they were formed, and then recorded what he considered to be their development up to present. This book became one of the important references of this school during the period from 1915, when it was written up to the present day. However, the real birth of Archetypal Criticism was at the hands of Frazer's students, members of the Cambridge School, which was active in the 1920s. They studied the relationship between the myth and literature in general and the theatre in particular. Their ideas were subsequently consolidated by the efforts of Northrop Frye, who contributed a valuable book in this field entitled *Anatomy of Criticism* (Frye 2000), which contained a major study about what is known as a Theory of Mythos. Also, Northrop Frye in his book finds that: "the presence of a mythical structure in realistic fiction, however poses certain technical problems for making it plausible, and the devices used in solving these problems may be given the general name of displacement" (Frye 2000, 136), he confirms that primitive myths contain different types of plots and main characters, which exist in all classical forms of drama (Frye 2000, 134-149). Northrop Frye divides myths and archetypal symbols in literature into three "organisations". First, what he calls undisplaced myth, "which [is] generally concern[ed] with gods or demons". Second, myths of general tendency, which he calls romantic myths, "the tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience". Third, the tendency of realism, whose technique is described as; "throw[ing] the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story" (Frye 2000, 139,140). According to this theory, any literary work can be studied in the light of those primitive mythical structures and can

be evaluated by its closeness to or distance from those structures, which provide keys to understanding the work and analysing its symbols. Mitawi (1993, 175) adds that on that basis also, the critic can judge to what extent the playwright was serious and creative. In order to explore their mythological aspects, the following examples from realist theatre will be explained, according to this school of criticism and others,

A Doll's House; the Root of Religion and Ancient Greek Mythology.

The playwright Henrik Ibsen was one of the pioneers of realism, especially with his famous play, *A Doll's House* (1879). The play concerns the middle class family of Torvald Helmer. At first sight, the family seems an ideal one; everything seems perfect, a life of ease and pleasure but by the end of the play Nora realises that the happiness and love in which she has spent her entire life have been illusory. She discovers she has been merely a beautiful doll for her father and her husband, never a woman who has strong personality and is respected. Therefore, she makes the brave decision to leave the 'doll's house' and exits, slamming the door behind her.

Erik Osterd (1994, 161- 182) expresses the idea that some contemporary critics see modernity in the theatre as standing on the ruins of myth, and consider the play, *A Doll's House*, as an invitation to focus on the reality of life and abandon any mythological hints, justifying their opinion by quoting dialogue such as that from the end of the play. When Nora decides to leave the house at the end of the play, Torvald asks her to allow him to write to her, but she refuses:

Torvald: May I write to you, Nora?

Nora: No. Never. You must not do that.

Torvald: But at least you must let me send you –

Nora: Nothing. Nothing.

Torvald: But if you should need help ...?

Nora: I tell you, no. I do not accept things from strangers (Ibsen 1965, 103).

So, Nora refuses any contact with the past, because the past, from now on, is strange. It seems that she wants to live a new life that has no shadow of the past, but what can be called a modern life, especially when it will be empty of any kind of myths of idealism and miracles, in which Nora does not believe any more.

Torvald: Nora – can I never be anything but a stranger to you?

Nora: (Picks up her bag): Oh, Torvald! Then the miracle of miracles would have to happen.

Torvald: The miracle of miracles!

Nora: You and I would both have to change so much that – oh, Torvald, I do not believe in miracles any longer (Ibsen 1965, 103- 104).

A sense of anti-myth is explicitly conveyed in many places in the dialogue of the play, an attack on the romantic myths that fuelled bourgeois idealism, but as a matter of fact, the play is also full of mythical features and roots, which universalise its concerns.

Although this play takes place in a salon inside a house and the heroes are ordinary people, such as one can meet everyday and everywhere, there are many obvious mythical features in this 'realist' play. Ibsen phrased what can be described as a modern form of tragedy. Comparing this play with the *Antigone* of Sophocles for example, several similar features can be mentioned. Firstly, in both plays, there is a conflict related to essential values and sacred traditions. In *Antigone*, the conflict is between the law of God and the law of state. The conflict in *A Doll's House* is between traditions and love, between the law of society and feelings of the heart. One can equally ask controversial questions: was Antigone wrong to bury her brother in order to save him from suffering after death? Was Nora wrong to forge her father's signature in order to save her husband's life? From a traditional and moral viewpoint, both of them may be considered wrong, but according to the revolutionary viewpoint of the playwrights, they are heroes, because their act is a cry against obsolete values that need to be changed or, at least, people need to be encouraged to rethink them. Indeed, such challenges have been central to theatre throughout history. Secondly, the two main characters, Nora and

Antigone are female and supposedly, in a weak position in society, but in contrast, they are forces that lead to the collapse of the overriding patriarchal authority of the state and turn society's values upside down. Thirdly, both main characters destroy their secure lives by their own hands, as they did not think about their own fate as much as about the person they loved or felt a duty to protect, whether so much love was deserved or not. Such qualities in their personalities make them unusual people, in other words, mythical heroes. In both plays, the playwright establishes the myth and then the protagonist demolishes it. In *Antigone*, Sophocles establishes the myth of state authority then Antigone demolishes it, and in *A Doll's House*, Ibsen establishes the myth of happiness and love, then Nora demolishes it.

Brian Johnston, in an article entitled "Realism and A Doll's House" highlights the root of Ibsen's protagonist Nora in the ancient Greek mythology, in particular Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Alcestis*:

When she [Nora] finally rebels against, not only her husband but also her whole society, she takes on the identity of another Greek heroine, Antigone.

In another part:

The tragic action of Torvald and Nora also seems to re-enact a well known Greek play about a marriage - Euripides' *Alcestis*, in which a wife 'dies' to save her husband, as Nora, 'figuratively' does in Act II when she decides on suicide to spare her husband. The imagery of the play is first her death by drowning, and then, with the tarantella dance, the death from the poison of the tarantula spider.

He then asserts that the Greek ghosts were crowding back into the modern world; not only in Ibsen's works but in those of many other modernist writers such as Thomas Mann, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, after him: through the rediscovery of those 'archetypes' that lie within our communal psyche.

Such mythical dimensions are what John Northam means when he describes Ibsen's drama. "Beneath the surface of everyday life the Ibsen hero was confronted with problems equal to those known by the heroes in Greek or Shakespearean theatre" (Osterd 1994, 161).

Erik Osterd, in an article entitled, "Myth and Modernity: Henrik Ibsen's Double-drama" focuses more on what he called sacred drama. "Ibsen allows a sacred drama, a drama of myth and ritual ceremonies, to be housed within another drama, a drama of modernity". He then tries to be more specific about the sacred drama. "A sacred drama presents the current of events within a framework of myth, magic and religion. It expresses its values in repeating ritual performances within mythological patterns" (Osterd 1994, 161- 162).

Furthermore, he argues that Ibsen employs rituals in his plays and cites many ritual acts and instances of magic in Ibsen's plays, including *A Doll's House* where he mentions: "Nora's Tarantella dance imitating the death struggle of the victim of a spider's poison". Osterd explains the role of such rituals: "Through the ritual acts the faith and the moral values of sacred tradition are kept alive and carried from the past into the present situation" (Osterd 1994, 161- 162).

In conclusion, even though some dramatists consider the modern theatre starts where the features of an ancient theatre ends, especially those features related to myths, religions and rituals, and they insist on cutting all the roots to the past for the sake of the present and future, mythological features are seen in almost every modern play and links to the present and future cannot be separated from the past. Indeed, sometimes, the past is even more alive in modern theatre than the present. Mankind's civilisation is moving in a recycled chain and theatre is one of its patterns.

Mythological Roots in a *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Tennessee Williams (1911- 1983), the American playwright, another “modern realist”, followed Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s methods in forming the structure of his plays in such a way that the reader or viewer, at the first glance, feels everything is normal and imitating real life in its everyday detail, while the fact is that there is another internal agitating event growing up side by side with the external approach. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) is one of his most popular plays, which has also been adapted for the screen. For the purpose of this study, the play will be analysed in terms of its mythical roots.

All events in the play happen in one day and take place in a big, old, rural house in the southern states of America, where the whole family is gathering around the old man who owns of the house and farm, Big Daddy, for his sixty-fifth birthday. Big Daddy is sick and about to die. The family members do not refer to his serious illness, cancer, but try to treat it as a simple temporary matter while at the same time, each of them tries to get close to Big Daddy, in order to persuade him that he or she is the person who deserves to inherit his wealth and position in the family. This is the main plot, but there are several vital side plots, which work in interconnection, like the branches of a tree.

Esther Merle Jackson in her book, *The Broken World of Tennessee Williams*, asserts that Williams’ was characterised by “international state of art”. Although he respected individuality to some extent, he considered art as somehow related to collective consciousness (Jackson 1966, 44). Of course Jackson, in using the expression ‘Collective Consciousness’, refers to Frazer and Jung. So, no wonder Jackson sees that Williams’ play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, is very close to Greek drama in its progression and kind of tragedy (Jackson 1966, 52). She goes on to highlight links between Big Daddy and Aeschylean characters:

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is a study of an extended cycle of human transgression. As Big Daddy Pollitt perceives the working out of the curse upon his house, he cries out, in Aeschylean tones, his Malediction:

CHRIST- DAMN-ALL-LYING SONS OF-LYING BITCHES!

...

Yes, all liars, all liars, all lying dying liars!

...

-Lying! Dying! Liars! (Jackson 1966, 52).

However, in Jackson's opinion, Williams in his later works created what can be called Modern Myth or Synthetic Myth, in which contemporary man's life is represented in a symbolic way. She describes the new myth as follows:

His myth is not an organic form; that is not a fabric surfacing from the unconscious life of man, individual or collective. In this sense it differs from the great natural structures, which have evolved through world religions, and even from popular myths, such as those, which now surround the figure of the legendary American cowboy. The contemporary myth of Williams is synthetic. It is composed, after the manner of cinematic montage, from the fragments of many ethical, philosophic, social, poetic, intellectual, and religious perspectives (Jackson 1966, 54).

Hani Mitawi, in his analysis of this play, draws attention to the importance of realizing that the play has two structures: a surface structure and a deep one, and both of them work integrally to build the complete picture and meaning of the play (Mitawi 1993, 163 – 220). In the surface structure, it is easy to recognize social reality and themes of everyday life, like life and death, greed, disputes about wealth, misunderstanding between fathers and sons, discord between wives and husbands, and sexual relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual. However, as Mitawi sees it, the deep structure is very different, encompassing secrets, symbols, ancient rituals and myths. The play, from this point of view, depicts the passing of the world from male domination to female and from a patriarchal society to a matriarchal one, with concomitant repression of the male's dreams of domination and freedom. Mitawi explains the events in the play and relates them, according to Levi-Strauss' view and

Northrop Frye's theory of mythos, to many ancient myths. First, he detects in the play the theme of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. He reminds readers that Tennessee Williams was fond of the character of Orpheus and wrote many plays derived from the inspiration of this myth. The myth centres on Orpheus and divides his experience into two stages. In the first, Orpheus is the great artist who amazes mankind, animals and even Gods with his magical music, and represents the free, wild soul. When a poisonous snake bites his beloved wife, Eurydice, and causes her death, he follows his wife to the underworld where he succeeds in charming Hades, the God of the underworld, with his marvellous music. So, the God allows him to take his wife back to earth again, with one condition, that is, that he must not turn to see her during their return journey. Orpheus cannot keep this condition, he turns to see his wife, and loses her forever. In the second stage, Orpheus is very sad and broken hearted. In some stories, he kills himself and in most popular versions, he was torn to pieces by Thracian maenads (followers of Dionysus). Mitawi considers that Tennessee Williams, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, captures the Orpheus of the second stage in a very grotesque way, in the character of Brick. Brick in this play seems to be a homosexual; in fact, he represents an advanced stage of liberality and the highest level of social protest. Nevertheless, Brick cannot face society with his homosexual relationship with his old friend, and unlike Orpheus, who killed his wife by mistake, Brick kills his boyfriend because he has not enough courage to face society. Maggie, for a while at the beginning of the play, is a substitute for the ~~Trojan~~ ^{Thracian} women, who torture him to death, but she later turns into the power that tries to restore him to ordinary life and by the end of the play she almost succeeds.

Secondly, Maggie is the Goddess of love who is left alone in the bed. There are many signs in the metaphorical language of the play that indicate that Maggie is equivalent to Aphrodite, the Goddess of beauty, passion and eroticism in Greek mythology. According to Greek mythology, Aphrodite travelled to the underworld after Adonis, her

dead lover, in order to retrieve him. She succeeded by the end in getting permission from Zeus to allow Adonis to return to the earth in the spring and summer every year. With the annual return of Adonis, life continues on the earth, plants, animals and mankind all become fertile, so Aphrodite becomes a symbol of fertility, passion and beauty. A similar thing happens with Maggie, who is working hard to retrieve her husband's love and passion. It is also possible to compare Adonis' suffering in the lower world with Brick's suffering on earth after the death of his friend. However, Mitawi draws attention to another reference in the text that compares Maggie who, as a university student was fond of hunting in the forests with her dogs, with the Goddess Artemis or Diana, the Goddess of Hunting, forests and chastity.

Margaret: Why, Sister Woman—that's my Diana Trophy. Won it at the intercollegiate archery contest on the Ole Miss campus.

Margaret: ... Brick and I still have our special archers' license. We're going deer hunting on Moon Lake as soon as the season starts. I love to run with dogs through chilly woods, run, run, leap over obstructions... (Williams 1962, 13).

Finally, Maggie, by her insistence on pregnancy and being a mother to a child by her husband Brick, in spite of the fact that he is neglecting her emotionally and sexually, is equivalent to another Goddess, Diana of Ephesus, and the Roman Goddess of holy marriage, fertility and motherhood.

Thirdly, there are many indications in the text that Brick suffers from an Oedipus complex. Mitawi, regarding this point, focuses on the special relationship between Brick and his mother, as in this duologue.

Margaret: Big Mama, Brick is dressing, he is not dressed yet.

Big Mama: That's all right; it won't be the first time I've seen Brick not dressed. Come on, open this door (Williams 1962, 16).

It is clear throughout the text that Big Mama neglects her elder son. She prefers her younger son and wants him to inherit his father's wealth and position in the family, even though he is jobless and an alcoholic. Big Mama does not abstain from using the

idea of an incestuous relationship with her son in order to agitate her husband's jealousy, and this matter explains why the relationship between Brick and his father is always so tense.

Fourthly, the relationship between father and son recalls the myth of Hiawatha and his father Mudjekeewis. The ancient Native American myth tells of Hiawatha whose Grandmother Nokomis brought him up and told him that his father abandoned his mother, Wenonah, before his birth, causing her to die of heartbreak and sorrow. Hiawatha goes to seek revenge for his mother, from his father. The father and son fight each other for three days and nights, then the father, who admires his son's bravery and boldness, which remind him of himself in his youth, stops the fight and decides to prepare his son to share his kingdom as a reward. The meeting between the father and son is very similar in both the myth and the play in their structure, behaviour or feelings. Brick, like Hiawatha, has a lot of complicated feelings toward his father: love, fear and cautiousness. And the fathers in both cases want to examine the son and successor's likeness to them.

Mary Ann Corrigan in her critical essay 'Memory, Dream, and Myth in the plays of Tennessee Williams' has a different explanation of the hidden myth in Williams's plays. She suggests that he used mythical substructures to treat the problem of time in his plays.

Tennessee Williams' writing reveals a striking preoccupation with the problem of time, ..., he has juxtaposed past and present, created worlds of fantasy, and employed mythical substructures in order to suspend the irrevocable forward direction of time in his plays (Martin 1997, 221).

Of the many articles and critical essays written about this play, most of them focus on its surface structure. Few of them pay attention to its mythical structures and dimensions, whether those dimensions form a new synthetic myth, influenced by the ancient mythology of Greece, modern anthropological and psychological theories, or

deal with problems of time. No doubt the play, in the view of those who identify its mythical structures, becomes richer, illustrating the importance of mythical dimensions, even in a contemporary realist play. Similar thoughts, feelings, problems and philosophy to those adopted in the ancient Greek plays, which depend on myths, are repeated in modern plays. Basically, one can say that as long as realism reflects the reality of life, it will continue also to reflect myth, because the perception of the world is formed from both facts and myths, physical and metaphysical visions. That is to say, in specific circumstances, reality converts to myth and myth converts to reality; there is no definite border to separate one from the other.

Examples of Realism and Myth in Arab and Omani Theatre

Henrik Ibsen and Tennessee Williams generally deal indirectly with the ancient myths that enrich their works. However, this was not the only way of employing myths in realistic plays. In some other plays, real events are linked directly to mythical ideas, symbols or even themes. In the Arab world, this occurs with the portrayal of the life of Antara Bin Shaddad Al-Absi, which is the theme of many plays.

The myth concerns Antara, a heroic, brave horseman whom nobody can face in battle, and who always protects his tribe from external danger. Although his tribe admit his valour in defending them, they denigrate him because of the black skin that he has inherited from his mother. So when Antara reveals his desire to marry his lovely cousin, Abla, his wish is refused, especially by his uncle Malik, who considers Antara a mere slave and rejects him as a potential son in law. Antara's father tries to help him by recognizing him as his son and a freeman who has rights over his wealth, but this announcement does not work, because it cannot change the colour of his skin. Nevertheless, the bravery of Antara and his beneficence to his tribe can never be overlooked. Those matters make Malik's situation embarrassing. The only solution he

can think of is to accept Antara's request, with an insuperable condition, a dowry consisting of one thousand Al-Asafeer Camels, found only in the kingdom of Al-Numan, a ruler known for his fierceness. The tale then recounts Antara's heroism on his long journey, where he penetrates the kingdom and single-handedly fights the whole of Al-Numan's army, captures the camels, returns to his tribe and marries his cousin. Some critics argue that the story of Antara is merely a popular tale that cannot attain the status of myth. In the current writer's opinion, there is no doubt that Antara is a mythical hero who performs great deeds that nobody else could do in his time or for a long period after-wards, if indeed he really existed as a person, and there is great scepticism about his existence. Antara challenged the holy tradition of his tribe that considered anyone with black skin to be a slave. He fought against that and finally broke the rule and demolished the system. He became a master in his tribe, despite his black skin. It is important to know that the traditions in those days were as strict as religion elsewhere and, later, in the Arabian peninsula. Challenging the holy law, breaking and providing a new explanation for it, is a characteristic feature of myth, as is the hero's unlimited physical ability.

Husayn Kamal (1993, 178 – 197), the Arab critic, stated that many plays were inspired by this myth. For example, the poet Shukri Ghanim wrote a play about Antara in 1901, then Habib Jamati 1928, the famous poet Ahmad Shawqi in 1932, and finally Yussiri Al-Gindi in 1977. Husayn described this final play as a mixture of reality and heritage. Here again, a political message is conveyed by myth. Although Yussiri (1977) used the well-known myth in all its details in the first part of the play, he added another part to express his view of modern society and political issues in Egypt. He concentrated on the theme of master and slave in the myth to indicate the situation in Egypt. In the early seventies, the president of Egypt, Anwar Al-Sadat, turned his back on the Soviet Union and established a relationship with the United States of America and this led him later to

the peace process. In Yussiri's view, it is true that Al-Sadat achieved a sort of peace with Israel, but it is true also that he mortgaged his power, and his country's political and economic issues, to the will of the United States. He got rid of one form of slavery to fall into an even worse one. To convey this message in Yussiri's play, although Antara returns to his tribe and becomes a master, he cannot get rid of his slavery, the major problem of his life. Antara can only get the camels from Al-Numan after promising to defend Al-Numan's kingdom and fight his enemies whenever he asks him to do so. As a conclusion, Antara remains the slave of Al-Numan instead of his own tribe.

The Dowry

From Omani theatre, the play *The Dowry*, produced in 1985, is an appropriate example of employing the myth of Antara in theatre production. Concerning its topic, this play can be categorised as realistic as it focuses on real and current problems of young men's lives in Oman. The main character in the play, Rashid, is in love with Maryam, but he cannot marry her because of the greed of her father, who requires him to pay six thousand Riyals as a dowry. Fathers used to acquire glory by receiving a high dowry for their daughters. Of course, this amount is beyond the means of most middle class young men, including Rashid, who has graduated recently from the university and has only just started to work. Finding a dowry is not the only problem facing Rashid and other young men in Oman. They suffer from other costs related to marriage. This topic was being widely debated in society in 1985, when the play was presented. At the first glance, one might assume that a play cannot add anything if it deals with such a topic in absolutely realistic terms, as did many sketches and short plays performed in clubs. Yet, the way in which Mansur Makkawi the author, an Egyptian playwright who was living in Oman, deals with it, presents a really exciting play. So what did he do and why did he succeed?

Basically, the secret of his success was in embroidering the reality of the story with the ancient myth of Antara Bin Shaddad Al-Absi.

The play starts with group of Omani relatives; young people gathering at a picnic in the desert, to discuss the problem of Rashid who wants to marry Maryam but cannot pay the dowry that her father has asked for her. The group consists of Salim and Fatema, a couple who have been married for several years but are still struggling to pay off bank loans, Ali who comes alone, and is angry with his wife Zaina who spends a lot of money in buying luxurious household goods, Thani and his wife Shakha who are uncomfortable with the whole picnic idea, and finally Rashid. As soon as they start talking about Rashid's problem, they see a ghost coming towards them. As the ghost approaches them, they recognize him as Antara Al-Absi. From this moment, the play takes a different direction in which the aspects of reality in Rashid's story are mixed with aspects of myth in Antara's story. Indeed, more than one myth is put before the readers, the myth of Antara and the myth of mixing modern society with the earlier Bedouin one. The author seems desirous to compare Rashid's situation with Antara's. Both of them want to marry their lovers and their fathers in law put obstacles in their way, and Makkawi is saying that, in spite of all our modern outward appearance, we are still living in the old state of ignorance. In the past, Antara had to provide a dowry of thousands of camels. In the present day, Rashid has to provide a dowry of several thousand Riyals. The play is set in an ancient Bedouin environment, exploiting its rituals and folklore. Rashid accompanies Antara to Al-Numan's kingdom in order to get the camels and money. King Al-Numan captures them, and when he learns their aims, he promises to give them what they came for after they have worked for ten years in the service of his kingdom. Rashid works for a short period, then escapes, preferring to go back to serve his country, even if he cannot marry Maryam. When he arrives home he is surprised to find that his prospective father in law has changed his attitude and allows

him to marry with a small dowry. Antara, however, continues to work for Al-Numan, returning as an old man, to find his lover, Abla, has married somebody else and has six children. So, he takes out from his pocket small models of Al-Asafeer camels and distributes them among Abla's children. The play ends with the scene of the picnic in the desert as at the beginning, with the group of relatives group waking as if from a long sleep. All the events in the play were merely a dream and nothing else.

In the following dialogue, the author tries to show the similarities and differences between Rashid and Antara:

Rashid: (talking to Salim about a book he has read about Antara) I have read it three times. Listen brother... I found Antara exactly like me... his father in law asked him to get one thousand Al-Asafeer Camels because he wanted to send him to hell. The old man Hilal dose same thing, asks me for six thousands Riyals as dowry. He also wants to get rid of me.

Salim: It is a strange coincidence and similarity.

Rashid: Sometimes I say that the task of Antara was easier than mine. All he had to do was get a sword and horse then he could get what he wanted, in addition it counted as heroism for him. But what can I do to solve my problem; the time of horsemen is over. My dear Salim we are living in a different time.

Salim: God save you.

Rashid: Some old men are still living with the spirit of the Abs Tribe (Makkawi 1985, 18, 19)²¹.

So, it might seem, at first glance, that the playwright condemned the traditions of Antara's era and made from it an example that the modern society should avoid. In other words, he put the myth of Antara in the category of false tales and invited the audience to discuss it, but this narrow view of the myth misses the essential point of it, as will be explained next.

Before going further with the mythical dimension, a couple of points can be mentioned here about the structure of the drama. The first regards the unexplained change in the attitude of Rashid's father in law. It seems as if the writer wanted to end Rashid's

²¹ The present writer translated this dialogue freely from Arabic to English.

problem with a shortcut in order to continue with the second plot of Antara, which he found more interesting, in spite of his condemnation of it. Second, regarding the unsatisfactory ending that makes everything a mere dream, it could be argued that the play would be more effective if the final scene were omitted or changed for a more reasonable end, such as an open end or shocking conclusion.

The matter of concern here is to what extent the playwright succeeded in employing an ancient myth in a modern play that deals with a real and current issue. Did the myth serve the issue or was it a useless encumbrance? Probably, the myth enriched the play and its topic on more than one level: First, the myth widened and deepened the topic from a narrow issue of concern to a specific society in a specific period, to an essential matter relevant to people everywhere and at all times. The problem in the play is no longer Rashid's alone, but instead a problem of any young man from the era of Antara to the present day, who suffers from obstacles put in the way of his marriage, a problem which may continue into the future. Secondly, on the level of spirituality, the myth gives the play an interesting atmosphere full of ritual and folklore, exciting events and satirical humour, especially the comparative images of Rashid and Antara. On the level of setting, the myth gives the play the ability to move from the confines of the desert or a salon in a modern house, to remarkable settings such as the environment of an ancient Arabic tribe and the kingdom of Al-Numan.

It is easy to find how the myth serves the modern play, but that leads to another question: does the play serve the well-known myth? Actually, the play presents the myth upside down, changing its events and its essential message. The focal point in the myth was slavery, not a dowry or any marriage obstacles, as it became in the play. Antara was fighting for his freedom; he wanted to be treated as a master, not as a slave serving his tribe. Once again, theatre employed an ancient myth to carry a modern social message, which has a different sense and nature.

The Ship is Still Wrecked

Myth sometimes is used in realistic plays to emphasize particular events or characters, as in this example from Omani theatre, the play entitled *The Ship Is Still Wrecked*²²(1987), which is about the impact of sudden wealth on a society. The events start with the ship sailing under the leadership of its old wise captain, who is taking with him his sick pregnant wife in order to get treatment in another country where medicine is advanced. The captain and his wife take their attractive young daughter with them, in order to take care of her sick mother. On the ship there are many sailors who are working hard and in harmony with each other: Rabhan, one of the sailors, is an ambitious man who considers himself second to the captain, Hyman is a poet and romantic who is always dreaming and is in love with his fiancée, the daughter of the captain. Fahman is the foster son of the captain, who has no loyalty to anybody except his foster father. Shaban, a fat man, is willing to sell his loyalty to anybody who feeds him. The play starts when a strong wind blows the ship off course, to an isolated island. Part of the ship is damaged, and some sailors are injured, including the captain, who is shocked and becomes blind and paralysed. However, the sad depressing state of the captain provides a great opportunity to Rabhan, offering him the dream of his entire life, to lead the group. He imposes himself upon the other sailors, asking them always to respect the captain's situation and pray for him, but never giving a chance for any of them to sit beside the captain or to listen to his words, ignoring all the captain's attempts to unite the group and encourage them to repair the ship together. Rabhan instead leads the sailors in a useless search for any means of life on the island that might sustain them for some time and support his leadership, ignoring the matter of the captain and the

²² This play was written and directed by the present writer in 1987 for the Omani Theatre. The play was the first Omani theatrical participation outside Oman in the GCC Festival of Theatre in UAE, and achieved prizes for acting and décoration.

wrecked ship. However, Rabhan and his group cannot find anything worthwhile, so the sailors start to lose hope and ask if there is anyone who can repair their ship and take them back home.

At the peak of their suffering, hunger, thirst and misery, in a dream-like scene, a Mermaid rises up to them from the sea and offers to grant them whatever they want. Everybody hurries to ask her for his own desires. Some of them, like Shaban, ask her for a lot of food and drink, others ask her for clothes and gifts to remember her by, especially Hyman, who falls in love with her and starts to write poems about her beauty, neglecting his beloved fiancée, the daughter of the Captain. Rabhan asks the Mermaid to give him treasures of gold and jewellery. The Mermaid gives them everything they asked then disappears forever. All of them forget their major problem; none of them has remembered to ask the Mermaid to repair their ship or cure the captain. The sailors on the isolated island become healthy and wealthy, enjoying a pleasurable life under the direction of a new leader, Rabhan, who does not hesitate to remind them on every occasion that they enjoy their life as a result of his kindness.

However, it is not long before the sailors start to wake up to the voice of conscience that is embodied in the voices of the captain's daughter who is busy with her mother, whose condition is becoming very serious, and of Fahman, the foster son of the captain, who is engrossed in serving his foster-father. Both of them carry the captain's messages to the sailors about the importance of paying attention to their wrecked ship, warning them that the wealth someday will run out and then they will not be able to bear the life on this desert island. Although Rabhan makes every effort to keep the matter under his control by providing a luxurious life for the sailors, isolating them from Fahman and subjugating the captain's daughter by trying to marry her, he finally, under the pressure of the sailors, forms a number of committees to study the issue of the wrecked ship. Each committee establishes many other subsidiary committees and expends large

amounts of wealth and time. All the committees and subsidiary committees in the end come to the same conclusion that they cannot depend on themselves to repair the ship, because they have lost their ability and experience in such work. Consequently, there is no option but to ask for help from the High Seas Fleet or Dawn Seas Fleet. These two fleets, which neglected the sailor's tragedy at the beginning because they were poor, might agree to help them now that they have become rich. The sailors are divided into two parties. One of them, led by Hyman, wants to bring an expert from the High Seas Fleet, because Hyman meets their woman delegate who seduces him with her beauty and promises to get more women for him and his partners if he makes the contract with her fleet. The other party is led by Fahman, who wants to bring an expert from the Dawn Sea Fleet because their delegate promises him that they will repair the ship and treat the captain. Since Hyman is closer to Rabhan than Fahman, he brings the first expert, who spends another great part of their wealth and fails to repair their ship. Fahman then brings the second expert, who steals all that is left of the wealth and escapes. The sailors are back to where they were hopeless and miserable on a desert island, still with a wrecked ship, and are now in an even worse position because they are now two factions fighting each other.

In the final scene of the play, a fight starts between the two parties. The captain hears them fighting and crawls towards them to separate them, but the two parties do not listen to the captain and trample him under foot. At the same time, a newborn baby is heard crying off-stage, and the daughter of the captain approaches, carrying her newborn brother. She is shocked by her father's death. She embraces the baby, cries, then rises and looks defiantly to the eyes of the sailors swearing that she will bring the baby up to be a strong man to continue his father's role.

The play is obviously talking about people in the Gulf and the sudden wealth that they received from oil, how well they used it for the benefit of their country (the ship) and

their people (the sailors). This is the major question of the play. But what matters here is the myth, how it is used in this play. Actually, the play deals with myth on two levels. The first one is the direct use of myth in the play as in the scene with the Mermaid, and the second is the hidden myth behind some characters and events.

One may ask whether the play is realistic in all its events, why it suddenly jumps to a mythical scene, the scene of the Mermaid. Does not this mixing of elements create a defect in the play? This opinion might be valid if this scene were the only aspect of myth in the whole play, but in fact there are seeds of myth in the play from the beginning to the end.



The poster of *The Ship is Still Wrecked* (1987)

Before going further in displaying hidden mythical roots, it is useful to talk first about the importance of the obvious and direct mythical scene. The scene with the myth of the Mermaid emphasizes the most important element in the play, the sudden wealth. It carries the exact meaning of sudden or unplanned wealth that people, themselves, are shocked and surprised by, as it shows it to be something unimaginable yet happening in real life. The Mermaid as a symbol here could be interpreted in many ways, from fate to the foreign powers or colonizers. Such symbolism opens up the scope of the play and challenges readers and spectators to provide their own views. It is understood, when somebody talks about sudden wealth in the Gulf, that he or she means oil, but if the play were to mention oil directly, it might become too subjective and artless. Furthermore, the scene of the Mermaid is used to link the gap between two different societies, the society before the wealth and the one after the wealth, in an obvious comparative situation. In addition, the image of the Mermaid exists in the collective memory of the people from oral folklore, but they have never seen it portrayed alive. Spectators like to see something familiar embodied on the stage, which allows them access to the situation.

On the other hand, from the first moment in the play, there are signs of a mythical atmosphere. The scene opens with sailors on an abandoned island with a wrecked ship. Where is this place, and what are they doing here? There are no specific answers. It seems as if fate gave everything to them. From the beginning, there is a sense of tragedy, people in an ordeal similar to the ordeal of the city of Thebes in the Greek myth of Oedipus. Rabhan plays a role that has many features of the role of Oedipus. He is the man who wrests power from his master\father, and brings to his people all kinds of welfare, yet cannot rid them of their ordeal, because he is essentially part of it. The blind captain who is always warning people of their bad habits and the coming danger

has much in common with the character of the old blind oracle, Teiresias, in the myth of

Oedipus:

The Captain: (talking to the sailors) Not in the ship, but in the people is the corruption.

Search for the defect inside us, not in the wood.

The darkness is in eyes; clouds never can cover the brightness (Al-Lawati 1987, 83).

Then there is the Chorus, which is represented by the group of sailors who collectively express their fears and wishes. Also, in the daughter of the captain can be seen the character of Antigone, the girl who survives from the royal family and who inherits her father's will to achieve her aim. The daughter of the captain also carries the image of Electra in the Greek Oresteian Trilogy, the young girl who meets her brother, Orestes, to avenge their father and retrieve his rights. This dimension is obvious in the following final monologue in the play, when the daughter of the captain comes in, carrying her baby brother, Falah:

The Girl: (happy) Father... Father.

Oh. My Captain Father... Falah is come.

(She is shocked at seeing her father's body thrown down on the centre of the stage)

(She shouts)... Father... *(She cries)*.

(She embraces her brother, then talks to her father is prostrate body)

Father

Falah is come

Don't you want to see him

He is your son

He looks like you

He has all your features

See his forehead

He has your highness and pride

You have been waiting for him a long time

So, he is here now

Do you want to abandon him and leave? Without even a single word?

(She continues crying strongly, she then stand up, embraces the baby to her chest)

Father

I promise

Death will never take you from us

We will see you in Falah's eyes

Yes, he is your extension

I will embrace him

I will take care of him

He will grow

He will build up

His arms will be strong

I promise

Tomorrow will be the day of Falah

And of Falah, you will be proud (Al-Lawati 1987, 85, 86).

Furthermore, the daughter of the captain can be linked to the character of Isis, the ancient Egyptian Goddess, and the myth of her collecting the organs of her murdered husband in order to bring him to life again. The daughter of the captain performs the same role; she collects her father/captain's organs to bring him back to life in the body of his son, Falah. Therefore, the daughter of the captain seems at first glance to be a character from real life, but she also contains parts from three mythical characters: Antigone, Electra and Isis, which universalise her behaviour.

There are, also other characters in the play that rooted in ancient myth and mythical characters. Fahman, the faithful adopted son who tries his best to treat the captain in order to keep him alive and active, takes us back 5000 years, to the myth of Gilgamesh in the ancient civilization of Babel. Gilgamesh the King/God had spent a lot of time and effort in order to find the Elixir, the water that would offer eternal life. But when he was granted it after a hard long journey, a snake stole it from him. This explains why the snake can remain alive by changing its skin, but the human cannot. Fahman thought for a while that he would succeed in getting an Elixir for the captain when he made an

agreement with the Dawn Sea Fleet to repair the ship and cure the captain, but the snake/ expert stole the money and the dream. Hyman is another character who can be traced back to the Greek myth of Pygmalion, the sculptor who invested all his experience in hewing a sculpture of perfect women, then fell in love with his work and asked the Gods to give his sculpture life. Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, responded and gave the sculpture life, and Pygmalion married the woman from his own fiction. Hyman portrays the perfect woman in his poem, but he never finds her in real life. At first, he thinks that the daughter of the captain is the perfect one, until he sees in the Mermaid the perfect woman, but unfortunately, she disappears. He then starts his journey to search for her everywhere, particularly in the High Sea Fleet.

In conclusion, the majority of realistic plays have mythical roots. Some of these roots are indirect or hidden and cannot be recognized except by analysing them in the light of the theory of primitive symbols or by submitting them to Archetypal Criticism. One may ask to what extent those links are facts and whether the playwrights intended such links to ancient myths. Really, it does not matter whether the playwrights intended to create those links to ancient myth or not. Of course, some of them did, and in other cases, the influence came through their works spontaneously from a collective unconsciousness, leaving explanation and analysis to critics who may highlight such links later on. In some other realistic plays, the imbrications with an ancient myth are direct and have specific aims. Sometimes to draw attention to a particular event in the play and give it significance by universalising it, and at other times they are used as symbols to compare a contemporary character, event or theme with an ancient one in the myth to convey a specific message. Myths always provide the performances with greater imaginative depth below the surface reality. That is to say, if the mythical dimension is employed properly, it will enrich the play on both intellectual and aesthetic levels.

Part Two: Myth and Modernism

The employment of myths in modern drama is not limited to Realism. It is engaged with even more profoundly in Modernism. Just as the realist movement focused on the material reality surrounding human beings, and their society, the modernist movement which in the theatre included surrealism, expressionism, futurism and the absurd was an important revolution against realism, that focused on the inner reality of the human emotions. It is characterized by boldness, distortion and forceful presentation according to the playwright's personal vision. In Modernism reside the deep psychological forces that lie beneath thoughts, feelings and dreams. The earlier conventions of theatre, plot, structure and characterization are thrown out and replaced with the expression of feeling, ignoring the logic of reality. The main task of the playwright, in modernism, is to stay always anti-naturalistic and create a dreamlike or nightmarish atmosphere in which he can embrace a wide variety of moods-satirical, grotesque, visionary, exclamatory and violent. The question that expressionism tries to answer is, how can the person get more real than real? Its solution was to penetrate beneath reality to the extent that something more expressive replaces it. Getting beneath reality means introducing the realm of myth in modern concepts such as collective unconscious and primitive samples. As a classical concept, myth was an expression of the worries of ancient society, which was created by one person or more, but expressed people's fears and hopes, whether they were aware of that or not. According to modern studies of myth, it is another example of Jung's concept of collective unconscious. Therefore, it is no wonder that expressionism becomes a theory that overlaps closely with mythological theatre. They both concentrate on similar issues and cover the same human needs for understanding and justification, even though on a different basis. Although there are

many modern psychological and anthropological theories that try to interpret myths and dreams from various aspects, most expressionist dramatists, in order to keep the nature of art, insist on freeing their thoughts from any established dramatic forms and generate their works in an absolutely spontaneous way as people did in ancient times. However, the important change that occurred in this process was in the element of belief. Most contemporary dramatists do not deal with myth any more as a part of their religion (in the classical form), but consider it, more than anything else, as a form of free artistic expression.

Many critics such as Bintley (1948, 135) asserts that Expressionism was established in the early twentieth century and the Swedish playwright, August Strindberg (1849-1912), particularly in his play, *A Dream Play* 1901, created what is widely considered to be one of the first attempts at expressionism, if not absolutely the first. Strindberg wrote in an introductory note for *A Dream Play*:

In this dream play, as in his former dream play *To Damascus*, the author has sought to reproduce a new disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisation. The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallise, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds away over them all-that of dreamer. For him there are no secrets, incongruities, no scruples and no law. He neither condemns nor acquits, but only relates and, and since on the whole there is more pain than pleasure in the dream, a tone of melancholy and of compassion for all living things, runs through the swaying narrative. Sleep, the liberator, often appears as a torturer, but when the pain is at its worst, the sufferer wakes-and is thus reconciled with reality. For however agonising real life may be at this moment, compared with the tormenting dream, it is a joy (Strindberg 1998, 176).

The play, from the first moment, destroys the logic of reality, and engages the reader or audience in the realm of mythology by a prologue between the Indian God Indra and his daughter Agnes, who wants to leave the 'topmost cloud', and travel to the earth. Indra, although he knows that the earth is 'of Brahma's work no ill', allows his daughter to travel on condition that she observes and listens to what humans are complaining of and

returns to inform him. Thus, Agnes starts a long journey to the earth, where she meets many humans who embody different types of suffering. Agnes tries to get close to them, to be involved in their affairs and wishes to save them from pain, but as she comes close, she loses her divinity and attains human nature, where she discovers that pain and suffering are part of the human condition and there is no way to rid human beings of them. Therefore, she decides to leave the earth and return to the topmost clouds.

John Ward, in his book, *The Social and Religious Plays of Strindberg*, emphasises the dimension of religious myth in the play, asserting that the spiritual structure, which derives from Swedenborg, Hinduism and Christianity, is an essential base on which the deepest elements can be analysed. He cites some examples, such as the act of the god Indra when he allows his daughter to take a human body. He assumes that such an act in Strindberg's view is an act of self-sacrifice (the imprisonment of a divine soul in a human body), which is akin to the concept of Christ. He also refers to the Hindu mythological framework:

With the union of Brahman (spirit) and Maya (earth), the universe was created and men's dual aspirations were irrevocably established. Throughout the play, the male and female are examined through three corresponding pairs of egos; Daughter and Poet, Bookkeeper and Lawyer, Mother and Officer. But these later fuse into a single personality; the dreamer. Through the various female characters, Indra's daughter represents all women (i.e. Maya), while all the male characters combine to represent the virile force (Brahman) (Ward 1980, 212).

Ward notes the existence throughout the play of many signs of Swedenborg's mythology such as the belief that "the soul after death is made to manifest its true nature. So Indra's daughter, the catalyst in this final scene, causes the pretensions of each character to drop away, leaving the ego nakedly good or evil" (Ward 1980, 227).

Nevertheless, the play is not just concerned with ancient religious mythologies. It also penetrates the realm of modern psychological theories and the advanced explanations of myth as representing a collective unconscious, primitive patterns and psychological

complexes. It is no coincidence that this play appeared in 1901, in the same year as Freud's famous seminal book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. They are similar in many respects, in particular, the dream atmosphere and the magic of the unconscious realm, the topic that started to draw Western attention in this period.

Psychologists such as Freud, Jung and others, who wrote about dreams and the unconscious mind, emphasized that the roots of genius hide in the unconscious human mind and that we cannot reach them as long as we remain awake. We can reach them only in sleep, in our dreams or daydreams. Some writers, such as Strindberg, changed their style, in the early years of the twentieth century, from realism to expressionism and symbolism, to penetrate into the area of dreams and interior human feelings. Even Stanislavsky, the famous Russian director and modern theatrical pioneer of naturalism at the turn of the century, was already seeking a theatre that would "picture not life itself as it takes place in reality, but as we vaguely feel it in our dreams" (Roose-Evans 1984, 75). J. M. Ritchie, in his translation of the book, *German Expressionism* (1980, 7), describes Expressionist drama as:

a theatre of gesture, noise, colour, and movement, theatre which is not psychological but plastic and physical, theatre which is anarchic and dangerous, theatre in which violent images crush and hypnotise the sensibility of spectator, theatre which is at times as devoid of speech as a silent film and at other times engulfs the listener in a storm-wave of words, theatre which is as deeply serious as it is grotesquely funny.

The Myth of Schizophrenia

The Omani theatre has presented few plays dealing with the human inner psyche, which might be categorized as expressionist theatre. However, a play worth mentioning here is *The Depth and the Visor*²³, written by the Egyptian playwright Abd al-Jafar Makkawi and presented in the Omani theatre in 1990. It narrates the story of the great opportunist

²³ The present writer directed this play for the Omani theatre in 1990.

merchant, Abd al-Jafar Amin, an ambitious, successful character, who suddenly falls into depression and suffers from schizophrenia. A split occurs between, on the one hand, his early character when he was an honest young man, having his legitimate dreams, and his great love for Zaynab, who later becomes his wife, and their tender, delicate little girl, Ahlam, and on the other hand, his present character. Now, he has become a successful businessman mostly concerned with developing his projects and swelling his funds. Because of that, he has neglected his beloved wife and forgotten his delicate daughter, while pursuing his endless ambitions. He was too preoccupied to remember his daughter who lay in agony on her deathbed waiting for the medicine he was supposed to bring her on time. He was too late when he finally reached home with the medicine; Ahlam had already passed away and only speechless looks of reproach were on the face of her mother. Only then did Abd al-Jafar Amin realize the gravity of his situation. Gradually, the split between his first, honest, character and his second, opportunistic, one became clear. He then began to suffer mentally. His suffering developed into feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety and a frightening nightmare. The aspect of psychological myth is created here when Abd al-Jafar Amin imagines that his honest self is trying to murder his opportunistic self.

This play has obvious roots in the ancient Greek myth of Agamemnon, which appears in the "Iliad". Abd al-Jafar Amin sacrificed his daughter Ahlam for the sake of his business ambitions, exactly as Agamemnon did with his beautiful daughter Iphigenie when he became leader of an assembly of allied kings and led the army of Greeks against Troy. He sacrificed her when his fleet was becalmed, as thanks to the goddess who blew the wind that carried their ships and enabled them to achieve victory in the battle. They both, Abd al-Jafar Amin and Agamemnon ignored their wives' wills and met a similar end. One was imprisoned by his madness and the other was murdered by his wife and her lover. However, the writer here extends the role of Abd al-Jafar Amin,

to be more than one character, so if he embodies Agamemnon in the first character, in the second he embodies Orestes who wants vengeance for his daughter's death, in this case, not from his mother but from himself. Zaynab, the wife, as well draws on two mythical characters, first, Clytemnestra, in her love for her daughter and rejection of the act of sacrifice, and second, Electra, in achieving her revenge by silence and blaming glances. Moreover, the poetic dialogue of a group of nurses at the hospital talking to Abd al-Jafar Amin is similar to an ancient Greek chorus talking to the mythical heroes, the one hand embodying the conscience of the hero and on the other hand recalling the final part of the myth, when the goddesses of anguish bound Orestes as a punishment for the sin of killing his mother, as the following lines show:

Nurses: You have moved indeed
Woe unto whoever does not move
You have culminated
And Where? Woe unto whoever falls
You have ascended the throne of power
And your friend is still in the abyss
Have you really reached the peak?
What does it mean?
What is it for?
What is the wisdom behind it?²⁴

However, this play can be seen from another perspective as a psychological mythical explanation according to modern theories. Sin is an integral part of the human psyche that can be revealed nowhere but in dreams and the unconscious. The writer deals with internal issues or the unconscious realm, which necessarily needs language different from the depiction of everyday reality. Therefore, the writer uses poetry to express psychological suffering at its peak. It is used to convey both the dream of the past representing the values of honesty, kindness, uprightness, legitimate ambition, the

²⁴ This dialogue was translated from the Arabic script of the play.

loving wife and the meek daughter, and later, the sufferings of the present, with the myth-like notion of two characters in one person. Certainly, the poetic dialogue is very effective in creating the atmosphere of the suffering and projecting the desired romantic atmosphere onto the dream of the past. Consequently, the plot of the play is not completely original; it has a hint of ancient myths, directly or through psychological analysis. This hint featured even in the setting, costumes and atmosphere as well as in the modern presentation of the mythical voice of the chorus and conscience. These elements are very successful and are used appropriately, at the right time and place.

Ubu the New Mythical Monster

Strindberg's contemporary, the French playwright Alfred Jarry (1873-1907), invented his bestial human being, Ubu, seen in a series of plays, *Ubu Rex*, *Ubu Cuckolded*, and *Ubu Enchained*. Although the audience did not accept Jarry's plays at first, they are now considered as a turning point in the international movement of theatre. Some critics considers Jarry as a pioneer of Surrealism and the Theatre of the Absurd (Aaron, 1, 2). The plot of *Ubu Rex* was stimulated by tensions between the bourgeoisie and the bohemian artistic community, which continued well into the 1930s. Thus, Alfred Jarry's character of *Ubu* helped release the imagination of artists and writers of the twentieth century (Shattuck 1965, 9).

Jarry's plays seem at first glance to be simple in plot, if not naive, but they had their own philosophy and controversial form that challenged the perception of his contemporary critics. Jarry did not believe in any of the inherited philosophies, which explained metaphysics and ignored any sort of logic behind the natural phenomena. Therefore, he invented his own philosophy, which he called, sarcastically, 'Pataphysics', in which he tried to bypass all classical metaphysical theories. In spite of that, there are many clear hints of ancient mythology in his works. His three plays in the

Ubu series narrate the deeds of the extraordinary characters, Pa Ubu, and his wife Ma Ubu. Ubu is a very savage, cruel, fat man with an evil tongue and dirty clothes. He and his wife do not hesitate to commit any kind of murders and crimes to gratify their desire for eating and collecting money.

Claude Schumacher described this character as follows:

Despite his all-too-human origins, Ubu's character owes nothing to naturalist aesthetics. Every objectionable trait of his mental or physical make-up is both simplified and exaggerated. Ubu is a dramatic force expressing elemental passion to the full without any psychological interference (Schumacher 1984, 40, 41).

Elsewhere he added: "Ubu is the personification of all our baser instincts and negative qualities: greed, cruelty, stupidity, gluttony, selfishness, cowardice, vulgarity, infidelity" (Schumacher 1984, 41).

In the first play of the series, *Ubu Rex* (1896), Ubu forms a conspiracy in which the king of Poland, Wenceslas, is killed as are all members of the royal family, except his son Boggerlas, the legal heir to the throne, who manages to escape with his mother. So, the whole kingdom comes under the control of Ubu, the bestial creature, who sends a huge number of nobles, judges and bankers to the death in order to take over their fortunes. By the end of the play, he loses a war against the Czar of Russia, who swears to take revenge on Ubu for his relative, King Wenceslas, and escapes with his wife to France. Ubu, as a bestial creature who dominates the kingdom and kills its people arouses in the memory the image of the monster that was dominating the city of Thebes before Oedipus' arrival in the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus. The monster used to ask everyone who approached it a puzzle, and if he could not answer, killed him. Therefore, one may say that the monster and the city of Thebes were the root of the character of Pa Ubu and the kingdom of Poland. If one considers that the monster of Thebes in the myth was substituted by another one, Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother, who brought grievous ordeals to the city, then we can consider Ma Ubu as a new image

of Jocasta, the mother/wife of Oedipus and the sharer in his sin. The difference between the characters is that the ancient Oedipus and Jocasta were wearing a mask of morality and seemed to be faithful to their city and people, while the new Pa and Ma Ubu are naked. They have no loyalty except to their desires.

In the second play of the series, *Ubu Cuckolded* (1879 or 1898), Ubu is not a king any longer, he is merely a member of the public, but is inhabited by an evil spirit, so that he cannot see anybody in the world but himself. He has no compunction about crushing anyone who blocks his way. Therefore, he does not hesitate to kill Achras, the art student with whom he lodges, and take his house as long as this act causes no danger to him. No matter how good and harmless a person Achras was, he must die because this is to Ubu's advantage. George Walworth in his book, *The Theatre of Opposition and Contradiction* (1963, 19), detected the sense of Indian mythology in this play, especially the great idol of Juggernaut, 200 feet high, beneath which devotees used to sacrifice themselves.

In the third play, *Ubu Enchained*, Ubu changes his life-style. He is no longer a king, nor even one of the public, but a slave who works with his hands. Even in his slavery, Ubu is obsessed by the sort of superpower that he used to have, because the strict social system makes everybody a slave to orders obeying rules and traditions, while the slave in this case is in a better situation because he is not doing more than he is supposed to. However, the play ends with Ubu and his wife sailing in a military ship leaving France in the hope of finding a country that has the sort of upside down logic that deserves them. Nehad Selaiha the Arabian critic in her book, *Contemporary Theatrical Tendencies* (2003, 98, 99), suggests that when Jarry chose the title *Ubu Enchained*, inviting readers or audience to recall the ancient Greek myth, Orpheus Enchained, it was not to say that there is a similarity between Ubu and Orpheus, but to make an ironic hint at the difference between the two characters. One may agree with her that Orpheus

was, in the myth, a creative poet and musician who overwhelms men, animals and even gods, a liberator who wants to invent a grand system for the world, free from any sort of oppression, while Ubu uses every sort of oppression to achieve his desires. It is as if Jarry wants to say that the image of a good creature who works for the people's welfare is an ancient myth. This is not true any longer. The truth is that people live off each other's blood. What should be noted here is how Jarry employed the ancient myth to deliver his contemporary view.

Theatrical works like Strindberg's and Jarry's represented a move from the realm of logic to one based on no logic, from the rational to the irrational. They moved from cause and effect to unknown cause and ambiguous effect. That is to say, they moved from the conscious to the unconscious mind, an area that had never before been submitted to defined conscious analysis in the theatre. In this area, individuals reveal buried desires; men face absolute violence, possession, and racism, exactly like *Ubu*, the main character in Jarry's plays, who adores evil, violence and blood, not for any self-interest or benefit, but simply for its own sake. From the early years of the twentieth century up to the present day, the realm of dreams and the unconscious has been one of the most distinguishing features in the modern theatre. As Freud and Jung suggested, dreams give us some keys to understanding our interior tendencies and forbidden desires, which exist inside every human being, but which are usually kept under control by society's laws and the power of the mind. These concepts were taken up by Antonin Artaud, the surrealist actor, director and theoretician. Artaud put forward his view of a "Theatre of Cruelty" in a book entitled *The Theatre and Its Double*, where he wrote:

The theatre will never find itself again, that is to say will never be able to form truly illusive means, unless it provides the audience with truthful distillations of dreams where its taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its savageness, its fantasies, its utopian sense of life and objects, even its cannibalism, do not gush out on an illusory make-believe, but on an inner level (Artaud 1974, 70).

Eric Sellin in his book, *The Dramatic Concepts of Antonin Artaud*, drew attention to three themes that recur in Artaud's theoretical works, "(1) a plea for a new language of the theatre, (2) catharsis, incorporating the ideas of cruelty and double, and (3) the almost mystical sense of vocation which the metteur en scene ought to possess" (Sellin 1968, 82). Artaud felt that people do not see themselves clearly except in their dreams, in which they connect with their ancient primitive past, when drama emerged as an aspect of rituals and myths. The dream device enabled Artaud to use dialogue in a purely theatrical way away from the requirements of literary style. It also allowed him to achieve his ideal of visual contact and physical language rather than the conventionally realistic one that depends mainly on words to carry the meaning. So, Artaud proposed that performances should depend on different elements such as music, dance, songs, fine arts, mime and employ effectively lights, scenery, ghosts, dolls, and events of violence and primitive power which supplant the everyday world and create mythically inspired images. "In the other words, theatre ought to pursue a re-examination not only of all aspects of an objective, descriptive outside world, but also all aspects of an inner world, that is to say man viewed metaphysically, by every means at its disposal" (Artaud 1974, 70).

So, Artaud aimed to explore the inner world of human beings, the world of dreams, which has its own distinct language producing images rather than words, and reflects the individual's and community's needs, desires and hopes. Such a word and such a language have much common with myth, in their nature and role in human life, even though Artaud concentrated on violence and blood rather than any other aspects.

Theatre of violence and blood depends on the argument that violence is an integral part of human nature; violence for violence's sake, even if there is no Benefit resulting from it. "There can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show. In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through

the body” (Artaud 1974, 75). It is impossible not to respond in some way, usually viscerally to images of set and scene. It argues that human beings are selfish, and everybody wants to possess everything by himself, even at the cost of bloodshed. Myths providing such a view of mankind recur in ancient Greek and Roman mythology, as in the monster of Thebes in the myth of Oedipus. Another example is the violence in the ancient Greek myth of Medea, who killed her sons in order to take vengeance on her husband, who left her for another woman. Such images of violence are common in ancient mythology, to the extent that it might be said violence and unusual characters are part of the nature of myth.

The Modern Omani Myth of Violence and Disaster

Sama Isa Al-Ta’i is an Omani poet who wrote the play entitled *Nothing Stops the Disaster* in 1991. The play contains several scenes in which the events are interspersed by a narrator’s interruptions. Although the play contains two acts and the first act contains three scenes, from the first moment, the play relinquishes the realistic theatrical form, as well the sense of logic. The playwright describes the setting in the first scene as a big green tree from which a swing hangs down, where a little girl is smiling and swinging. Nearby, there are three dead bushes, and then there are two open vacant graves, a deserted dry well with an old pail, and a high mound of sand where two men are sitting at the top, watching quietly. The two men have no specific names, but the writer describes them as fugitives 1 and 2. The two are talking about a disaster, which took place in their area and crushed everything, polluted the water and killed all living things except this little girl and her swing and tree. Death and sadness pervade. The two fugitives want to leave the area to escape from the disaster, but they do not want to leave any eyewitness to their disgrace, even a little girl on a swing, so they go close to the girl where they can see her more clearly, in order to explore whether the girl is

aware of their existence or not. They then discover that the girl is blind, but she can see remote things in space, she is deaf, but she can hear the hiss of trees, wind and far waves, and she is dumb but she can talk in silence with the water, trees, and spirits of the dead. So, they make their decision. They go to the girl and grasp her, one from the right and the other from the left, lift her while she is still smiling, and bury her alive in the sand under the tree.

In the second scene of the play, in the same setting, three lepers, one woman and two men, in their fifties, crawl exhaustedly to the place. The disease is destroying their limbs. The lepers talk about their miserable situation and their misfortune because they are not able to run away, and wonder how terrible their sins were, to cover the whole surface of the earth. They dream of that faraway land where God will forgive all their sins, heal them and return their youth. They then ask about their child, the little girl. Later, they discover that their little girl was buried under the tree. The leprous 'father' crawls to the leprous 'mother' and embraces her, and they both start to cry and wish they could wake up tomorrow to their little girl's voice, or be returned to their mother's womb, or to their dead ancestors' roots.

In the third scene, the two fugitives appear again and see the three lepers lying on the sand. They express their fear that those lepers will follow them to the new country where they intend to go, so they cut the rope of the swing and tie the lepers each one to a separate tree, then run away. The narrator appears at the end of the first act to say that the lepers are waiting for nothing but the death that comes too late.

In the second act, everything is the same except the green tree is dead. The narrator enters, warning those who migrate that they will never find shelter, any land they step on will be a home of disaster, because the disease is rooted inside them. Then he addresses the audience, asking them when that time will come when all of us are enabled to hide the sin of our existence and obtain from love the secret of our eternal

life. The narrator walks out and a traveller enters and sits on the top of the mound, listening to the lepers talking about their suffering and dreams, in particular, those dreams about their daughter, who wakes at night and sings for them, gives them water and feeds them black leftovers. The traveller, who has escaped from a burning land, finds himself involved in another disaster, so he tries to escape. When he hears the narrator address the audience again, calling them to take off the garment of death and wear the one of childhood, he hurries to help the lepers. The traveller takes a knife and unties the first one, and then he observes him crawling until he falls down into an open grave. The traveller cries and decides to untie the second leper. He gives him some water, but as soon as the leper drinks the water, he starts suffering from a bad pain in his stomach, and when he sees the pail shouts, "Who gave me this poisoned water?" then he crawls with the narrator's help to fall down into the second open grave. The traveller decides to deal with the woman in a different way. He approaches the woman singing and dancing. He lies down beside her and starts to suck her breasts one after the other, until his mouth is full of milk. The woman wakes up, looks at the traveller, laughs and blames him for what he did; telling him that the milk he sucked was poisoned yellow milk, because a woman can only give real milk to her child in motherhood. The traveller falls down dead, with the knife in his hand. The woman cries, then laughs, at the same time taking the knife and cutting her bonds. She stands up with the knife in her hand, and addresses the audience in a long monologue, blaming those that planted the sin in her womb. Later on, she lifts up the knife and cuts off one breast savagely and throws it towards the audience, then cuts off the other breast even more savagely and throws it towards the audience, and finally stabs herself hysterically many times, yelling in agony as she falls, stained with blood. There is a pause for one minute, and then the play ends. In many respects, this play can be recognized as Theatre of Cruelty, the scenes that depend on visual elements rather than on mere words, the physical acts particularly in

the final scene, violence and dreams. It is also intended to be cruel by shocking the audience out of its complacency in the face of constant potential disaster. On the other hand, there are many ancient mythical ideas and elements in this play. First of all, the disaster, which has attacked the country, recalls the one that attacked Thebes in the myth of Oedipus, and as a matter of fact, the theme of an old sin, which causes a present disaster, is a common plot in ancient mythology, in particular in the Middle East. For example, there is a Sumerian myth that ascribes a disaster, which attacks the country, to the anger of the goddess Anana, because a gardener raped her while she was sleeping in his garden. Another myth attributes the windstorm that overruns the country to the anger of Anlel, the god of wind. In another Sumerian myth, a disease that spreads through the country is attributed to Iyra, the god of pestilence, who is practising his mission from time to time, so there is always a sin or supernatural will behind the disaster (Al-Sawah 1989, 197-208). Returning to the myth of Oedipus, by the end, the inventor reveals the nature of the sin committed in the city; Oedipus had killed his father and married his mother. However, in this play, *Nothing Stops the Disaster*, nobody knows what sin they had committed to deserve such punishment. The writer wants to emphasise that there is no need to define the sin, because it is part of human nature. Men are full of sins and because of that, disaster comes, whether in the form of disease or death. This concept is related more to the modern theatre in which the cruelty of life alone is considered the important fact, as mentioned above, because the natural power is full of cruelty, to the extent that men can do nothing in front of it. According to this concept, the role of theatre is to enlighten the spectators about how much violence is settled in their psyches, and enable them to bring it under control.

In this play, again, the face of Iphigenie emerges in the image of a smiling little girl, whom the two men sacrifice by burying her alive under the tree in order to save themselves from scandal, as some Arab tribes used to do in ancient times. The habit of

sacrificing a son or daughter also frequently appeared in the ancient mythology of various cultures such as the native Indians of North America and ancient Brazil and some African tribes. The play invests the image of motherhood as a symbol for homeland, love and forgiving, as is popular in many ancient mythologies, in particular Indian mythology, which considers the cow as a holy creature, because it is a symbol of giving. However, the symbol of giving and motherhood is used at the end of play as a means of punishment, when the milk of the woman becomes poisoned and when the woman cuts off both breasts and throws them towards the audience, to remind them that they are fully partners in the sins. This physical imagery is also consistent with the aesthetic of modern theatre. Doubtless the final scene in the play of the woman cutting off her breasts after discovering the fact that nothing can stop disaster/death, recalls the act of Jocasta in Oedipus myth when she hangs herself, as well as the image of Oedipus himself when he gouges out his eyes, because he discovers that the sin in the city belonged to him and nobody else. The difference here is that the ancient Greek playwrights preferred to have such scenes reported by the chorus or an actor who describes that what has to have happened offstage, while modern theatre prefers to present such violent scenes on stage, to shock the audience. Furthermore, this play has a significant realistic reference to Omani society. In the middle decades of the last century, leprosy was a very widespread disease in Oman, and there was no medicine known to cure it. Lepers were exiled in remote places to avoid infection. This was very painful for their relatives and so many people considered it as a punishment from God for their sins.

Consequently, what is happening in our contemporary theatre regarding dreams and the unconscious mind is not absolutely new. It has deep roots in ancient mythology. It goes back to the roots of myth where the theatre was born. Dreams and the unconscious mind were the basis of myth, used unselfconsciously in ritual and drama. In the contemporary

theatre, many playwrights, however, use dreams and the unconscious mind consciously and mix them with the facts of contemporary life to present new perspectives, images, feelings or messages.

Symbolic and Visual Theatre

The search for new elements or language remote from the life's harsh reality and closer to metaphysical concerns led theatrical performance to focus on the visual and symbolic. This has adopted mainly the concept of art for art's sake, that is to say, that people come to the theatre, not to see reality surrounding them in life, but to see an invented beauty that had nothing to do with reality. Therefore, one of the suggestions was to present performances depending on abstract monumental sets of geometric shapes and levels which often had a classical Greek appearance, puppets, stage lighting and sound. Of course, the focal point in such a show is the presentation style, the craft of the art, more than words or intellectual arguments. The pioneers of this movement in modern theatre were Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, yet this style of performance also had roots in ancient Greek theatre. Michael Walton, in his introduction to his book, *Craig on Theatre*, (1999, 3) explains:

Every generation needs reminding that the word theatre comes from the Greek for 'to see' not 'to hear'. When Craig set himself up as the champion of visual in the theatre, he saw the need for an antidote to the phenomenon of Naturalism which advocated stage surroundings which were authentic and true-to-life.

He then summarizes Craig's technique in the theatre:

...He sought to remind audiences of perennial theatrical values, those single images which serve for a thousand words, the associations which transcend real life while giving to that life a greater meaning.

Even though in the ancient periods had no electric lights, and depended on sunlight, the roots of this theory can be found in the performances of mythological plays. Roman

actors used to wear large masks with specific designs to represent different facial expressions, and boots so audiences could see them from a distance, and to give a grand physical shape to their heroes, and emblematic costumes revealed their characters. In ancient Greek theatre, actors utilized a selection of mechanical devices in their performances. Some of those devices contribute to the mythical aspect, such as the crane which presented gods or demi-gods to the audience from above the setting. "The gods became, in physical form, personifications of more abstract ideas and emotions." (Walton 1996, 24)

The Theatre of the Symbolic and Visual in the Omani *Al-Baragge*

Al-Baragge is an Omani play that can be considered as a play of visual language and aesthetic harmony for many reasons²⁵. First of all, the play depends on scenes that contain most visual elements of the theatre, starting with prominent decoration, costumes, dance, music and folklore, in addition to individual and collective movement. Secondly, the play is absolutely free of words or dialogue. Thirdly, the element of aesthetic harmony is evident in the sets as well as in the performers' movements. The play *Al-Baragge* consists of several mingled folklore dances, which explore woman in her relationship with man in the conservative Omani society. 'Al-Baragge' is the plural of 'Burgo', a kind of veil covering all the features of a woman's face except the eyes. In some Omani regions, women must wear the 'Burgo' as soon as they pass childhood. The main decoration in the play consists of the huge shape of a 'Burgo' in the depth of the stage and two other smaller ones, one at each side, forming four rooms with transparent walls. In the centre of the main 'Burgo' there are several steps leading to a chair that looks like a throne, where, throughout the play, a man sits holding a pipe of

²⁵ The present writer wrote and directed this play for Majan Theatre Company in Muscat. This play represented Oman in the Fifth GCC Theatre Festival that was held in Kuwait in 1997 where it received the special award of the Jury.

'Sheshah' (kind of smoking popular in Arab areas) smoking intensively, while two 'Sheshah' shapes are seen in the eye holes of the main 'Burgo'. The play starts with the suffering of women in pregnancy. Then there are two scenes of delivery taking place at same time on the stage. One shows how the parents, relatives and friends express their gladness and pride when they hear that the new baby is a boy and in contrast, the second shows how those people express their displeasure when they know that the baby is a girl. Other scenes demonstrate how the parents and society are proud of the boy who accompanies his father everywhere, while the girl sits at home with her mother listening to old songs telling how a good girl should behave. When the girl grows up, she is not only forced to wear the 'Burgo', but also finds that every man, father, brother, uncle and cousin around her is another sort of 'Burgo'. When she grows up and meets a man with whom she falls in love and considers him as a way of escape from her present life, she discovers that her husband has many mistresses and finally she finds herself one of four wives in his house, which is overloaded with a great number of children. In the final scene, the play presents the man who has become very old, sitting on his throne smoking the 'Sheshah' determinedly, while the noise of burning dominates the stage. His white beard has grown very long, covering most of his face and extending to cover the whole area of the stage. Each of his four wives sits in her room holding a tuft of his beard, trying to comb it, while they recite traditional songs. At the end of the songs, the old man stands with difficulty, descends the steps and walks carefully until he reaches the centre of the stage, where his wives surround him, holding his huge beard from four sides. They start to move around him, while at the same time the man moves around in the opposite direction. The ropes of beard hair wind around the man and gradually the white beard cover his whole body. He becomes like a man wrapped in a shroud. The man feels heavier and heavier until he collapses motionless, surrounded by his four wives. Hundreds of children's images appear on the walls and behind the 'Baragge',

sharing the four women's wailing and crying. The four women, exhausted from weeping and crying, collapse beside their man. A moment of silence dominates the stage before a small boy appears wearing the 'Bisht' (a grand man's cloak) and moves with firm steps towards the throne. He ascends the steps lightly to reach the top step where he sits down, and picks up the pipe of 'Sheshah', sucking the smoke. The sound of burning becomes louder and louder. The lighting dims on the stage and concentrates on the boy for seconds, then there is a complete blackout.

The play *Al-Baragge* not only employs traditional elements in its form, but is also inspired by traditional thoughts and culture, as well as ancient myths. First, although there are no individual characters in the play, but a man who possibly represents all men, and a woman who possibly represents all women, the male images in this play in different ways resemble the mythological character of Shahriar. He was a great king in the Arabian medieval tales, *The Thousand and One Nights*, who used to get married every night and in the early morning of the next day kill the bride, to avenge himself on his first wife, whom he loved but who betrayed him with his slave. The king Shahriar did not desist from his habit until he married Shahrazad, who occupied his mind with exciting stories for a thousand and one nights. In the play there is a modern Shahriar who does not kill his wives but imprisons them in the house and who does not find Shahrazad, the mythical woman who can make him desist from his habit. The small boy in the play inherits his father's throne as his father inherited Shahriar's throne, and so on with life continuing in the same cycle. Secondly, the events in the opening scenes refer to the pre-Islamic period, when it was popularly believed that the birth of a girl was a sign of disgrace and bad fortune, so girl babies were buried alive as soon as they were born. Thirdly, the final scene, when the four women cry until they collapse besides the dead man's body, refers to many mythical beliefs that a wife should die with her

husband. Such a custom was familiar, for example, in ancient Indian mythology, since wives used to burn themselves with the bodies of their dead husbands.

The Concept of the Absurd and the Root of Myths

Absurdism as defined by Martin Esslin appeared after WWII. The theory of the Absurd is based on a realization that there is no sense to anything in life and no logic justifies or explains human behaviour. Martin Esslin in his book, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), attempts to distinguish between the regular drama, the well-made or 'good' play and the theatre of absurd:

If the good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babbling (Esslin 1961, 15).

Esslin also considers that the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd as he terms it, depicted the world in powerful and sometimes frustrating images, and despite its exaggerated, imaginary forms, it contained an essence of reality. That is to say, those plays expressed the reality of the human mind with its depression, fears and loneliness, in a strange and antagonistic world. Basically, their plays were surrealistic. Their reality was inner and psychological. They plumbed the depths of the human subconscious rather than external reality. Their difference from surrealism was their evocation of a world without meaning or beliefs. It is obvious that this theatrical tendency had its philosophical basis in Existentialism, particularly in France during the immediate post war period. The interpenetrative relationship between myth, theatre and philosophy has been mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis and in its second chapter.

Although Martin Esslin considers the Theatre of the Absurd as “the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time” (Esslin 1961, 16), he asserts that the Theatre of the Absurd was not a revolutionary movement in the theatre in all of its elements. It was a new mingling of a number of ancient theatrical forms such as Greek and Roman comic acting and improvised comedy such as Commedia dell’Arte, jesters, clowns and fools, and movement and gesture like those of mimes and acrobats. Regarding the language of The Theatre of the Absurd, Martin finds that “theatre is always more than mere language. Language alone can be read, but true theatre can become manifest only in performance” (Esslin 1961, 234). He suggests that such events as the opening of the Olympic games contain powerful elements of pure, abstract theatrical effect, which also embody ‘metaphysical meaning’, “they have deep, often metaphysical meaning and express more than language could” (Esslin 1961, 234). This is the first thread that unites myth and the Theatre of the Absurd. They are both somehow searching for imagistic communication beyond words, language or logic.

The question that might be raised here is to what extent the Absurd is related only to our own time and has no roots in the ancient mythology. Some scholars, such as Paul Cartledge in his book, *Aristophanes and his Theatre of the Absurd* (1990), trace the roots of the Theatre of The Absurd to the ancient Greek comedies, and see in Aristophanes’ comic drama an inimitable cocktail. He wrote:

For if we were to translate content, tone, style and atmosphere into recent or contemporary terms, it was something like burlesque, broad farce, comic opera, circus, pantomime, variety, revue, music hall, television and movie satire, the political cartoon, the political journal, the literary review, and the party pamphlet - all shaken and stirred into one very heady brew (Cartledge 1990, 73, 74).

No mention here that Aristophanes was a satirical playwright who criticized everything in his period, including its mythology. For example in his play *The Birds*, Cartledge finds his way of recombining the two old themes of enmity between gods and between

men and men and birds, is particularly intellectually satisfying. However, many ancient myths contain an obvious sense of the absurd. Albert Camus, when he tried to discuss why men should live in a meaningless world, chose *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as the title for his creative work (1942). He drew readers' attention to the ancient myth in order to emphasise his idea about the contemporary human situation. The ancient Greek myth tells of Sisyphus, who has earned the anger of the gods. He is punished by being made to carry a heavy rock from the valley to the top of the mountain. Sisyphus, with great difficulty, carries the heavy rock and climbs the mountain, but as soon as he reaches the top, the rock falls down and returns to its previous place in the valley. Sisyphus repeats the same act again and again and every time, the rock returns to the valley. Sisyphus never gives up, but keeps performing the same act continuously, but never, despite his attempts, does the rock stay on the top of the mountain, because it is the gods' will, to punish Sisyphus. The concept of this myth that might be applicable to the concept of the Theatre of the Absurd is in the idea that all human beings' efforts are useless and will come to nothing as long as the human being does not control his own fate, which is controlled by other unknown powers. And because this will never happen, our lives as a result are merely lies and nonsense.

In another Greek ancient myth, the myth of Medea, her beloved husband, Jason, for whose sake she relinquished everything in her life even her family, betrays her and marries another woman. She reaches the conclusion that there is no sense in life, where all values such as love, loyalty and trust are nonsense, so she does not hesitate to kill her sons in order to break her husband's heart.

Many myths of ancient Syrian and Sumerian civilization carry partly the concept of the Absurd, for example, the character of Al-Bain, a symbol of evil and disaster in Sham (Syria, Lebanon and Jordan). Al-Bain, according to folklore and fairy tales, was the king of Sham and extended his domination over the Jews in the period of the tribes'

leaders in 1296 BC. Finally, however, one of the Jewish rulers called Barak, with the support of an elderly poetess called Deborah, defeated him and killed him. His death, however, was not the end of Al-Bain, who is transformed into a legendary creature. His body, after burning, became ashes spread in the air, so evil was mixed with each breath of every human being on earth. These ashes bred through generation after generation (Abd al-Hakim 1995, 135). The myth conveys the message that evil exists not only in our life, but also in our psyches as an integral part that controls everything. In the more than 5000 year old Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh, the hero was shocked by the snake that had the 'Elixir' of life, which he had found after a very long, exhausting journey; one must face a concept of the absurd, that death is the only truth in human life. Everything else is merely a lie.

Martin Esslin asserted that the concept of the Absurd also appeared, in particular in the works of Shakespeare.

But over all, there is in Shakespeare a very strong sense of the Futility and absurdity of the human condition. This is particularly apparent in the tragicomic plays like *Troilus* and *Cressida*, where both love and heroism are cruelly deflated, but it underlies most of Shakespeare's conception of life (Esslin 1961, 237, 238).

Peter Brook's 1962 production of Shakespeare's *King Lear* which was influenced by the Polish critic Jan Kott's, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1965), brought out its "Absurdist" elements. The main character in this play, King Lear "who rages naked in a stormy heath against his deceitful daughters" made audiences and readers wonder whether there is any meaning to the physical and moral carnage with which the play concludes. For many modern readers, the message has been one of bare futility.

Lear: Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee;
But where the greater malady is fix'd
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'ldst shun a bear;
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea,

Thou'ldst meet the bear I'th'mouth. When the mind's free
The body's delicate; this tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there--- filial ingratitude!
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand

(Shakespeare 1975, 107)

The production ended with an ominous sound of thunder, suggesting that things might not get better.

In the middle of the last century, the Theatre of the Absurd flourished in Europe, particularly in France, where the playwrights to whom Esslin attributed the Theatre of the Absurd, such as Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Fernando Arrabal gathered. Although myths do not exist in their classical forms in the Theatre of the Absurd, they are apparent in various ways. As Jan Culik wrote describing the relation between the Theatre of the Absurd and myth in the West in an electronic article entitled 'The Theatre of the Absurd, the West and the East', "The Absurd Theatre can be seen as an attempt to restore the importance of myth and ritual to our age, by making man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by instilling in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish" (Culik 2000).

Therefore, it can be said that those playwrights discussed as Absurdist deal from different viewpoints with contemporary situations, but, from time to time, the roots of ancient myths appear in their works and give them metaphysical resonance, as in the following examples.

In 1953, when Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, was first presented in Paris, the character of the Theatre of the Absurd was manifestly related to Surrealism and the philosophy of Existentialism. The topic of the play is waiting, waiting for something, waiting for somebody, waiting for the explanation of the meaning of life that never comes. The two travellers, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting for Godot to arrive, but

he never does. Who is Godot, what is their relationship with him and why are they waiting for him? These questions and others remain unanswered throughout the play. As the writer tries to assert, no facts in life, nothing is real; events, memories and relationships are merely the subjects of illusion. Maybe the only fact in human life is that they are waiting for something to happen and this thing never happens and only a relationship with another will make the waiting bearable.

George Walworth in his book, *The Theatre of Opposition and Contradiction*, presented many ideas in an attempt to explain the play, such as an emphasis on the values of friendship or the power of human compassion that might replace the Saviour who never comes. Although he denied that Samuel Beckett depended on a belief in Christianity in writing this play, he cites many examples that reveal a metaphysical dimension related to Christian concepts such as the tree as a symbol of the Cross. Others, such as Horace Gregory, explain in his book *Beckett's Dying* (1956, 88,89), the tree as the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Bible. However, trees were worshiped by the Aryan race in Europe (Frazer 1996, 131). In many ancient mythologies, the green tree is often a symbol of flourishing life, as in the Greek myth of Adonis, the handsome god who is adored by the goddess Aphrodite and who is killed by animals while he is hunting in the mountain. Where his blood falls various kinds of flowers grow and he becomes a symbol of growth. The myth tells that Adonis spends half of the year in the other world and the other half on the earth, when greenery covers its surface. There are many similar myths in ancient Babylon mythology, as well in the area between Western Asia and Europe. The ancient Syrian myth of Adonis tells that Myrha or Samirna, the daughter of Thyas, the king of Ashur, had drunk a magical potion by which she was transformed into a tree and that Adonis was born from this tree's trunk. The palm tree was one of the most holy trees in Arab folklore in general and in the other ancient civilizations that existed in the same area. It was considered as a symbol of the family and birth in

Western Asia, ancient Egypt, Babel and the Arab Peninsula. Phoenicians, for example, associate the palm tree with the tree of life in paradise and the god of sexual fertilization (Abd al-Hakim 1995, 44, 665). So, it is a great and, I believe, intentional paradox that Beckett had Estragon and Vladimir thinking of hanging themselves from the tree, the symbol of life.

Whether Beckett believed in Christianity or not, whether he intentionally incorporated these and other metaphysical and mythological dimensions in the play or not, does not matter. What is of concern is that such an interpretation enriches the play and gives it additional metaphysical areas for speculation.

Eugene Ionesco is another playwright whom Esslin incorporated into his Theatre of the Absurd. His plays are rich with diverse potential meanings, each of which could be the intended one, and they tend to reflect the disharmony between the human being and his desires. In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defined his understanding of the term 'Absurd theatre' "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his action become senseless, absurd, useless" (Esslin 1961, 18). But despite this understanding of the absurd in the theatre, which severs almost every root inherited from the past, Ionesco's plays are not devoid of mythological elements. His play, *Amédée* or *How to Get Rid of it* (1952) is a good example.

Amédée is a humble playwright. Fifteen years ago, a young man came to visit him and his wife Madeleine in their flat, but he never walked out alive. Since then, the body of the young man has remained intact in their bedroom and they remain at home, cutting off all relationships with the outside world. The body, during these years, not only remains without rotting, but also continually grows, to the extent that it occupies almost the whole of their apartment and confines them to an uncomfortable tiny corner. Paralleling the growth of the dead body, many poisonous fungi grow up everywhere on

the ground of their flat. When Amédée decides to get rid of the body something strange happens. The dead body becomes like a big balloon that flies up, carrying Amédée far away from the people and police officers' hands.

George Walworth interprets the dead body as a symbol of death that grows with the human being and interprets the fungi as a symbol of the abortive love between Amédée and Madeleine. However, Martin Esslin reads in the play something slightly different, in line with the mythological spirit. He interprets the corpse as a symbol of the increasing impact of previous sins on the human psyche. It is a symbol of a sin that happened in the past or an evil that is getting worse day after day. (Esslin 1970, 11)

Such an interpretation of the play recalls the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus. Amédée is the Oedipus of the present day. His sin is not an event that happened in the past. It is a dead body that exists with him in his apartment and is growing day after day, as physical evidence, not merely as words or feelings in the consciousness. And as Oedipus in the end was beleaguered by his old sin to the extent that he could not cope, and fled from his city, Amédée is beleaguered by his sin, the body that flies carrying him far away from the city. Both cities were suffering from their heroes' past sin and were seeking to get rid of it. The disaster in the Oedipus myth is embodied in *Amédée* as poisoned fungi. Jocasta, the wife and mother in Oedipus, can be seen in Madeleine the wife, mother and queen, who spends on the house, dominates everything in it and inspires Amédée in all his deeds.

Fernando Arrabal (born 1932) the Spanish playwright, who has lived in France since 1954, is another playwright of the Theatre of the Absurd, who was concerned about the meaninglessness of traditional moral rules. In his play, *The Automobile Graveyard*, the graveyard of old motorcars becomes a luxury hotel in which all sort of services are provided, starting from breakfast in bed and ending with a kiss from Dila, the prostitute, for every gentleman, before he falls asleep. On the other hand, there is Emanuo who

wants to be a good person by providing music to the poor people for dancing every night, which is strictly forbidden by the police. Regarding the metaphysical concept, Martin Esslin mentioned that the playwright in one way or another depicts some similarity between Emanuo and Christ, "he was born in a stable, his father was a carpenter, and he left home at the age of thirty to play the trumpet" (Esslin 1961, 196). Those obvious parallels border on the blasphemous. But despite this, he finds, "the play achieves an impression of innocence – the search for goodness pursued with total dedication in a universe that is both squalid and devoid of meaning" (Esslin 1961, 169). However, this is not the only metaphysical and mythological element can be read in this play. The character of Dila and her role in the play as a prostitute who sleeps with everybody, and is consequently seen by Emanuo as a good person (Arrabal 1962, 109), recalls the ancient Ashurian myth of Holy Prostitutes or Temple Women, when women used to donate themselves to become servants or brides of gods. People of this period believed that gods might be embodied in some images and shapes of human beings such as druids, beggars, strangers and wayfarers, and they, in their new forms, needed to have sexual intimacy. The goddess of those Temple women was Ashtar, from whose name is derived the Arabic word 'Mu'ashurah', which is still in use today to mean making love. Such myths and rituals were popular also in ancient Indian temples where the holy prostitutes known as a Temple Dancing Girls practised collective sexual rituals with their relatives and other people participating in the ceremony. Such myths and rituals were popular in the Ancient East, in general, to the extent that a wife had the right to leave her husband's house to become a Holy Prostitute (Abd al-Hakim 1995, 660, 661). On the other hand, Emanuo is a modern depiction of the character of Orpheus in ancient Greek myth, the innocent liberated young man and talented musician who overwhelms men, animals and gods by his magical music. But the gods, policemen in the play, will not leave him alone. The god Hades asked Orpheus not to turn back to

see his wife on their return journey from the other world, but Orpheus could not prevent himself from looking at his wife the symbol of love and beauty, so he deserved punishment. Similarly, Emanuo plays music in the graveyard, which is strictly forbidden by the police so he deserves the punishment. They are both punished for the sake of beauty and their desire to provide good things for the people. Neither is able to abide by the absurd condition set by the superior power. Orpheus is tortured in the lower world, Hades, to the extent that he changes his view and attitude towards life, and similarly, the torture that Emanuo undergoes at police agents' hands makes him rethink everything in his life, as a rebel looking for a new constitution. Here again, the mythological roots gave the play another dimension that enriches the play. The pathway by which myth arrives at the Absurd was therefore that of dreams, which may contain collective symbols, through Surrealism, which taps into dream-imagery.

The Man who Returns from Coming Time: an Absurdist play from Oman

In 1999, the Majan Theatre Company presented the play *The Man who Returns from Coming Time*²⁶, as its contribution to the 6th GCC Theatre Festival in Muscat²⁷. The description of the scenery on the stage stipulates that in the background there is a huge electricity pylon, connected with other far pylons by high voltage cables. There is a platform of five steps around the base of the pylon. The platform takes the shape of a question mark, with the pylon standing at its centre. The play starts with an expressive silent scene with evocative music. Several lumps are seen under black covers. Then suddenly those hidden masses start moving, slowly at first then faster and faster synchronously with the music, as if the masses are unrecognisable creatures imprisoned that try to free themselves from their black sacks. A beautiful young girl appears from

²⁶ The present writer wrote and directed the play in 1999.

²⁷ The play won three awards; the best director, best actress and best second actor.

the back, limping because she is wearing only one shoe. The masses surround the girl and try to attack her. The girl escapes from them once and twice, but they keep following her, until she finds there is no escape. She climbs the electricity pylon and sits at the top, between the high voltage cables, which start to flash and thunder with many fire sparks. The masses calm down. Black out.

The second scene takes place in the centre of the audience. The two main characters Shahid (which means the viewer) and Dahiq (which means laughter) continue their dialogue. Shahid is talking about the first scene, as a dream he has had, while Dahiq mocks him for the bad dreams he has had since he found a girl's shoe. Shahid brings out the shoe from his pocket; it is obviously the pair of the girl's shoe in the first scene. Shahid starts talking about his hope of finding his dream girl, like the prince who recognized Cinderella by her shoe. Dahiq mocks him and tries to encourage the audience to take the same attitude. However, Shahid insists on seeking Cinderella in another city, which a signpost on the stage indicates is called 'The City of Coming Time', and Dahiq follows him. On their way to the city, in the suburbs, they meet a famed oracle. When they ask him about the girl, he tells them that the girl really exists in this city and is now on a high place with flame on her right and flame on her left, but the way to her is very dangerous and full of shocks and risks.

In the city, they both enter the same place as the first scene, where the girl is still sitting on the top of the electricity pylon. They are shocked when they see her, especially when they note her matching shoe. Shahid tries to talk to her, but she does not give any reaction to indicate that she hears or sees, but when Shahid tries to climb the pylon to rescue her, she makes a sudden sharp movement that makes the electricity cables touch each other, causing huge explosions, and sparks. Shahid gives up his attempt and tries with Dahiq to seek help. Soon a police officer appears offering his service. When the police officer fails to solve the problem, he calls the fire fighters, the fire fighters in

their turn call the city council, and then all of them call the governor of the city. In a few seconds, almost everybody in the city comes to the place where the girl sits on the top of the pylon, refusing to talk to anybody or even give any reaction to indicate that she is aware of what is going on around her. Shahid and Dahiq join the people of the city, including the governor, in making circles around the pylon as they pray together to some superpower, asking the girl to say anything or make any sign to explain what she wants. The girl finally makes a strange sound and then says a few words, looking towards the horizon in front of her: 'Trbia, shinka, serfati, dakoni, niba, miba, and loo', which have absolutely no meaning. Although the people of the city are happy that she has spoken, they are depressed when they cannot find anybody who can understand her words. However, everybody in the city starts to pronounce the words and do their best to compare them with some local words or with some other language. Chaos covers the whole city, so the governor gives orders to the city council to make a worldwide search to find out whether these words really belong to any language in the world and whether they have meaning or not. Then the governor, before he leaves, asks the people to leave the girl alone and go back to their jobs or homes. All the people leave the place except Shahid, who insists on remaining close to the girl and Dahiq who remains beside him.

Soon, various organizations and media crowd into the place. Painters come to draw the girl as a symbol of freedom. They explain her act as a message that she is free to do whatever she wants, climb the pylon, wear only one shoe, and so on. Poets come to write modern poetry about her, using her words as a liberated expression against the classical one. Singers come to sing her words, because they find them full of romance and feelings. The representatives of associations of women's rights come to support the girl because they consider her act as a protest against the domination of men. A woman announcer comes with two logisticians to discuss the case in a live broadcast. One of the them says that the act of the girl is an exploration of the primitive tendency in

human beings and her language might be related to the ancient hieroglyphic one, while the other explains her act as an expression of boredom with modernity and relates her words to the ancient Sanskrit language. Even the oracle, when he passes the place and Shahid tells him the words and asks him about the meaning, tries his best, but in the end, he admits that the jinn fail to understand this language. Nevertheless, the people of the city start to come again to the place, talking partly in their own language and using the girl's words in context in an obvious way, as they are proud of them. Finally, a member of a council announces that the governor is going to deliver a speech that contains very important news about the girl's case. All people in the place turn silently to the governor when he approaches, but they are shocked when they find that the governor is speaking entirely in the new words that the girl has brought, even more when he finishes his speech and the national anthem is sung with new words. Later on, all the people of the city start talking continually in the new words and leave the place without paying any attention to the girl. Even Dahiqa cannot bear any more, so he leaves his friend Shahid alone sitting beside the pylon. The play ends when an old lady enters asking Shahid whether he has seen her beautiful, mad daughter wearing only one shoe.

Nehad Selaiha, the well-known contemporary Egyptian critic, in discussion after the performance, categorized this play as Absurdist according to two main features. First the events and their meaning do not follow any logical system. Secondly, the use of the language shows that there is no real value in words as sounds, unless they can carry on a kind of communication between people.

While the play might have the appearance of absurd theatre, the aspects of mythology are obvious throughout the text. The story of Cinderella is employed in a grotesque form, as if the play wants to say that the story of Cinderella is a beautiful dream but is far away from our present life, in which there is no place for naive romance and simple ideas such as one shoe leading to a lovely girl. The girl in this play can also be seen as a

new Antigone in ancient Greek myth who challenges by her act the traditional system of the city and brings into being new values, such as new words, new language, and new means of communication or miscommunication. Although in classical myth Antigone was absolutely aware of what she was doing, modern life is so complicated that one never can gauge to what extent people (the girl) do things intentionally. The oracle in this play recalls the character of the oracle in the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus, whose prediction comes true, which raises questions whether he has a hand in all that happens in the city. He also reminds the audience or readers that even the oracles and jinn in the past and present day are unable to explore or understand people's issues, ideas and words when they are so complicated. Furthermore, the act of the governor, who stands in front of his people promising them to find a solution for the ordeal that occupies the city and then finds that he himself is the first to be involved in the sin that causes all this ordeal, recalls the image of Oedipus doing the same thing with the people of Thebes in the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus. Such mythical explanations add a valuable dimension to the play and locate it in the continuous movement of history and the development of human thought. In writing it and other plays, I have attempted to demonstrate how Omani drama can be enriched by reference to modern Western drama while maintaining its own character.

It might be proper here to mention the opinion of Mircea Eliade about the impact of myth on human beings: "It seems that a myth itself, as well as the symbols it brings into play, never quite disappears from the present world of the psyche; it only changes its aspect and disguises its operations" (Eliade 1957, 27).

In conclusion, it is difficult not to consider that, in whatever direction the modern theatre develops, the roots of myth spread through it to the extent that it might be said that myth and dramatic creation are twins. Although people may seem to have left myth behind centuries ago, mythological ideas surround them everywhere. The concept of

man not living by bread alone is drawn from the New Testament, meaning that it is necessary to balance the food of the body, bread, with the food of the soul, thoughts. Today it could be said that science cannot totally explain material existence and myth is still needed to explain the metaphysics. No doubt, man today has a different attitude towards myth, when speaking of universal myths such as the perfect king, the satanic evil doer, the mystic, he does not adopt them completely or consider them as pure fact, as some ancient people did, but as a vehicle for speculation, analysis and exploration of invisible realms. Finally, as long as theatre presents a mirror to life, myth will continue to play an essential role in the theatre.

In the last three chapters, the focus was on how myths have penetrated the modern theatre, but as mentioned earlier, special attention will be given to the Omani theatre and to achieve that, in the following chapter, there is an attempt to explore the elements of mythology in Omani culture and heritage.

References:

- AARON, Comway. Theatre of the Absurd, *Snappyprof com art historian*. Available: <http://www.snappyprof.com/profile/jarabs.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- ABD AL-HAKIM, Shawqi. 1995. *The Cyclopaedia of Arab Folklore and Myth*. Egypt: Maktabat Madboly. (In Arabic)
- AL-GINDI, Yussiri. 1977. *Oh...Antara*. Cairo: Union of Cultural Friends.
- AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1987. *The Ship is still Wrecked*. Sultanate of Oman: Ministry of Education. (In Arabic)
- AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1997. *Al-Baragge*. In the researcher's collection.
- AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1999. *The Man who Returns from Coming Time*. In the researcher's collection.
- AL-SAWAH, Firas. 1989. *The First Mind's Adventure*. Syria: Dar Al-kindy, (In Arabic)
- AL-TA'I, Sama Isa. 1991. *Nothing Stops the Disaster*. Muscat: The Press of Modern Colour.
- ARRABAL, Fernando. 1962. *Four Plays By Arabal: Orison, The Two Executioners, Fando and Lis and The Car Cemetry*. Translated by Barbara Wright. London: John Calder.
- ARTAUD, Antonin. 1974. *The Theatre and its Double* in Antonin Artaud Collected Works, V. 4. Translated by Victor Corti. London: Calder & Boyars.
- BINTLEY, Eric. 1948. *The Modern Theatre*. London: Robert Hale.
- CARTLEDGE, Paul. 1990. *Aristophanes and his Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Bristol Classical Press.
- CRAIG, Gordon. 1999. *Craig on Theatre*. Edited by J. Michael Walton. London: Methuen Drama.
- CULÍK, Jan. 2000. The Theatre of the Absurd the West and the East. Available: <http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- ELIADE, Mircea. 1957. *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries*. London: Harper Torchbooks.
- ESSLIN, Martin. 1961. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
- ESSLIN, Martin. 1970. *Absurd Theatre*. International Theatre Series. Kuwait: Ministry of Information. (In Arabic)
- FRAZER, James. 1996. *The Golden Bough*. London: Penguin Books.
- FRYE, Northrop. 2000. *Anatomy of Criticism*. 15th Ed. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- HUSAYN, Kamal al-Din. 1993. *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre*. Cairo: Al-Dar Al-misria Al-lubnania.

- IBSEN, Henrik. 1965. *A Doll's House*. Translated by Michael Meyer. London: Rupert Hart-Davis.
- JACKSON, Esther Merle. 1966. *The Broken World of Tennessee Williams*. Madison, Milwaukee & London: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- JAMESON, Storm. 1920. *Modern Drama in Europe*. London: W. Collins
- JARRY, Alfred. 1968. *The Ubu Plays*. Edited by S. W. Taylor. London: Methuen.
- JOHNSTON, Brian, Realism and a Doll's House. *Voyages in Drama with Ibsen*. Available: <http://www.ibsenvoyages.com/e-texts/doll/index.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- KOTT, Jan. 1965. *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. London: Methuen
- MAKKAWI, Abd al-Jafar. 1990. *The Depth and the Visor*. In the researcher's collection.
- MAKKAWI, Mansur. 1985. *The Dowry*. Muscat: Ministry of Education & Youth Affairs, Youth Theatre. (In Arabic)
- MARTIN, Robert A. 1997. *Critical Essays on Tennessee Williams*. New York: G. K. Hall.
- MITAWI, Hani. 1993. *New Reading in Old Plays*. Cairo: The New Dawn Press. (In Arabic).
- OSTERD, Erik. 1994. Myth and Modernity: Henrik Ibsen's Double-drama. Article. *Scandinavica*, ISI Web of Science. Univ East Anglia Sch European Stud, Norwich. Nov. 33 (2). PP. 161- 182.
- RITCHIE, J. M. 1980. *German Expressionism*. Translated by J. M. Ritchie & H. F. Garten. London: John Calder.
- ROOSE- EVANS, James. 1984. *Experimental Theatre from Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*. London & New York: Routledge.
- SCHUMACHER, Claude. 1984. *Alfred Jarry and Guillaume Apollinaire*. London: Macmillan.
- SELAIHA, Nehad. 2003. *Contemporary Theatrical Tendencies*. UAE: Al-Sharjah Centre for Intellectual Art.
- SELLIN, Eric. 1968. *The Dramatic Concepts of Antonin Artaud*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. 1975. *King Lear*. Edited by Muir Kenneth. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.
- T/ SHATLUCK, Roger & Simon Watson, TAYLOR, 1965. *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*. London: Methuen.
- STRINDBERG, August. 1998. *Miss Julie and Other Plays*. Translated & Introduction by Michael Robinson. New York: Oxford University Press.
- WALTON, J. Michael. 1996. *The Greek Sense of Theatre*. London: Harwood academic publishers.
- WALWORTH, George. 1979. *The Theatre of Opposition and Contradiction*. Arabic Translated by Abd al-Mun'am Ismail. Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli. (In Arabic)

ELLWARTH, George. 1979. The Theatre of Protest and Paradox.
217

WARD, John. 1980. *The Social and Religious Plays of Strindberg*. London: The Athlone Press.

WILLIAMS, Tennessee. 1962. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In *Five Plays by Tennessee Williams*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Chapter 7:

Myths in Oman

As I have illustrated, myths have been important sources for the theatre throughout history and are still are in the present day. The modern theatre does not confine itself to the classical definition of myth, but has broadened it with concepts which enrich theatre with new aspects such as originality and an aesthetic dimension. In Oman, there is a treasure-trove of myths that can be used to play a significant role in the development of modern theatre. An attempt is made in this chapter to offer illustrations of various types of myths in Oman, classify them, reveal their distinguishing features, and examine their theatrical dimensions and potentiality. Omani folklore is full of many theatrical phenomena, which in turn contain significant mythical aspects. A synopsis of a selection of Omani folklore will be illustrated. In addition, there are six Omani stories with mythical aspects, which have been translated by the researcher into English and appended to this thesis. These provide the material for this chapter.

Doubtless, features of the local culture and environment, when employed properly, can provide theatre with an original dimension. Useful lessons always can be cited from ancient Greek theatre. Michael Walton in his book, *The Greek Sense of Theatre* (1996, xvi) emphasizes this dimension in the works of three famous Greek tragedians:

After a further twelve years of their restoration to the world's repertoire, I am more than ever convinced of the Greek tragedians' incomparable capacity for synthesizing the world around them, their history, their mythology, their politics, their art and their culture.

In light of the theories of many modern anthropologists, in particular Bronislaw Malinowski, mythical aspects in such stories can be read as a manifestation of the "pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom" (Malinowski 1992, 101),

reflecting the nature of the society, its concerns and worries. In light of the views of psychologists such as Freud and Jung, they can be read as an Individual or Collective Conscious or Unconscious.

Historical Myths

In ancient times, the distinction between history and myths was not so crucial. Myths, sometimes, have played the role of history; at other times, history has carried many mythological aspects especially in Arab culture as Wajih Kutharani suggested in his study which was mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis. However, there are two ways to distinguish between the real history and the craft of myth. The first is to prove the reality of historical events with reliable evidence. The second is by applying logic and rationality. The first way reaches an explicit result, while the second way gives a subjective result that depends on the personality of the scholar and his educational background.

Oman, when first established as a state, passed through a period when it was impossible to separate myth and history. Many resources mention the migration of Arab tribes from the Ancient Yemen to different parts of the Arabic world after the collapse of the famous Ma'rib Dam, but very few resources provide details of how those tribes established themselves in the new land as the tribe of Al-Azd did in Oman. Shaikh Nur Al-Din Abdallah Al-Salimi (1869-1914), the famous Omani jurist and historian, made great efforts to trace those details in his book, with the Arabic title, *Tuhfat Al-a'yan fi Sirati Ahl Oman* meaning *The Valuable View in the Legacy of the People of Oman*. He mentions that shortly after the entrance of the Arabs into Oman, tribes were founded Arab culture was established and continues to prevail until the present day. This

happened in around the 14th century BC²⁸. The events started in Yemen when heavy rains and floods caused the collapse of the famous Ma'rib Dam, which sustained the lives of many Arab tribes. There are many myths invented about the collapse of the Ma'rib Dam, and many Arab plays refer to this event. Some of them will be mentioned later in this chapter. The collapse prompted many of those tribes to look for alternative places to settle. One of those tribes was the Al-Azd, who headed to Oman under the leadership of Malik Bin Fahm, who is the main character in the legend. The word 'legend' is more proper here in referring to Malik as a good leader and the founder of the state of Oman. The mythical element is derived from an ancient story invented in order to explain historical events and some other natural and social phenomena.

Narrators quote many reasons for Malik's migration from Yemen. Some said that his nephews, who had attacked his neighbour's dog, angered him. Others refer to a dispute between one of his subjects and a boy from a tribe called Daws. Whatever might be the reason, Malik, according to Al-Salimi, decided to head for Oman. He started his journey accompanied by those of his children and his subjects who obeyed him. (Appendix 2: The Story of Malik Bin Fahm: Al-Salimi 2000, 19-37) ²⁹

Before his death, Malik composed a poem in which he described his people and their march from Yemen to Oman. He described their struggle with the Persians and their victories after that. He also described his dynasty and his tragic death (Al-Salimi 2000, 19-37).

This story of Malik Bin Fahm, although it contains obvious historical facts, has several mythological aspects. First of all, Malik Bin Fahm has all the characteristics of a mythical protagonist in both his physical and mental abilities, which are so extraordinary that he is not far from Osiris, Oedipus, Agamemnon and Gilgamesh. He

²⁸ Some sources state that the first migration was in the 3rd millennium BC.

²⁹ The present writer translated and summarized the story of Malik Bin Fahm and his son Selima from Al-Salimi's book into English for study purposes.

was very ambitious and achieved his aims, but, like most mythical protagonists, committed one mortal sin by favouring his younger son, and this sin led him to his tragic death. Malik Bin Fahm fought, not to change some old worn out traditions, nor to establish a new constitution, but to establish a new state on new land with a totally new culture, so his task was even harder. Although Al-Salimi focused on the events of the story, trying to feature its political and historical aspects, the mythological hints appear clearly in the character of Malik and in the events in general. The moral message, that a father should be fair to all his sons and treat them equally, is also clear, and the basis of the dramatic conflict between the older brothers against the younger one and their father can be employed to create marvellous plays and deliver many contemporary messages, not to mention the sub-plots and events, each of which could be the basis of a drama. It is appropriate here to mention an example from Yemeni theatre. The Yemeni director, actor and general director of the Theatre and Cinema Directorate in Yemen, Nabil Huzam Al-Muradi, talked to the present writer about the many myths that appeared to explain the collapse of the Ma'rib Dam in Yemen, which caused the migration of Arab tribes. One of these myths stated that the dam collapsed because of a rat that repeatedly gnawed its foundations³⁰. This myth was employed in the Yemeni theatre in a play called *Rat in the Dock*, written by Abd al-baky Muhammad Sa'id and presented in the theatre for the first time in 1975. In this play, the rat is prosecuted in a contemporary court as a symbol of corruption and covetousness. In the trial, many historical characters are called as witnesses, but it is not long before the rat, in the course of defending himself, starts to attack those characters, revealing their role in all the events. However, at the end of the play the rat escapes from the trial, as a message to the society that corruption can never be ended. This example gives an idea how the story of Malik Bin

³⁰ This meeting was in Abu Dhabi in theatre GCC Festival in 26 September 2003.

Fahm in its historical and mythical form can be an inspiration for talented playwrights, and a vehicle for carrying modern messages and ideas.

On the other hand, the story of Malik Bin Fahm lacks certain elements, which are normally of concern in the realm of mythology. First, there is no basic and effective role for a woman in the process of events, which would, as in Greek mythology, give myth a broader social context and implication. No woman is mentioned except the daughter of Malik Bin Zuhar who married Malik Bin Fahm, and in a passing reference in the verses of the last poem composed by Malik on his deathbed. These mention the names of women he had married in order to boast of the noble Arab tribes he was related to. Second, there is no reference to religion at all, as Al-Salimi points out, and thus nothing is known of the beliefs that prevailed at that time. Therefore, this story lacks the very important element of supernatural powers and their intervention for or against the hero. However, these deficiencies are compensated for by serious events and the great heroism depicted in the personality of Malik Bin Fahm. Sometimes he is shown in command of physical powers superior to those of any ordinary human being, especially in the war with Persia when he killed four of their strongest warriors, one after another. It is understandable why those events, in general, are closer to the possible than to the impossible. The 'plausible' aspects of this story imprint it with historical realism, far from any excess of fantasy existing in myths. Even though the story of Malik Bin Fahm might be seen as a crude historical set of events, it still carries in its folds the seeds of a legend. Malik Bin Fahm bears in his character the features of a mythical hero. He is a leader with extraordinary abilities who is responsible for his people and struggles to establish his kingdom almost from nothing, in addition to his tragic end. One may consider that ancient tale as the first historical legend, which contains many mythical elements about the establishment of the state of Oman.

Furthermore, the epic of Malik Bin Fahm does not finish with his death. It is followed by the stories of his sons who continued his legendary character and mythical events. As happened to many kings in ancient Greek myths, some of Malik's sons became kings in Oman, and others travelled to become kings in Iraq, Sham and Iran. Al-Salimi found the story of Selima, the younger son of Malik who established the first Omani colony, worth mentioning in more detail than those of other brothers, even those who left Oman. (Appendix 3: The Story of Selima from: Al-Salimi 2000, 38-43).

In this story, again, no significant role for a woman appears. Also, there is no mention of any religious aspects, relating to either Selima or the people of Karman. The boundaries between the historical events and fantasy ones are also mixed up and cannot be distinguished. Nevertheless, the events and the character of Selima are unusual by any standard. The expert reader can perceive how some themes of this story, like the king who sleeps with every woman, and the wedding conspiracy, recur in many Arab literary works, the *Arabian Nights* for example, where Shahriar the king used to marry a new woman every night and kill her the next morning, not to mention in other Omani fairy tales. In this historical mythical story, the seeds of drama are promising and bring to the surface more essential questions. First, women were the first and obvious victims of oppressor kings, not only Dara, but every oppressor king, but there is no Antigone here to challenge the king's rules, or rather one can say 'Antigone' was a man masquerading in a woman's dress, when Selima put on makeup and masqueraded in a bridal dress in order to kill the king of Karman. The conclusion here is that women always need men, even in revenge against men. Is this really only an ancient topic or one that is still vital in the present day? Men are thinking, talking, wishing and dreaming in the name of women while women are absent from their own issues and satisfied with their predetermined fate, especially in oriental societies. Second, in the myth, the conspiracy through the wedding procession to enter the fort and kill the king

recalls the ancient Greek myth of the 'Trojan Horse'. Perhaps one can argue which one was the original, but there is no denying the resemblance. Thirdly, the theme of one tyrant king following another in endless chain, as Creon succeeds Oedipus in the ancient Greek myth, like mythology everywhere tells people that tyranny is a fate that cannot be avoided. However, the main theme in the story of Selima resembles the myth of Oedipus. Selima also is a stranger who comes to the city, Karman here instead of Thebes, where he kills the old king and takes his place. Selima, like Oedipus, is loved by the people of the country at the beginning, but at the end of his era, he leaves the country in crisis.

Thus, history provides theatre with so many events, attitudes and characters whose deeds seem in some way like legend or myth in the present day. Al-Salimi in his book also mentions the history of Imam Warith Bin Kaab Al-Kharusi a 10th century religious leader and ruler of the country who sacrificed his life to save his prisoners. Al-Warith was a good, just Imam and the most remarkable event in his life was his end. He was drowned in a flood. The prison of the city was located in the waterway of the valley. In that year, an overwhelming flood came, and somebody told the Imam that the flood would hit the prisoners. Al-Warith ordered them to be freed, but no one was courageous enough to go and fulfil his order. Al-Warith said, "They are in my trust and I am responsible for them" and went to save them himself, with 70 of his men. The flood was so strong that it killed all of them. The people of the region buried him in the same valley. The grave of the Imam, as Al-Salimi asserts, still exists in a well-known place. Moreover, he added that every time the flood comes, no matter how strong it is, it swirls around the grave, but never damages it. This makes it supernaturally mythic.

The Omani theatre employed this event in a play entitled *The Banner*, written by Mansur Makkawi (1983), in which the heroism of Al-Warith Bin Kaab Al-Kharusi is recorded when he showed that even though the prisoners were guilty and were being

punished, he had to take good care of them and, most of all, keep them safe. Here, the local people are eulogizing Al-Warith for his deeds.

Oh Warith borne in hearts
Oh knight who appalled lions
Oh man, whom my country knew,
Who the mountains, the palms and the paths adored (Makkawi 1983, 90)



Al- Warith in *The Banner* (1983)

This is a good example of how the poetic dialogue serves the text effectively. It conveys the prestige, the glory and the reverence that both the author and the director wanted to attribute to the character, who was an Imam representing military and religious leadership and whose attitude towards his prisoners was so idealistic and extraordinary, like an event in myth. Of course, the moral message here is clear and direct about the obligation of ruler to be just and a protector of his people, whatever situation they are in. The concept of trust and responsibility is discussed in this play. What is the real meaning of trust and to what extent is a person responsible for his trust especially in the position of Imam or leadership? It is another essential question, raised by the ancient

myths of other cultures. To what extent was it Oedipus's responsibility to free his people from the ordeal that afflicted the city of Thebes? To what extent was Creon responsible for burying his nephew's body?

Characters like Al-Warith, who raise some essential questions, repeatedly appear in the history of Oman. Oman's history overflows with such poets, whose lives, epics and poetry can form a rich source for Omani drama. As a first example here, the Omani poet Al-Lawah Al-Kharusi can be cited, who lived in a period of antagonism and major events, of which the most important was the Portuguese occupation of Oman (Ministry of National Heritage 1991). The poet concerned himself with his people's affairs and contributed to countering the threat to his country through the advice he gave both to the rulers and to ordinary individuals. Many of his poems that have reached us reflect these attitudes. The second example is the Omani poet, Kaab Al-Ashkari. He was a poet, a knight and an orator. He fought many battles and engaged in many political quarrels until he was killed because of his hurtful lampoons. His life could be another source for fascinating drama. So could that of the Omani poet Thabit Katanah, who had a tendency to idealism. He tried to achieve perfection and strove to become a role model. Indeed, there are many stories and poems recounting glorious deeds. These are only samples selected from a history overflowing with heroes and poets, of which the Omani culture boasts (Ministry of National Heritage 1990).

Myths and Folklore

Myths or mythical elements do not always exist in verbal form. They can be found also in behavioural forms such as traditions, rituals and folklore. Folklore is an important feature of Omani heritage. It is a rich combination of the arts of performance (theatre phenomenon) and literature. Hence, poetic phrases and songs are associated with the expressive movement of folk dance. Linked together, and accompanied by the rhythm

of Oman's famous drums, they engender an enjoyable spectacle for the spectator. Considering Sir James Frazer and his followers' assertion that there is an intimate association between myths and rituals, one can illustrate that those Omani folk arts have a basis of mythology. Moreover, they have developed in such a way that they form patterns and features with a basic dramatic quality (Malinowski 1992, 98).



From Omani Folklore, Oman 2002-2003, Ministry of Information.

The book published by the Ministry of Information about Omani folk arts claims that the Omani traditional art known as "Baket", particularly "Performance Baket" and "Puppet Baket" were the roots of drama in Oman. Baket art was an Omani folk art that originated in Asia. It was performed only at night. The participants would sit on the ground in a circle in a public square, with the singer and drummers at the forefront. The drummers and the singer started to perform, with the audience clapping to the rhythm of the music. When the mood had built up, the performers entered the ring and represented

shapes of wild animals such as the tiger and the crow, and comical characters such as a hump-backed old man or woman, the characters depending on the story lines. The performances usually featured a comically simplified version of the struggle between good and evil. The characters moved according to the rhythm of the drums and ballads in an expressive movement until the story ended with the triumph of good over evil and man's dominance over animals. In the "Puppet Basket", puppets replaced animals in the performance inside the ring. To the sound of drumming, singing and clapping, the puppet player entered the ring, lay on the ground and rested his head on the lap of the person closest to him. He covered his head with a black cloth and held above him two hand puppets, the first representing a man dressed in Omani traditional clothes, the second representing a woman dressed in the traditional costume of Al Batinah, a region in Oman where this art is usually performed. Then the player started moving the puppets, and voicing a conversation carried out between the puppet figures, featuring a comical story with a social moral. It might also include a passionate conversation or a quarrel, in which the audience took part until a solution was reached. Although expressive movements and pre-prepared or extemporized poetry characterize these folk arts, the mythological basis of this art is featured in the belief in dividing people into two contrasting natures, absolutely good or absolutely evil. The same concept is sometimes expanded to consider mankind as entirely good and other creatures; whatever they are, as evil (Ministry of Information 1990).

“Al-Razha” is another kind of folklore worth mentioning here. It is an art, which combines swordsmanship, poetry and poetic competition in eulogy and pride, in, riddles and puzzles between great poets (Shawqi, 1989). The participants stand in two opposite lines, with swords in their hands, in a public square. The drummers who move between the two lines in front of the dancers provide music. Collective ballad singing is done with an expressive movement to the rhythm of the drums in a kind of question and

answer format between the two rows of dancers. In the past, the “Razha”, with its spectacular swordplay, was used as a way of declaring war and mobilizing the warriors, and to announce victory. Today it is used at weddings, national days, feasts, evening entertainment and recreation. Nevertheless, this art is related to myth in symbolising the fear of war and the joy of triumph (Ministry of Information 1990).

Fertility is a very popular theme in ancient mythology, and is evident in the Omani folk-art called Nairuz, which is performed to celebrate the springtime and season of fertility. To flee the hot weather on the coastlines in summer, Omanis used to leave their homes and seek moderate weather in the interior regions of the country where they could find gardens, green agricultural land, ‘Falajes’³¹ and wells with fresh cool water. At the end of the hot season and the coming of the spring, they returned home, celebrating the arrival of the new season of fertility. In this celebration, men, women and children, all dressed in their best, headed towards the sea in a great procession, singing. The women would carry palm fronds and newly flowering tree branches, diffusing a fragrant smell in the air and waving them in a rhythmical movement. Some men would represent an animal such as a bull that might be explained as a symbol of fertility, using their bodies and masks to feature the animal (Shawqi 1989, 485-486). The Nairuz celebration would reach its peak at midnight when the procession reached the sea and the men, still fully clothed, walked into the shallow water (Ministry of Information 1990).

In some other Omani folklore, the dramatic conflict and aspects of myth are clearer. Al-Maydan, a lyrical and punning form of poetry, is one of the most famous folk traditions. It is performed in a large square away from the village or town. Its performance has many purposes, of which the most important is the folk treatment of those who believe they have mania and want to be cured from it. Al-Maydan art involves several ceremonial rituals. In an atmosphere full of incense, drum, rhythms and lyrical songs, it

³¹ Falajes are small canals that bring water to the people and agriculture.

starts with the recitation of ballads, and then the participation of each poet in turn. Poets improvise on words to fit the music while the whole crowd moves in an expressive dance around the square, women dancing opposite men. After finishing several rounds, the women sit on one side of the square, then the men come and invite them to dance, and they respond. The square organizers and their guests take parts in Al Maydan ballads. Al-Maydan ballads are governed by well-known rules and principles, which none of the participants can ignore. The poet of Al-Maydan juggles with words, trying to present the most difficult ones and use them poetically. He resorts to the use of many rhetorical devices such as antithesis and alliteration to express the point he wants to convey. However, the main event in this art is the fight between the master of Al-Maydan, who physically exists, against the jinn as a hidden supernatural power, which inhabits the psyche of the sick person and acts through his body, causing madness and illness. Consequently, the fight takes a verbal form at the beginning then gradually alters to a physical clash, with violent movement and strong shouting (Ministry of Information 1990). In most cases, the master, by reciting some verses of Holy Quran, gets the Jinn under his control. This can be seen when the body of the patient becomes still and quiet. The master then starts to negotiate with the jinn, trying to find out under what conditions the jinn will agree to leave the possessed person. In ordinary cases, the master tells the patient that somebody else, who has contact with the jinn, instigated the jinn against him. In some other cases, the master tells the patient that the jinn has taken residence inside him as a result of some old sin he committed in the past and describes to him what to have, what to pay and what to do to get rid of it. In a very few cases, the fight between the master and the jinn does not end with a compromise. In these circumstances, the master fixes another appointment to repeat the whole performance again. The focal point here is that such conflict forms an extension of the ancient

conflict that appeared in most myths between human beings and hidden super powers, for the same afore-mentioned reasons.

The master in such folk-art plays the same role as oracles in ancient myths, with one important difference. The role of the master is limited to individual cases in the range of social issues, while the role of ancient oracles was expanded to include political issues, which affected all the people of the city as in the myth of Oedipus. Such an expanded role can be given to the master of Maydan in the theatre in many ways. First, as soon as the individual case takes place in the theatre, it automatically changes to become universal. Second, playwrights in the theatre can always substitute the individual cases with a common one. This is an essential aspect of dramatic art.

However, the role of theatre here is not limited to employing the folklore and the mythological aspects, but it would involve enlightenment as well. Such folklore may be good or even great material for art, it is acceptable material for speculation, and it might be reasonable as a physical therapy for some psychological cases when a patient gets rid of his illness by imitating certain prescribed movements and repeating certain verses, keeping in the mind the character of the society. All these dimensions are good if the people are aware, understand the real nature of the performance, and do not consider it as magician's miracles. This thesis trusts in theatre to play this role of enlightening the people about contemporary myths.

Myths of Ghosts, Magicians and Jinn

English dictionaries identify the fable as a “traditional short story that teaches a moral lesson, especially a story about animals”, and fairy tale as a “children's story in which magical things happen or a story that someone has invented and is difficult to believe”. Many modern studies assert that fairy tales and fables are influenced by myths (Malinowski 1992, 101) because all of them belong to the same period of oral culture,

and address lower classes in society. Myths are serious material especially in their own era, but when they lost their religious content, they became fairy tales or fables as Sami Al-Jaman concludes in his research about the presence of *One Thousand Nights and One* in Arab Theatre (Al-Jaman 2003, 28, 29). The present writer agrees with him that fairy tales and fables mostly contain mythical aspects. In Oman, such aspects are clear, as in the following stories.

Ghosts, magicians and jinn occupy a great part of Omani myths, fables and fairy tales. Some of these stories are very long, including many characters and events, while others are very short, no more than a single event. Most of them have obvious mythological aspects, while others refer only to some concepts which are related to myths. Some of them are very old and others have points of contact with the contemporary era. Some of them are recorded in books and others were picked from oral sources.

Several short stories, fables and fairy tales with mythical elements were collected in Dhofar, Oman's southern region, by T. Johnston and contained in a book entitled, *Dhofari Folklore and Folk Tale* (1980). A number of those stories were in the Amharic and Jebali languages. In his collection, Johnston pursued various sources and themes, stories with rich and intricate elements of fantasy. These stories often dealt with rulers, kings, merchants, devils, ghosts and magicians. An example of these was the story about a conspiracy of ghosts against an Arab who lost his brother. It was said that the Arab disturbed the ghosts by his continuous weeping over the grave of his dead brother. The ghosts, according to the story, decided to tell the Arab that his brother was not dead but hypnotized by a witch who later took him to a village in India and transformed him into a goat. The ghosts granted the Arab powers to travel to India, recognize the witch, and then forced her to return his brother to life. In other stories, ghosts in a certain place were all infused by one spirit that spoke simultaneously within all of them from the mouth of one of the ghosts. A third story told of a gathering of ghosts during a holiday,

at an ancient valley called Khur Ruri, where they left behind what seemed to be the ghost of a sleeping man. The ghosts, it was said, also had the power to invoke the spirit of a guard like a Serek, the magical creature. It was believed that the Serek was a white animal, the size of a small cow, which appeared only at night and ate people. Also, many stories tell of magicians who have the ability to change their own shapes, and those of other people, into new shapes and their ability to bring disease to people or cattle (Ministry of National Heritage 1996, 172-173).

In another tale, the father and sisters of a man hated him to the extent that they decided to get rid of him. They devised a plan to kill him by transforming one of the sisters into a snake that would bite the man. As they were whispering their plan, a cat belonging to jinn that loved the man was hiding, listening to their conspiracy. Later, one of the man's sisters, now transformed into a serpent, sneaked into the man's room. Suddenly the cat jumped at the bewitched sister and killed her. However, myths and legends contained many tales about serpents. In one of these tales, a group of people learn about the existence of a treasure in a valley called Wadi Nahtz that was guarded by serpents. They meet with a pious man who commands special powers. They ask the man to read from his holy book to ward off the guardian serpent and in return, they promise him a share of the treasure. The man agrees and starts reading from his book. The serpent guarding the treasure leaves, and the other men start digging. After a while, one of the men starts grumbling that the reader has a much easier job, and does not deserve a share of the treasure. The man grumbles even more loudly and continuously at the appearance of the first lumps of gold. The reader then stops reading and leaves the place. Suddenly the serpent appears, seizes the grumbling fellow and throws him over a cliff to land on rocky ground and die (Ministry of National Heritage 1996, 172-173).

Other fairy tales deal with the things that were believed to happen during an eclipse. The local people believed that an eclipse was caused by a ghost strangling the sun. They

would crash stones against each other or make an orphan weep and cry aloud, to frighten the ghost until it let go of the sun or the moon (Ministry of National Heritage 1996, 172-173).

Al Rustaq is another Omani area where fables, fairy tales and mythical stories occupy people's traditional culture. The Omani writer Uthman Al-Balushi collected and published many of those stories, most of which were about a single supernatural event. One of these stories was entitled *The Old Woman's Cannon*. It concerns heavy cannon on top of the Castle of Al-Hazm, a famous fortress in Al-Rustaq region. It was said that in one of the battles invaders besieged the fort. An old woman came to the help of the Imam and carried the heavy cannon, which no man could carry, to the roof of the Castle. The Cannon played an important role in defeating the invaders. From that day onwards, the gun was known as the Old Woman's Gun (Ministry of National Heritage 1980).

The same writer mentions the story about a fort in the wilayat of Al-Rustaq under the title, "Al-Shahba and the Clover", Al-Shahba being the name of the fort. It was said that one man built the fort in one day, when the local people asked him to build a fort for their defence and promised him a large payment. When the man built the fort so quickly, the local people refused to pay him, saying it was built by magic and they would not pay for a magical building. The builder became very angry and told them that he would drag the fort behind him like a goat. Then the builder brought a bundle of clover and pointed it to the fort, which, it was said, moved and turned around to go for the clover as the man called out, "Come, and take the clover". Then the local people screamed in astonishment and confirmed that they would pay the builder his rights (Ministry of National Heritage 1980).

Thousands of such stories carrying some mythical aspects are scattered around the Omani regions. Those stories did not exist for trivial reasons, but played some essential

role similar to those played by the ancient myths in many civilizations, to deliver some moral message, to provide explanation for social events or to explain some natural phenomena.

Cinderella in the Heritage of Oman

As discussed in the second chapter, the anthropologists Levi Strauss and the psychologist Jung asserts that one of the most important features of myth is its ability to travel from people to people through direct and indirect contact (Klages 2001) (Mythology 2002, 7). Cinderella is an international story, versions of which are found over a wide range of locations, and it is difficult to decide where its native home was. In Oman there are many stories having a similar plot to Cinderella with some changes to suit the local culture. Here are two examples of those stories, the first called “The Daughter of the Radish Seller” (Appendix 4: The Story of the Daughter of Radish Seller from: Al-Busaedi 2000)³², and the second called “The Human Dog” (Appendix 5: the Story of Human Dog from: Al-Shuaili 1995)³³.

Although the two characters, the daughter of the radish seller in the first story and the girl in the second story are similar to Cinderella, especially in her social circumstances and the happy ending with marriage to the prince, the development of the events in the second parts of the two stories is different and they carry additional messages. The first story, on the one hand, limits its literary aspect by a direct moral message to good and bad people. It presents one-dimensional characters, and each of whom at the end, gains what he or she deserves. It links such a basic idea, on the other hand, metaphorically to the support of nature and environment through the connection between the bird as a symbol with the sky and rain, to indicate a higher power which is acting unseen. The second story does not go beyond the first in its moral message but it provides, in a way,

³² This story was recorded on cassette tape from oral resources as part of Youth Theatre activities led by the present writer. According to my knowledge, this story is transcribed for the first time.

³³ The present writer translated this story for this study.

more aspects of reality and a more complicated plot. Both stories could be the basis of good drama and deliver messages that apply to modern society, such as the meaning of justice in the view of social relationships and the people in general in their relation with the ruler.

Ajab, the Myth of Patience

(Appendix 6: the Story of Ajab from: Al-Busaedi 1996). In spite of the happy end, this story has a complex plot, which develops on the events level as narrated in the appendix and on the literary level as follows. This story again can be simplified to merely a story of good and evil, but this is not the whole of it. Northrop Frye's theory of 'Archetypal Criticism' and Symbolism might be an appropriate methodology here (Frye 2000, 134,135). In the current writer's opinion, nothing in this story is direct, neither the events nor the characters. "Ajab", the name of the girl means in Arabic "Wonder", and "Sabra" the substance that explodes, is derived from the Arabic noun that means patience; those two things are not accidentally included in the story. The first important question this story raises is about the value of patience. To what extent should a person be patient in bearing terrible things that happen to him? When does patience become submission and what is the difference between submission and respect? Although both the characters of the barbarian princess Medea in the ancient Greek myth and Ajab in this story lose their children, they stand on contradictory stages and spring from different traditions of myth and different culture. Medea kills her children with her own hands because she is impatient for vengeance on her husband, while Ajab kills her children by the master's hands because she is too patient with him in order to save her husband, the sultan. Of course, such differences reflect how different cultures have different attitudes to the same value, or perhaps the same value in different fiction carries a different message. However, the patience of Ajab, with suffering such that even a solid body like the "Sabra" explodes because it cannot bear it, leads the readers

or listeners to rebel against the image. This might bring some changes in their attitude in real life in relation to various events, people and values. Changing attitudes from some traditional values is actually one of the most important shared areas between this story and modern theatre. In addition, the image of the growing of 'Sabra' here might remind the readers of the surrealistic symbol of growing dead body in the play of Eugene Ionesco, *Amédée*.

The other important symbol in this story is the man of knowledge and religion, the master. The essential question, which might be raised here is, is it necessary that all people involved in knowledge and religion be perfect in their behaviour? As long as knowledge is mostly connected with religion in the old Arabian culture, such a daring question suggests, in a way, a critical view of some religious phenomena, an area which has rarely been touched. One may wonder why the master, the man who teaches religion, is a cannibal, monster, and magician. Was he really a cannibal, eating children's bodies, or does cannibalism here represent some other physical abuse? Symbols are talking in this story, revealing more than hiding. It is a language which fits the theatre better than any other art form because the theatre is able to present visual symbols that increase the means by which the spectator is able to interact with the event by imbuing it with greater resonance and implication.

Although the woman "Ajab" is the main character in this story, at least, the story is about her suffering and she is involved in all its events, the events' keys were not in her hand. She was merely a doll in the hands of the master, Sultan and prince. The story tries to portray the Sultan as a father of a big family, and this might be a contemporary point of view rather than a historical one.

The Story of Zaid Bin Anan

(Appendix 7: the Story of Zaid Bin Anan, from: Al-Sa'di 2000)³⁴. This story has many mythological aspects if it is read in the light of Frye's theory of 'Archetypal Criticism'. First, the hero, Zaid Bin Anan, started from almost nothing to become the king of his country because of his intelligence, nobility and bravery and because of his uncle's challenge, which he accepted voluntarily. Second, although he had no control over the supernatural powers, he was able to deal with such powers through some intermediaries from the jinn. He could receive help from the good ones and avoid harm from the bad ones. Third, although it may have been added later as a sort of propaganda, the hero of the story played a main role, not to add or change something in the country's constitution, but to change its old religion to the new one, Islam, and according to the story, he succeeded.

On the other hand, there are many similarities in the concepts and events between this myth and other ancient myths. Superpowers in the myths always seem to do unreasonable things to challenge the ambitious. Just as nobody can give a convincing reason why the gods insisted on Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter to assure victory in the war, and on Oedipus learning the whole truth, that he is the killer of his father, so nobody can explain why the jinn kidnapped Zaid's wife, Al-Khahlah, and why Sa'ada the good jinn helped him. There is no way to explain such events except by treating the myth as metaphorical material, and the theatre is the best place for such treatment because of its ability to present images joining the past with the present, and logical with illogical events.

³⁴ The story of Ajab and the story of Zaid Bin Anan were recorded on cassette tape from oral resources as part of Youth Theatre activities led by the present writer. According to my knowledge, these stories are transcribed for the first time.

Although one never can say which came first, the journey of Zaid to forty years beyond the world to bring back his wife, or the journey of Orpheus in the ancient Greek myth to Hades to bring back his wife from the underworld, there is a clear similarity. The difference is that Orpheus could not keep his vow not to turn to see his wife, which led him to a sad end, while Zaid was a good listener and followed instructions carefully, which led him to a happy end. This point, indeed, is noticeable in Omani mythology, in general, whatever the event is, a tragic end is always avoided. Moreover, there is another similarity between Zaid and Orpheus on the intellectual level. They both wanted to change their societies for the better by a new religion or system. One succeeded and the other failed.

One can argue that the event of Zaid meeting the prophet Mohammad and he and his people entering Islam might have been added later for some religious purpose, but there is still a possibility that this event was an integral part of the story. However, there is no doubt that the idea that the devil, Seber, was from the Jews, was added recently because of the contemporary conflict, even though Jews were well known in the Arab peninsula as people of knowledge, which in ancient times meant a relationship with jinn and superpowers. Also worth commenting on is the notion that somebody, usually a magician or jinn, draws a line on the ground and crosses it to travel to some far distant place. Such an idea is common in some regions in Oman even in the present day, that is to say, people in these regions still talk about magicians doing so, and people even tease each other by threatening to send them over the line. There are hundreds of stories about such ability, which recall the popular image. This is equivalent, in Western culture, to a magician or witch flying on a broomstick. Maybe a good contemporary example of this is the story of Harry Potter!

From a theatrical viewpoint, this myth can be treated on more than one level. First, on an intellectual level, the topic here is about dealing with a supernatural power like the

jinn. All Muslims should believe that there are jinn who obey almighty God and fulfil his orders, and there are others like Satan who disobey God and try to lead human beings astray, as recounted in the Holy Quran. The essential question here is whether people can be in contact with jinn or not. Ordinary people mostly tend to believe there is contact, while the elite do not. Then another question arises, what is the use of all a human being's efforts, as long as jinn can interrupt everything and change it in seconds. Furthermore, can people, in a society like Oman, plan their practical lives on the possibility of being interrupted by jinn or Satan? Are jinn and Satan part of the psyche or are they separate creatures? Many questions can be raised. Second on the artistic level, such a myth is a challenge to the artist to use his imagination to convey what level seven of the earth and the place forty years beyond the world might look like. In addition to the world of jinn and magicians that is located under the earth or above the sky. Finally, there are reasonable roles for women in this myth, whether as a natural woman, Al-Khahlah who insists on facing all the problems side by side with the man she loves, or a female in supernatural form, Sa'ada, who helps noble people against the evil spirits. Certainly, such women's roles make the myth more a valuable source for theatre today.

In conclusion, from those Omani stories, one can extract many features about people and society in Oman, as follows: first, the people of Oman are very proud of their roots in pure ancient Arab tribes and of their ancestors' history, as in the story of Malik Bin Fahm. Secondly, the people of Oman are proud of their capability to expel various colonists throughout history, while also extending their own domination to include some other nations, as happened to the Persians in the story of Selima. Thirdly, the people of Oman are proud of their religion as Muslims and believe that God will save them either by tangible or metaphysical means, as in the story of Zaid Bin Anan.

Fourthly, Omani society wants to eradicate some issues and phenomena that oppress their lives, in particular, those persons who pretend that they have authority derived from metaphysical power such as religion or magic, and use those privileges to wrong the local people, as in the stories of Zaid Bin Anan, Ajab, the daughter of the radish seller and other stories from various Omani regions. Fifthly, the sultan, in general, is portrayed as a father of the whole people, who establishes justice, and if anything goes wrong, it is because of some evil hand working beyond his knowledge, as in the stories of Ajab and the daughter of the radish seller. Sixthly, the people of Oman, like those of other nations, reject any kind of unfairness, and look forward to a flourishing future, as in all the above-mentioned stories.

The above-mentioned folklore and stories of Oman contain significant mythical aspects in addition to their dimension of drama on the intellectual and visual levels. Those two features, one can assert, if they are employed properly, will enable Omani theatre to achieve distinguished development and build its own originality. However, these Omani sources need further extensive study from scholars in various fields. Such studies should ideally be conducted under the supervision of a professional theatrical organization, which can make use of the findings in a practical way to enrich theatrical performances. Nevertheless, from the exploration conducted in this thesis, we can conclude that mythical aspects have some important functions in the Omani theatre. Firstly, mythical aspects, as declared above, reflect the characteristics of Omani people and society. If employed in the theatre, those characteristics will give the Omani theatre a distinct identity and originality. Secondly, those mythical aspects contain marvellous dramatic elements: plots, events and characters, which can be rich resources for Omani directors and dramatists, who could draw on them as inspiration for exciting plays carrying not only the sense of heritage but also contemporary messages. Thirdly, mythical aspects can provide Omani theatre with powerful imaginative dimensions and aesthetic images,

in addition to some rituals and forms of theatrical expression accompanied by distinctive rhythms coming from various Omani drums. Fourthly, mythical aspects offer fertile ground for theatre to engage with other branches of knowledge such as mythology, anthropology, psychology, sociology and theology, which would enrich the intellectual base of Omani theatre and enable it to explore various issues that concern the people. Fifthly, a mythical aspect can be found for Omani theatre sharing ground with the international theatre, via the theory of mythical primitive samples. Those samples hold great similarity, in spite of the fact that they belong to different cultures. Sixthly, employing the mythical aspect in Omani theatre would necessarily lead to the introduction of new theories of criticism, such as archetypal criticism, which would broaden the scope of intellectual endeavour. Seventhly, Oman possesses, besides a rich tradition of myth, some notable historical sites. There are castles, fort, palaces, old markets and public squares in almost every city, some of which are already used for folklore presentation, where mythical performances can be presented in a suitable atmosphere. Such a movement of the Omani theatre away from enclosed rooms and into open venues, which is a new theatrical phenomenon in Oman, would provide vital contact with peoples' everyday life and places, and can play an essential role in rooting theatrical traditions in Omani culture.

References

- AL-BUSAEDI, Aminah. 2000. *The Story of the Daughter of Radish Seller*. A story recorded on cassette tape. Muscat: Youth Theatre Collection.
- AL-BUSAEDI, Durah. 1996. *The Story of Ajab*. A story recorded on cassette tape. Muscat: Youth Theatre Collection.
- AL-JAMAN, Sami. 2003. *The Presence of One Thousand Nights and One in the Arab Theatre*. Master Degree. Bahrain: University of Bahrain.
- AL-MURADI, Nabil Huzam. 26 September 2003. Interview with the researcher in Abu Dhabi at the GCC Festival of Theatre.
- AL-SA'DI, Ya'qub. 2000. *The Story of Zaid Bin Anan*. A story recorded on cassette tape. Muscat: Youth Theatre Collection.
- AL-SALIMI, Nur Al-Din Abdallah. 2000. *Tuhfat Al-a'yan fi Sirati Ahl Oman (The Valuable View in the Legacy of the People of Oman)*. Muscat: Al-Batih Press. (In Arabic)
- AL-SHUAYLI, Isa Bin Hamad. 1995. *The Two Basrans and the Omani*. Muscat: Al-Batih Press. (In Arabic)
- FRYE, Northrop. 2000. *Anatomy of Criticism*. 15th Ed. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- KLAGES, Mary. September 13, 2001. Claude Levi-Strauss: The Structural Study of Myth and other Structuralist Ideas. Available: <http://www.colorado.edu/English/engl2010mk/levistrauss.2001.htm> [Accessed 29/10/2003].
- KUTHARANI, Wajih. 2001. "The Connection between History and Myth". *Al-Hayat Newspaper*. 15 April, Sunday No. 13909.
- MAKKAWI, Mansur. 1983. *The Banner*. Muscat: Ministry of Education & Youth Affairs, Youth Theatre. (In Arabic)
- MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw. 1992. *Magic, Science and Religion*. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- MINISTRY OF INFORMATION. 1990. *Traditional Arts from Oman*. Muscat: Ministry of Information. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HERITAGE & CULTURE. 1980. *The Harvest of Omani Studies*. V. 7. Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage, pp. 172-3. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HERITAGE & CULTURE. 1990. *The Harvest of Activities of the Literary Salons*. V. 1. Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HERITAGE & CULTURE. 1991. *The Harvest of Activities of the Literary Salons*. V.2. Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage. (In Arabic)
- MYTHOLOGY. *The Illustrated Anthology of World Myth and Storytelling*. General editor C. Scott, Littleton. 2002. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.
- SAID, Abd al-baky Muhammad. 1975. *Rat in the Dock*. In the researcher's collection.

SHAWQI, Yusuf. 1989. *Oman Traditional Music Dictionary*. Muscat: Ministry of Information. (In Arabic)

WALTON, J. Michael. 1996. *The Greek Sense of Theatre*. London: Harwood academic publishers.

Conclusion

It is necessary to take into account several facts when studying myths in Oman in the light of developing its modern theatre. First, Omani culture is an integral part of Islamic and Arabic culture and therefore if it is to appeal to an Omani audience, it should reflect this dimension. Secondly, Oman is tied to the GCC countries in its history, culture and environment as well as lifestyle. For that reason, the theatre movements in those countries are growing synchronously and supporting each other. This fact should be recognized in any upcoming plan to develop the theatre in Oman. Thirdly, although Oman is part of Islamic and Arabic culture, nevertheless it has its own character, which distinguishes it from other cultures. This character is best revealed through reference to its rich heritage of folklore, poetry and myth. Fourthly, Oman started its young theatrical movement in 1970, and the movement is still in its early stage and needs a lot of effort and assistance in order to shape its character and establish its artistic credentials. The latter cannot be achieved except by two important routes. The first is by awareness of international theatre, which means that the theatre movement in Oman must be connected with the international theatrical movement at a theoretical and practical level, especially with those countries which have a great history of theatre. The other is the employment, in the theatre, of the indigenous sources of heritage and knowledge such as the myths focused on in this thesis.

For many reasons, myths dominate Oman's culture. Various circumstances made the country an ideal environment for myths to evolve. First, Oman has a very ancient history that contains many great events, some of which were written and others recorded in oral culture, leaving scope for human imagination to omit, add, and change material according to the requirements of their time. Second, although Oman was influenced by many neighbouring cultures, such as Persian, Indian and African, for

various reasons, it has gone through periods when it was completely isolated, especially since the sea separates Oman from the aforementioned cultures, and the desert separates it from other Arab countries on the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, Omani geography contains two huge mountain chains that divide the country into small isolated villages in narrow valleys. Therefore, people suffered from domestic and international isolation for long periods, exacerbated from time to time by political and social events. This dual isolation led to a lack of education and wider knowledge, which led people to depend on their own intellectual ability to invent explanations for the different phenomena they confronted in everyday life. Those explanations became the basis of myth, which over years took on an imaginative shape. Mythology is still an integral part of Omani culture. The nature of people's thinking; the way they imagine and explain different events or phenomena in their lives is based on mythological aspects. Therefore, theatre should be aware of this fact, and deal with it, by preserving that heritage and employing it in a way that recognizes its advantages and disadvantages.

Myths, around the world, were the first attempt of human beings to think, explain, justify and invent thoughts and images, as well as the basis on which the first theatrical movement was established in ancient Greek civilization. Throughout history, myths have been one of the main sources of theatrical inspiration. However, it is only in the mid nineteenth century that serious study of myth began. As I have discussed, scholars have classified myths into various categories, which have been studied individually. Myths have been seen by anthropologists and psychologists as the manifestation of the individual or collective conscious or unconscious realm. Consequently, these studies confirm that myths, in spite of their outwardly illogical events, carry not fact itself but the essence of the fact, or the motivation to seek the fact. Myth is never unrelated to fact, although as it is one can never be certain about the facts themselves. This midway stage forms its beauty and philosophy, and this is consistent with the nature of art in the

theatre, where Artaud for one recognized that it creates astonishment, surprise and speculation for the audience, who can experience through it a sense of the real nature of human beings' essence.

In Islamic culture, the Holy Quran used the word myth in two main forms; as a verb where it meant mainly 'write' or 'record', and as a plural noun, which meant a nonsensical old story, contrasting to the truth told by Almighty God and his prophet Muhammad. Although the Holy Quran valued the role of stories as a means of giving people examples and illustrations from the past, most Islamic scholars have adopted for many reasons a negative attitude towards myths. First, one of the powerful principles in Islam is belief in monotheism; one God who has all powers, while most myths, especially the Greek ones and ancient Arabic ones, dealt with polytheism, presenting many gods who have adversarial relationships with each other. Secondly, Islamic philosophy tries to maintain a direct and transparent relationship between God and the Muslim person, without any medium or idols such as myths portray.

Some modern Arab scholars attribute the ancient Arabs' lack of concern with myths, in contrast to the cultures of their neighbours, to the hard life they lived as scattered tribes in the desert, that forced them to focus on struggling for their existence rather than any imaginative activities. However, that did not prevent some early Arab researchers, in the Islamic period, from revering Greek mythology and philosophy. On the other hand, some other Arab scholars assert that there are many signs that Arabs used the word myth in the same sense as history, especially in the period before Islam.

Throughout history, there was a close interrelationship between myth and theatre. Myth does not provide theatre only with essential questions, plots, characters, but it was always "raised dough" in the playwrights' and directors' hands, from which they could phrase unlimited forms and convey numerous messages. In addition, myth provides theatre with evocative symbols, the philosophy of ritual and practical rituals which

enable playwrights and directors constantly to originate their own myths, which suit their contemporary circumstances and thoughts. Furthermore, there are important modern theories of theatrical criticism developed in the last century, such as Archetypal Criticism, in which every theatrical play or performance is evaluated according to its employment of elements from ancient myths. Such theories have a particularly relevant role in establishing theatre in developing countries such as Oman.

In the light of the theory of Archetypal Criticism and the modern anthropological and psychological concepts of myth, contemporary critics can provide valuable rereading of modern masterpieces such as those plays of the 19th and 20th centuries widely considered realist and modernist. Such rereading enriches our understanding of the plays by emphasising the similarity and differences between modern masterpieces and mythology in their concerns, psychology, 'primitive' behaviour and symbolism, and by emphasising the continuity between different cultures from different periods. Regarding this, when one asserts the importance of employing myth in the theatre, particularly the Omani theatre, this does not simply mean ancient sacred stories, but also several other valuable elements. Firstly, myth is a manifestation of the collective human mind, of the development of the human mind throughout the history. This means enrolling the past, present and future of humanity in a continuous cycle of evolution. Secondly, myth is a subject and a means of expression, which deals not only with the exterior social experience but also with the interior, individual psyche evident in worries, dreams and wishes. Thirdly, myth is like an open field of unlimited imagination particularly relating to metaphysical realms.

Directors, actors and playwrights in theatres around the world do not confine themselves to the classical definition of myth as a sacred ancient story, but extend their efforts to include modern theories of myth, which are provided by contemporary mythological, sociological, anthropological, theological and psychological studies.

Their valuable modern explanations, classifications and definitions of myth open up a huge horizon to theatrical productions, in terms of form and content. Omani theatre needs to utilize such theories when it deals with ancient or modern myths, which will enable it to provide the society with new and wider understanding of their existing myths, which are sometimes seen in a very narrow scope and are considered as forbidden materials.

There are various reasons why myths are sometimes considered as forbidden materials, meaning holy stories, not to be touched. First, some myths become holy because they are considered as ancient masterpieces, part of the heritage or a historical record that needs to remain unpolluted by any recent influences. Second, myths are sometimes considered holy because they are religious stories and any change in them would mean in one way or other changing religious principles or philosophy. Of course, such changes in most cases are not accepted by religious leaders. Third, some myths are still alive in some societies and play an essential role in spreading ideas or maintaining traditions, therefore people consider myths holy because they believe that they happened, and need them to continue their social role. Arguments never end between conservatives and those who use myths freely in artistic and literary works. Nevertheless, even such arguments and dialogues between different opinions are useful in enriching the cultural life of society, and theatre should contribute effectively to them.

Treatment of myths in Omani theatre should not be limited to the concept that myths are an ancient aesthetic resource. It should be taken into consideration that some myths are still vital in the society, as a great part of the population believe in some of them as a super reality. This gives myths, sometimes, an evident role in changing society's thoughts in Oman and indicates the direction taken by the collective conscious. Maybe the social reformers, with good reason, consider it necessary for the people to abandon

myths and deal with life by means of rational logic, as do most people in the so-called 'developed' countries of today's world. Theatre can contribute to this by identifying with myths or encountering them, not demolishing or annihilating them, but opening up new interpretations by presenting them from a different viewpoint, highlighting new aspects such as the aesthetical, psychological and intellectual and relating them to contemporary concerns.

Some directors and playwrights in the modern theatre have adopted myth in its classical form, seeking to present it in every single detail. Others tend to make very limited changes in the myth, to satisfy their modern audience, while keeping the myth's essential topic and form. A third group believe in their right to turn the myth upside down in a way that makes essential changes in its form and content, even sometimes producing an absolutely new work. Although there have been notable success in all three categories, the third category was and still is the most controversial one, as some critics think it wrongs the ancient myth, while others think it revitalizes the myth and adds to it new aesthetic dimensions and ideas, and makes it acceptable in contemporary society. However, of course there are no strict rules as to how directors or playwrights in the theatre should deal with myth; their theatrical experience, education and political stance will be influential factors.

Myths, for example, have been employed extensively in the contemporary political theatre to carry some current political message. Indeed, some of these productions bring contrasting messages to those of the original myth by focusing totally on the political issue and ignoring the myth's innate meaning and value, or at best giving it marginal consideration. Although some of those plays such as those mentioned in previous chapters have been successful and excellent in performing their political task, they remain tied to specific events or short-term occasions. This limitation works against the

traditional accepted nature of both myths and art, which address essential concerns that remain vital over time.

Although many modern plays in Oman have dealt with myths intentionally or intuitively, still myth as art, a combination of past stories and modern interpretation is far from receiving the consideration that it deserves in Omani theatre, either on a quantitative or qualitative level. Moreover, theatre criticism in Oman has not engaged with mythological aspects, ignoring the mythical nature and culture of the society. My contention is that employing myths in the theatre can be considered as a social and cultural need as much as a theatrical aim. The stories and myths stored in Oman's heritage are a great treasure. If used in a proper way by playwrights and directors, they can give the Omani theatre originality in its aesthetic and intellectual dimensions as well as encouraging a greater interaction with the audience. Nevertheless such strategic ambitions cannot be promoted or achieved except under the umbrella of a qualified organization such as a national theatre set up to develop indigenous drama and performances. The foundation of such a theatre is thankfully expected to be announced in the very near future.

Bibliography

Plays:

AESCHYLUS, 1956. *The Oresteian Trilogy: Agamemnon, Choephoroi, Eumenides*. Translated with introduction by P. Vellacott. London: Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

AL-GINDI, Yussiri. 1977. *Oh...Antara*. Cairo: Union of Cultural Friends.

AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1987. *The Ship is still Wrecked*. Sultanate of Oman: Ministry of Education. (In Arabic)

AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1997. *Al-Baragge*. In the researcher's collection.

AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1999. *The Man who Returns from Coming Time*. In the researcher's collection.

AL-MA'MARI, Said Salim. 1996. *The Bewitched Girl*. In the researcher's collection.

AL-RAHBI, Muhammad. 1998. *The Lament of the Monster*. In the researcher's collection.

AL-TA'I, Sama Isa. 1991. *Nothing Stops the Disaster*. Muscat: The Press of Modern Colour.

ANOUILH, Jean. 1957. *Antigone*. Translated by L. Calantiere. London: Methuen.

ARRABAL, Fernando. 1962. *Four Plays By Arabal: Orison, The Two Executioners, Fando and Lis and The Car Cemetery*. Translated by Barbara Wright. London: John Calder.

BAKATHIR, Ali Ahmad. 1990. *Al-Basus War*. Cairo: Egyptian Library.

BIN SALIM, UMAR. 1979. *The Al-Lat Day*. Damascus: The Union of Arab Writers.

BIN SALIM, UMAR. 1991. *Babylon Tower*. Tunis: Al-Dar Al-Tunisia Lil-nashr.

BRECHT, Bertolt. 1963. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Translated by James & Tania Stern & W. H. Auden. London: Methuen.

- BRECHT, Bertolt. 1990. *Sophocles' Antigone*. Translated by Malina Judith. New York: Applause.
- EL-HAKIM, Tawfiq. 1978. *Isis*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani.
- EL-HAKIM, Tawfiq. 1984. *The Cave Companions*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani. (In Arabic)
- EURIPIDES. 1974. *Hippolytos*. Translated by Robert Bagg. London: Oxford University Press.
- HAMUDA, Abd al-Aziz. 1981. *The People of Thebes*. Cairo: The Egyptian Organization for Books.
- IBSEN, Henrik. 1965. *A Doll's House*. Translated by Michael Meyer. London: Rupert Hart-Davis.
- JARRY, Alfred. 1968. *The Ubu Plays*. Edited by S. W. Taylor. London: Methuen.
- JELLICOE, Anne. 2958. *The Sport of My Mad Mother*. London: Faber & Faber.
- KANE, Sarah. 1996. *Blasted & Phaedra's Love*. London: Methuen.
- MAKKAWI, Abd al-Jafar. 1990. *The Depth and the Visor*. In the researcher's collection.
- MAKKAWI, Mansur. 1983. *The Banner*. Muscat: Ministry of Education & Youth Affairs, Youth Theatre. (In Arabic)
- MAKKAWI, Mansur. 1985. *The Dowry*. Muscat: Ministry of Education & Youth Affairs, Youth Theatre. (In Arabic)
- SAID, Abd al-Baky Muhammad. 1975. *Rat in the Dock*. In the researcher's collection.
- SALMIN, Amina Rabi'a. 1995. *The Stab*. In the researcher's collection.
- SARTRE, Jean Paul. 1946. *The Flies and In Camera*. Translated by Gilbert. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. 1965. *The Tempest*. London: Cambridge, University Press.

SHAKESPEARE, William. 1969. *The Tempest*. London: J. & R. Tonson in the Strand.

SHAKESPEARE, William. 1975. *King Lear*. Edited by Muir Kenneth. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.

SOPHOCLES. 1978. *Oedipus the King*. Translated by Tawfiq El-Hakim. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani.

SOPHOCLES. 1991. *Antigone*. Translated by Don Taylor. *The Theban Plays*. London: Methuen.

STRINDBERG, August. 1998. *Miss Julie and Other Plays*. Translated & Introduction by Michael Robinson. New York: Oxford University Press.

WILLIAMS, Tennessee. 1962. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In *Five Plays by Tennessee William*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Books:

ABD AL-HAKIM, Shawqi. 1995. *The Cyclopaedia of Arab Folklore and Myth*. Egypt: Maktabat Madbuli. (In Arabic)

AL-AHLI CLUB. 1977. *The Theatre in Al-Ahli Club*. Muscat: Al-Ahli Club. (In Arabic)

AL-ATTAR, Habib Ghulum. 2001. *The Influences of Economic and Social Changes on Gulf Theatre*. Abu-Dhabi: U. A. E: Cultural Foundation Publication. (In Arabic)

AL-HAWI, Ilea. 1980. *Aeschylus and the Grecian Tragedy*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani. (In Arabic)

AL-LAWATI, Abdulkarim. 1988. *The Experimentation of Theatre in Oman*. Sultanate of Oman: Ministry of Education (In Arabic).

AL-RAI, Ali. 1999. *The Theatre in the Arab World*. The World of Knowledge Series Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, & Literature (In Arabic).

AL-SALIMI, Nur Al-Din Abdallah. 2000. *Tuhfat Al-a'yan fi Sirati Ahl Oman (The Valuable View in the Legacy of the People of Oman)*. Muscat: Al-Batiah Press. (In Arabic)

- AL-SAWAH, Firas. 1989. *The First Mind's Adventure*. Syria: Dar Al-kindy, (In Arabic)
- AL-SHUAYLI, Isa Bin Hamad. 1995. *The Two Basrans and the Omani*. Muscat: Al-Batiah Press. (In Arabic)
- ARTAUD, Antonin. 1974. *The Theatre and its Double* in Antonin Artaud Collected Works, V. 4. Translated by Victor Corti. London: Calder & Boyars.
- ATTAR, Farid ud-Din. 1971. *The Conference of the Birds*. Translated by C. S Nott. Boulder: Shambhala.
- BACON, Francis. MCMV. *The Wisdom of Ancients and New Atlantis*. London: Cassell.
- BENTLEY, Eric. 1948. *The Modern Theatre*. London: Robert Hale.
- BHARUCHA, Rustom. 1991. A View from India. In David Williams, ed. *Peter Brook and Mahabharata*. London & New York: Routledge. P. 229.
- BRANDT, W. George. 1998. *Modern Theories of Drama*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- BROOK, Peter. 1989. *The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration: 1946 – 1987*. Kuwait: the National Council of Culture, Art, & Literature.
- CARTLEDGE, Paul. 1990. *Aristophanes and his Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Bristol Classical Press.
- CONTAT, Michel & Michel, RYBALKA. 1976. *Sartre on Theatre*. London: Quartet Books.
- COUPE, Laurence. 1997. *Myth*. London & New York: Routledge.
- CRAIG, Gordon. 1999. *Craig on Theatre*. Edited by J. Michael Walton. London: Methuen Drama.
- CUNNINGHAM, Adrian. 1973. *The Theory of Myth*. London: Sheed & Ward.
- CUPITT, Don. 1982. *The World to Come*. London: SCM Press.
- DANIELL, David. 1989. *The Tempest*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd.
- DURANT, Will. 1944. *The Story of Philosophy*. Beirut: Maktabat Al-Ma'arif. (In Arabic)

- ELIADE, Mircea. 1957. *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries*. London: Harper Torchbooks.
- ESSLIN, Martin. 1961. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
- ESSLIN, Martin. 1970. *Absurd Theatre*. International Theatre Series. Kuwait: Ministry of Information. (In Arabic)
- FRAZER, James. 1996. *The Golden Bough*. London: Penguin Books.
- FREUD, Sigmund. 1938. *Totem and Taboo*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Modern Library.
- FREUD, Sigmund. 1991. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey. London: Penguin Books.
- FROMM, Erich. 1951. *The Forgotten Language*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- FRYE, Northrop. 2000. *Anatomy of Criticism*. 15th Ed. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- GROTOWSKI, Jerzy. 1968. Towards a Poor Theatre. In Eugenio, Barba, ed. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen.
- HASHIM, Watfa. 1996. *The Heritage and its Influence and Employment in the Theatre of Tawfiq El-Hakim*. Lebanon: Dar Bin Rushd. (In Arabic)
- HEILPERN, John. 1977. *The Conference of the Birds*. London: Faber & Faber.
- HOOKE, S. H. 1993. *Middle Eastern Mythology*. London: Penguin Books.
- HUSAYN, Kamal al-Din. 1993. *The Popular Heritage in Modern Egyptian Theatre*. Cairo: Al-Dar Al-misria Al-lubnania.
- HUSAYN, Taha. 1982. *Chapters in Literature and Criticism*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi. (In Arabic)
- IBN KHALDUN, Wali al-din. 2000. *The Introduction*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani. (In Arabic)
- IDRIS, Yusuf. 1974. *Towards Arabic Theatre*. Egypt: Dar Al-Watan Al – Arabi. (In Arabic)

- JACKSON, Esther Merle. 1966. *The Broken World of Tennessee Williams*. Madison, Milwaukee & London: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- JALAL AL-DEN, Said. 1994. *The Lexicon of Idioms and Philosophical Illustration*. Tunis: Dar Al-Janob. (In Arabic)
- JAMES, Edward & Gillian, JONDORF. 1994. *Racine's Phèdre*. London & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- JAMESON, Storm. 1920. *Modern Drama in Europe*. London: W. Collins
- JUNG, C. G. 1978. *Man and his Symbols*. London: Picador.
- KOTT, Jan. 1965. *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. London: Methuen
- LANGBAUM, Robert. 1964. *William Shakespeare; The Tempest*. London: The New English Library Limited.
- MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw. 1992. *Magic, Science and Religion*. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- MARTIN, Robert A. 1997. *Critical Essays on Tennessee Williams*. New York: G. K. Hall.
- MCDONALD, Marianne. 2000. "Life and Death in Mnouchkine's Theatre". In: Nehad, SELAIHA. Editor *Forum Magazine. The Exposition, Dismounting, Ideology and other Studies. The Exposition, Dismounting, Ideology and other Studies*. Egypt: Egyptian General Organization for Books pp. 242-267. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & YOUTH AFFAIRS. 1985. *Aspects of the History of Education in Oman*. Muscat: Ministry of Education. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF INFORMATION. 1990. *Traditional Arts From Oman*. Muscat: Ministry of Information. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HERITAGE & CULTURE. 1980. *The Harvest of Omani Studies*. V. 7. Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage pp. 172-3. (In Arabic)
- MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HERITAGE & CULTURE. 1990. *The Harvest of Activities of the Literary Salons*. V. 1. Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage. (In Arabic)

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HERITAGE & CULTURE. 1991. *The Harvest of Activities of the Literary Salons*. V.2. Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage. (In Arabic)

MITAWI, Hani. 1993. *New Reading in Old Plays*. Cairo: The New Dawn Press. (In Arabic).

MYTHOLOGY. *The Illustrated Anthology of World Myth and Storytelling*. General editor Littleton, C. Scott. 2002. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.

RITCHIE, J. M. 1980. *German Expressionism*. Translated by J. M. Ritchie & H. F. Garten. London: John Calder.

ROOSE-EVANS, James. 1984. *Experimental Theatre from Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*. London & New York: Routledge.

SCHUMACHER, Claude. 1984. *Alfred Jarry and Guillaume Apollinaire*. London: Macmillan.

SELAIHA, Nehad. 1996. *The Theatre between Art and Thought*. Cairo: Egyptian Book Organization.

SELAIHA, Nehad. 2003. *Contemporary Theatrical Tendencies*. UAE: Al-Sharjah Centre for Intellectual Art.

SELLIN, Eric. 1968. *The Dramatic Concepts of Antonin Artaud*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

SHARAWI, Abd al-Muti. 1984. *Euripides*. International Theatre Series. Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, & Literature. (In Arabic)

SHATLUCK, Roger & Simon Watson, TAYLOR. 1965. *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*. London: Methuen.

SHAWQI, Yusuf. 1989. *Oman Traditional Music Dictionary*. Muscat: Ministry of Information. (In Arabic)

THE HOLY QURAN. 1996. Translation of the *Holy Quran*: CD based on interpretation of Ibn Kather & Aljalalyn. Saudi Arabia: Sakher Company for Computer Programs.

VERNANT, Jean-Pierre and VIDAL- NAQUET, Pierre. 1973. *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. Paris: Masberu.

WALTON, J. Michael. 1996. *The Greek Sense of Theatre*. London: Harwood academic publishers.

WALWORTH, George. 1979. *The Theatre of Opposition and Contradiction*. Arabic Translated by Abd al-Mun'am Ismail. Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli. (In Arabic)

WARD, John. 1980. *The Social and Religious Plays of Strindberg*. London: The Athlone Press.

WHITE, Alfred D. 1978. *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays*. London: Macmillan.

WHITTON, David. 1995. *Molière's Don Juan*. England: Cambridge Univ Press.

WILLIAMS, David. 1991. *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata*. London & New York: Routledge.

ZAKI, Ahmad Kamal. 1979. *Myths, Comparative Civilizational Study*. Beirut: Dar Al-Awdah (In Arabic).

Periodicals:

ABAZAH, Muhammad. 1994. "Myth and Theatrical Writings in Tunisia". *Theatrical Studies Series*. Dar Sahar, No. 2. pp. 3-26. (In Arabic)

ADAM, Mahjub. April 2001. "The Cave Companion Play between the Quran Text and Theatrical Deliberation". *The Magazine of College of Teachers in Riyadh* No. 1. (In Arabic)

ALAWI, Hamid. March-1995. *The Employment of Myth in Tawfiq El-Hakim Theatre*. Masters Degree thesis, University of Batinah, Algeria: *The Magazine of Theatre* pp 79-91. (In Arabic)

AL-JAMAN, Sami. 2003. *The Presence of One Thousand Nights and One in the Arab Theatre*. Master Degree. Bahrain: University of Bahrain. (In Arabic)

KUTHARANI, Wajih. 2001. "The Connection between History and Myth". *Al-Hayat Newspaper*. April, Sunday No. 13909. (In Arabic)

OSTERD, Erik. 1994. "Myth and Modernity: Henrik Ibsen's Double-drama". Article. *Scandinavica*, ISI Web of Science. Univ. East Anglia Sch. European Stud, Norwich. Nov. 33 (2). pp. 161- 182.

OUYUNASUD, Nizar. 1995. "Theories of Myth". *Alam Al-Fiker*. V.24. Issue 1, 2. Kuwait: The National Council of Culture, Art, & Literature. pp 213-232.

Unpublished Sources

ABDUL LATIF, Riza. 1987. Interview with the researcher in Muscat.

AL-BUSAEDI, Aminah. 2000. *The Story of the Daughter of the Radish Seller*. A story recorded on cassette tape. Muscat: Youth Theatre Collection.

AL-BUSAEDI, Durah. 1996. *The Story of Ajab*. A story recorded on cassette tape. Muscat: Youth Theatre Collection.

AL-MURADI, Nabil Huzam. 26 September 2003. Interview with the researcher in Abu Dhabi at GCC Festival of Theatre.

AL-SA'DI, Ya'qub. 2000. *The Story of Zaid Bin Anan*. A story recorded on cassette tape. Muscat: Youth Theatre Collection.

AZIZ, Tawfiq. 1987. Interview with the researcher in Muscat.

BARSHID, Abdulkarim. 28/9/2003. Interview with the researcher in Abu Dhabi at GCC Festival of Theatre.

SALIM, Ahmad. 1987. Interview with the researcher in Muscat.

Internet Sources

AARON, Comway. Theatre of the Absurd, *Snappyprof.com art historian*. Available: <http://www.snappyprof.com/profile/jarabs.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].

AL-BAHRAWI, Sayed. A Study in the Modernism in Amal Dunqal's Poem. Available: http://www.nizwa.com/volume5/p81_89.html [Accessed 19/12/2003].

AL-JULANDANI, Ahmad Sulaiman. Tawfiq El-Hakim. *Pioneers of the Theatre*. Available: <http://www.squ.edu.om/stu/tht/pioneers/hakeem.html> [Accessed 18/12/2003].

ARABIC DICTIONARIES. Myth. *Ajeeb Arabic Dictionaries*. Available: <http://literary.ajeab.com/articles/Alef/A0059.asp> [Accessed 16/12/2003].

ASHER, Laleh. *The Conference of the Birds*. Adapted from introduction by Afkham Darbandi & Dick Davis. *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid Ud-Din Attar Penguin Books, England 1984 Lines 3475. Available:

- http://www.mycweb.com/megillah/jul2000/the_conference_of_the_birds.html
[Accessed 18/12/2003].
- BARRAKAT, Muhammad. December 2001. A Woman by a Thousand Men. *Al-Sakher Forums* (Interview in Arabic). Available:
<http://www.alsakher.com/vb2/showthread.php?threadid=24650>, [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- BIERL, Anton. 1997. Anton Bierl, Die Orestie des Aischylos auf der modernen Buhne. Gregory, Hays, ed *Bryn Mawar Classical Review* 98.5.21. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Available:
<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/1998/98.5.21.html> [Accessed 17/12/2003].
- BRENTON, Kyle. 14 November 2000. Antigone; Acts of War. *American Repertory Theatre*. Available:
<http://www.amrep.org/past/antigone/antigone5.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- BROWN, Larry A. November 2001. The Mahabharata. *Web pages for discussion of mythology and theatre*. Available:
<http://larryavisbrown.homestead.com/files/xeno.mahabsynop.htm> [Accessed 18/12/2003].
- CULÍK, Jan. 2000. The Theatre of the Absurd the West and the East. Available: <http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm> [Accessed 19/12/2003].
- DAVIS, Richard E. 1994. Creating Clytemnestra. *Didaskalia Ancient Theatre Today*. Department of Communication, University of San Francisco. Available: <http://didaskalia.open.ac.uk/issues/vol1no3/davis.html> [Accessed 17/12/2003].
- DON JUAN. Available:
<http://www.theatrehistory.com/French/donjuanool.html> [Accessed 10/10/2003].
- DUNQUL, Amal. 2004. No Reconciliation. *Arabandalucia*. Available:
<http://www.arabandalucia.com/index.php/1267> [Accessed 12/7/2004]
- ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: Available:
<http://shakespeare.eb.com/shakespeare/micro/731/86.html> [Accessed 1/7/2003]

FLOREN, Gloria. 20 September 2003. The Mahabharata, a Film by Peter Brook. Available: <http://www.miracosta.cc.ca.us/home/gflore/mahabfilm.htm> [Accessed 18/12/2003].

GOETSCH, Sallie. October 1994. Fusing Greek and Asian Drama. *Didaskalia Ancient Theatre Today*. V. 1, 4. The School of Theatre Studies. University of Warwick. Available: <http://didaskalia.open.ac.uk/issues/vol1no4/goetsch.html> [Accessed 17/12/2003].

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE. Available:
<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc39.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].

JOHNSTON, Brian, Realism and a Doll's House. *Voyages in Drama with Ibsen*. Available: <http://www.ibsenvoyages.com/e-texts/doll/index.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].

KALI. 1997. California, U.S.A. Ascension Research Centre. Available:
<http://www.ascension-research.org/kali.html> [Accessed 8/7/2004]

KLAGES, Mary. September 13, 2001. Claude Levi-Strauss: The Structural Study of Myth and other Structuralist Ideas. Available:
<http://www.colorado.edu/English/engl2010mk/levistrauss.2001.htm> [Accessed 29/10/2003].

LEVI-STRAUSS, Claude. 1955. The Structural Study of Myth. Available:
<http://courses.essex.ac.uk/lt/lt204/strauss.htm> [Accessed 8/7/2004].

NICOLESCU, Basarab. 9 April 2001. Peter Brook and Traditional Thought. *Gurdjieff International Review*, V. 4 (2). Translated by David Williams. Available: <http://www.gurdjieff.org/nicolescu3.htm> [Accessed 18/12/2003].

SCHAEFER, Susan. 12 April 2001. Furious Antigone. *Dailyprincetonian Art*. Available:
<http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/archives/2001/04/12/arts/2906.shtml> [Accessed 19/12/2003].

SILVIS, Steffen. An interview with Nancy Keystone. *Willamette Week Online* Available: <http://www.wweek.com/html2/perf022101.html> [Accessed 19/12/2003].

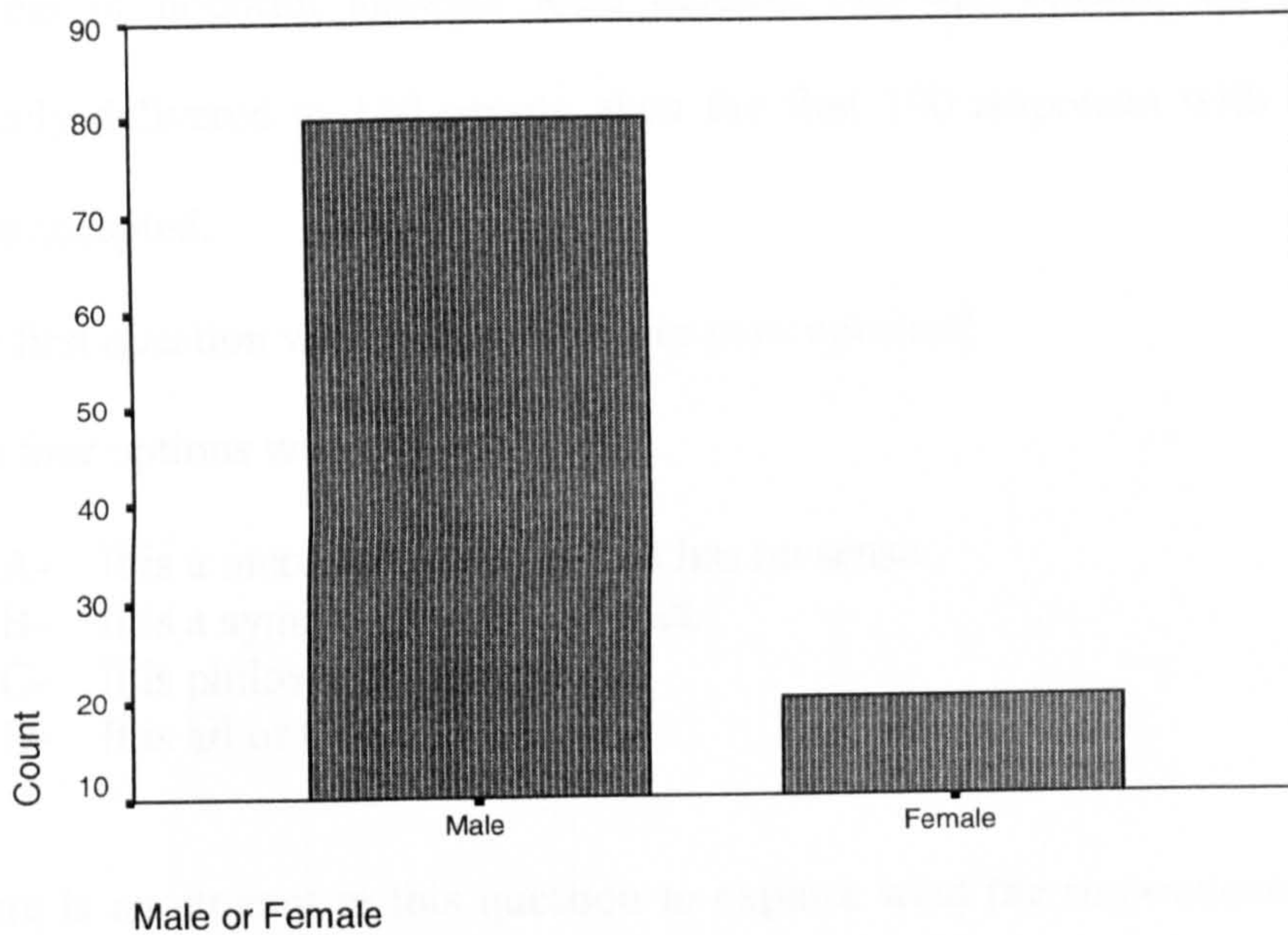
THOMAS, Russ. Another Antigone by A. R. Guney. *New Jewish Theatre*.
Available: <http://www.kdhx.org/reviews/anantigone.html> [Accessed
19/12/2003].

Appendices

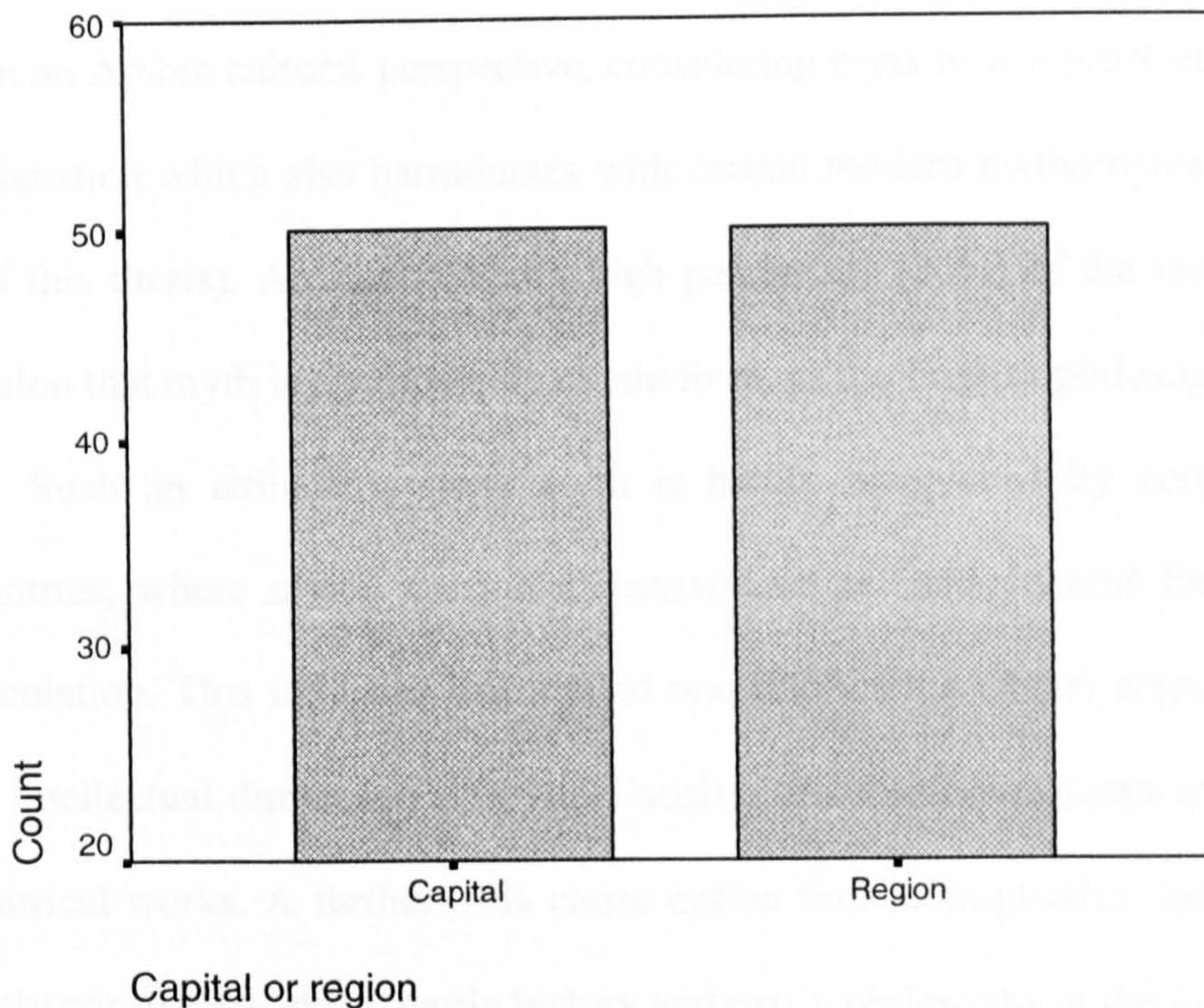
Appendix 1: Questionnaire Data (1 August to 15 October 2003)

For the purpose of this thesis, a questionnaire was sent to experts on Omani theatre, in order to discover the opinions of those who worked in that field on a regular basis. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore the opinions of these Omani people towards myths and how important they are in current life, in general, and in the theatre in particular³⁵. The questionnaire was forwarded to a selected group according to certain criteria. First, to those involved directly in theatrical works such as performers, writers, and directors. Second, to those who are working in various ministries in positions which deal with the theatre in one way or another, such as the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture and The General Organization of Youth for Sport and Cultural Activities. According to previous Youth Theatre sources and the data provided in the first chapter of this thesis, there are seven Youth Theatre Groups and around 14 private theatre groups, with an average of 20 members in each group, in addition to others who are not members of groups. The estimated number of such people in Oman is about 500, aged between 20 and 50 years. Most of them are working in Muscat, the capital, and 20% of them are women.

³⁵ The present writer attended to a course entitled Survey Methods and Questionnaire Design at the University of Hull and according the guidance of this course this questionnaire was designed after a pilot study had been done. The SPSS statistics computer program was used as data editor and result analyser for this questionnaire.



The selected group was 100 people, 80 men and 20 women, aged between 20 and 50 years. 50% of the group were from the capital and the rest from various Omani regions, especially where the current theatre has satisfactory activities.



The questionnaire started with open-ended questions and then focused on specific points and information by means of 14 multiple-choice questions, each with four response options. Finally, the information from the questionnaire was carefully examined, and

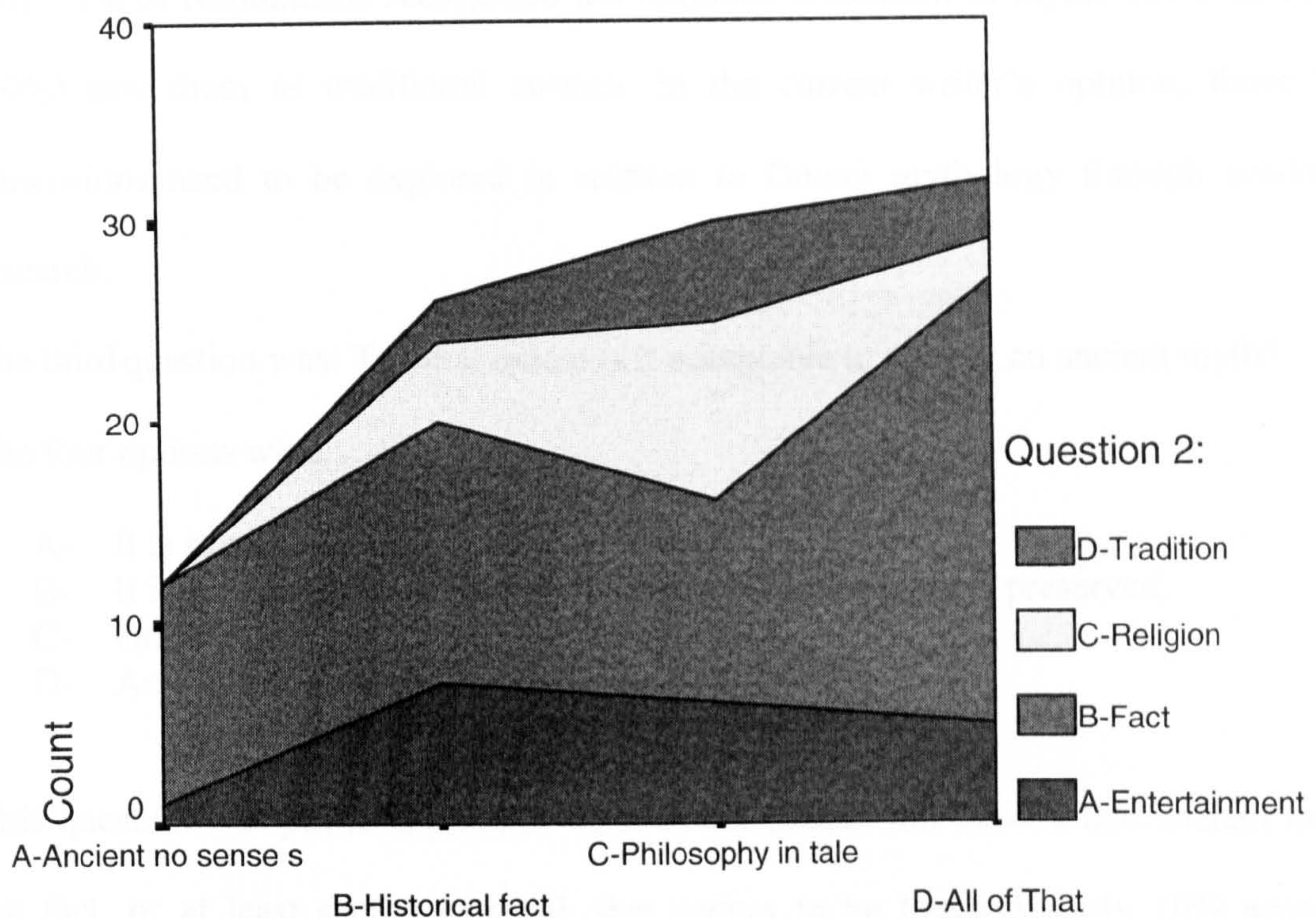
unclear or doubtful answers were deleted. For this reason, the questionnaire was initially delivered to 140 people, then the first 100 responses with complete answers were accepted.

The first question was: What is myth in your opinion?

The four options were:

- A- It is a mere ancient story that has no sense.
- B- It is a symbol of historical fact.
- C- It is philosophy in tale form.
- D- It is all of that.

There is an attempt in this question to explore what the respondents thought of myth. The surprising result was that only 12% of the responses adopted the traditional Islamic *interpretation of myth, as an ancient story that has no sense and stands counter to the truth that was told by Almighty God through his prophet Muhammad.* Like Wajih Kutharani, quoted in the second chapter of this thesis, 26% of respondents viewed myth from an Arabic cultural perspective, considering myth as a symbol of historical fact, an explanation which also harmonizes with certain modern mythological theories (chapter 2 of this thesis). An unexpectedly high percentage (30%) of the respondents hold the opinion that myth is a philosophy in tale form, as the English philosopher Francis Bacon did. Such an attitude towards myth is hardly recognized by people in developing countries, where myths are mostly considered as metaphysical fact beyond rational speculation. This indicates that around one third of the Omani respondents recognized the intellectual dimension of myth. Usually, this dimension plays an important role in theatrical works. A further 32% chose option four to emphasize that myth, to them, is partly nonsensical story, partly history and partly philosophy at the same time.



Question 1: What is myth in your opinion?

The second question was: In your opinion, how did people, in ancient times, deal with myth?

The four options were:

- A- As a story for entertainment.
- B- As a fact, they believed in.
- C- As a religious ritual.
- D- As a traditional custom.

This question was put to explore people's knowledge of the attitude toward myths in their first environment when they were created. 19% thought that myths were created merely for entertainment. Although their opinions partly make sense, they depend on their personal opinions rather than any serious studies. A high percentage (56%) thought that myths were considered as absolute fact by ancient people, whether their knowledge depended on their personal conclusions or educational background. Such understanding of myths' status in the past offers a great opportunity to deal with them today from different perspectives and compare our new understanding with the old one. However,

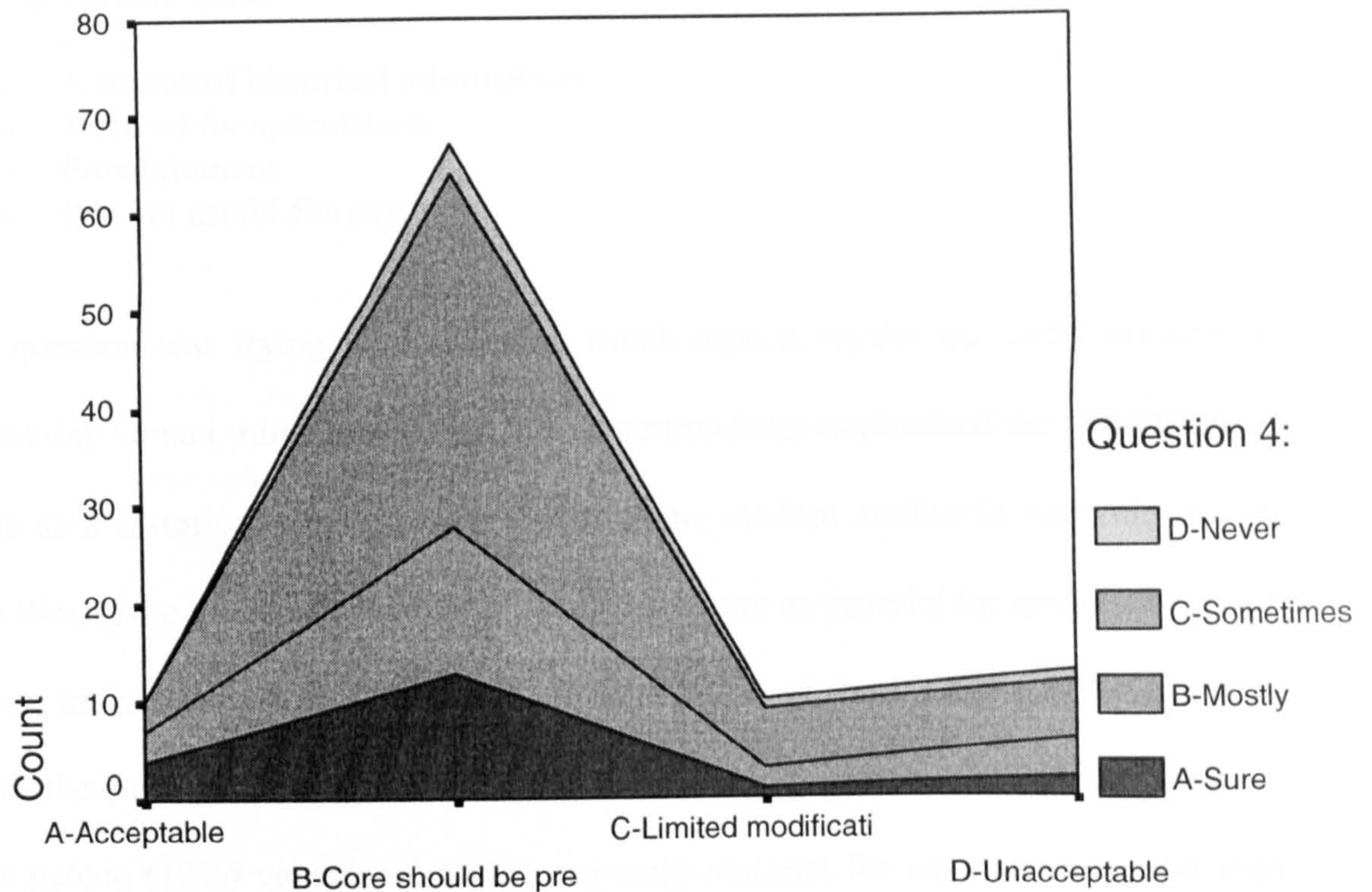
only 15% of respondents recognized the religious dimension in myths and even fewer (10%) saw them as traditional custom. In the current writer's opinion, those two dimensions need to be explored in relation to Omani mythology through academic research.

The third question was: To what extent is it acceptable to modify an ancient myth?

The four options were:

- A- It is acceptable.
- B- It is acceptable on condition that the core of the myth is preserved.
- C- Only limited modification is acceptable.
- D- Any sort of modification is unacceptable.

This question was put to explore to what extent people still believe that ancient myths are fact, or at least sacred material, that cannot to be touched. Only 10% accepted modification of ancient myths without any conditions. The majority of people (67%) in the selected group still had a feeling of loyalty towards ancient myths, so they accepted modification on condition that the core of the myth should be preserved. 10% were even stricter; they accepted only very minor modification, while 13% refused any kind of modification, either because they still believe in myths as fact or because they perceived a sort of sacredness in them. It is necessary to respect local people's opinions and attitudes toward myths, which means studying them carefully and exploring the reasons why they do not totally agree with or adopt them.



Question 3: To what extent is it acceptable to modify an ancient myth?

The fourth question was: Do you find myth useful in our contemporary life?

The four options were:

- A- Yes, for sure.
- B- Most of the time.
- C- Sometimes.
- D- Never.

This question was put to explore people's opinion about whether myth belongs totally to the past or it has an impact on the present and future. Only 20% were sure that myths are useful in our contemporary life and 24% considered them useful most of the time. The majority of the people (61%) found them useful sometimes, while only 5% considered them pointless. As a conclusion, one can say that the respondents in general still believed that myths could play a role in their contemporary life, even though the limit of this role differed from person to another.

The fifth question was: What is myth useful for in contemporary life?

The four options were:

- A- A source of historical information.
- B- Material for speculation.
- C- Entertainment.
- D- It is not useful for anything.

This question was trying to find out in which aspects myths are useful material in present day Omani minds. Although 19% of respondents emphasized the importance of myths as a historical view, consistent with some modern studies in particular in the Arab World, the great majority (66%) considered them as material for speculation. Such a view, indeed, reflects how respondents were aware of the intellectual dimension of myths, the dimension that provides theatre with essential questions and plots. However, some people (12%) considered myths as purely material for entertainment, and even fewer (3%) considered them not useful for anything.

The sixth question was: Where can you find myth in modern life?

The four options were:

- A- Grandmother's fairy tales.
- B- In heritage books.
- C- In ancient monuments.
- D- In all the mentioned resources.

There are, in Oman, many traditional sources of myths that still exist in present day. Through this question, we tried to explore which of those sources is most important in people's consideration. 28% found grandmothers are the main sources of myths in the present day, while 17% mentioned heritage books. Only 2% trusted the ancient monuments as myth providers. However, 53% trusted all the mentioned sources. This opinion suggests the importance for researchers on Omani mythology of returning to those sources. On the other hand it is important to record all oral myths told by "Grandmothers" on paper or cassette tape to preserve them. Nobody can guarantee that the grandmothers of the next generation will be able to tell the same myths. Very few

myths are recorded in Oman by individual effort, and much more needs to be done in this respect.

The seventh question was: Is there what can be called a modern myth?

The four options were:

- A- No, all myths are ancient.
- B- Yes, there are modern myths.
- C- The modern myths are re-creations of ancient myths.
- D- I do not know.

Some people are of the opinion that the era of myths is finished, others think that the ancient myths still exist in modern life but have taken new forms, a third group believe that there are new myths approaching human life every day. This question attempted to explore the opinion of the selected group on the existence of modern myths. 12% insisted that all myths are ancient, while 43% expressed their opinion that there are what can be called modern myths. 33% considered that modern myths are nothing more than the ancient myths in new forms. 12% expressed their confusion by choosing the fourth option, which says, "I do not know". The conclusion is that a majority of respondents were of the opinion that myths still exist in modern life, in either traditional or new forms.

The eighth question was: what does a modern myth look like?

The four options were:

- A- It is an unnatural event.
- B- Scientific imagination.
- C- Reading the future.
- D- There is no modern myth.

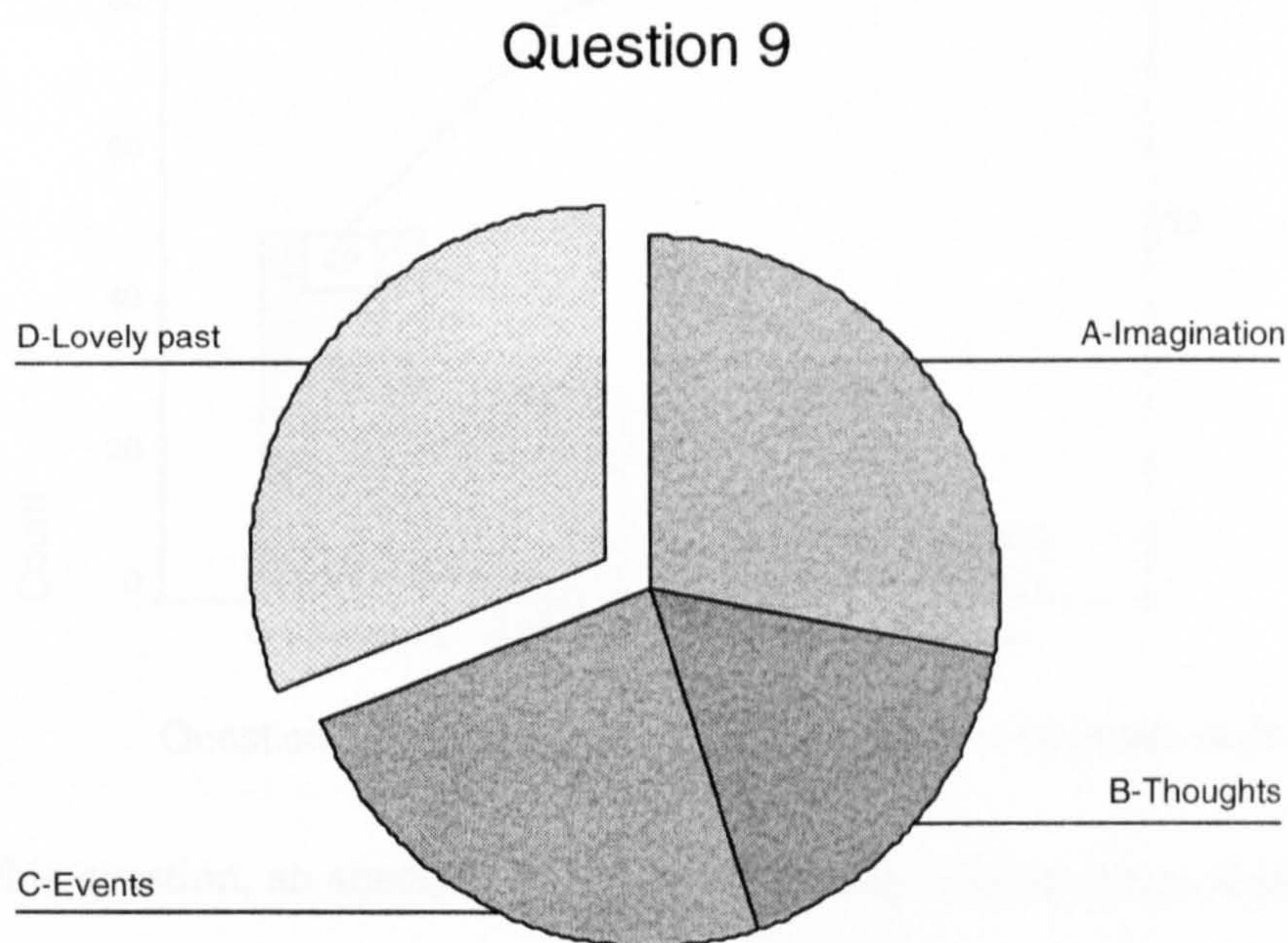
On the assumption that there are modern myths, what do those myths look like? What are their topics? This question was put to explore the opinion of respondents on the nature of modern myths. 19% were of the opinion that modern myths should contain unnatural events, while 33% confined the modern myths to scientific imagination and

23% confined them to predicting the future. However, all these three features were present in the ancient myths and they seem accepted in the modern life or theatre. On the other hand, 25% chose the fourth option, which says, "There is no modern myth"

The ninth question was: What do you like about myth?

The four options were:

- A- Unlimited imagination.
- B- Overlapping thoughts.
- C- Amusing events.
- D- Aspects of a lovely past.

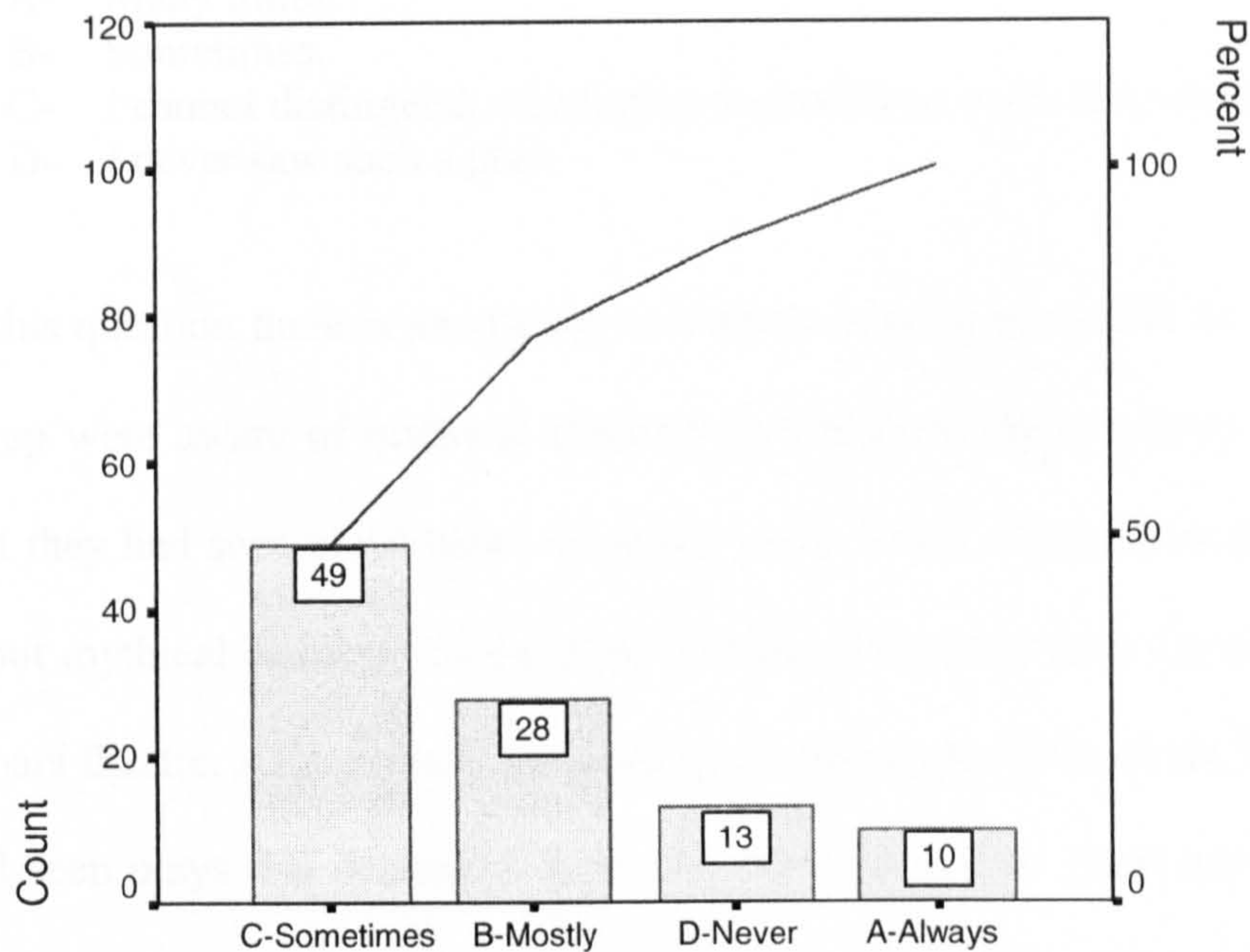


This question was put to explore what qualities in myth draw people's (respondents) attention. The responses were divided relatively between the four options; the first option received 28%, the second 17%, the third 24% and the fourth 31%. This result illustrates the importance of imagination, thoughts, event and aspects of the past in myth, and how people according to their point of view prefer different elements of myth. It is appropriate to mention here that theatre, in its dealing with myths, widely utilizes those elements. Many examples were cited in this thesis, in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

The tenth question was: Is the theatre a suitable place to deal with myth?

The four options were:

- A- Always.
- B- Most of the time.
- C- Sometimes.
- D- Never.



Question 10: Is the theatre a suitable place to deal with myth?

In this question, an attempt was made to find out to what extent theatre was linked with myth in people's minds. The shocking result was that only 10% believed that theatre is always a suitable place to deal with myth. 28% found it suitable most of the time, while a relatively large percentage (49%) found it suitable sometimes. 13% were of the opinion that the theatre is absolutely not the proper place to deal with myth. This result shows that although people can recognize some links between myth and theatre, they are not really sure about how close those links are. In the current writer's opinion, there are two reasons for that. The first is that people do not yet trust theatre to provide them with new valuable readings or explanations for myths. The second is that theatre was introduced to Oman only recently, in modern European forms, without a proper

historical background. However, such incomplete views increase the responsibility of scholars to establish the missing link

The eleventh question was: Can you remember how many times you have seen plays that depended on myth in the theatre?

The four options were:

- A- Many times.
- B- Sometimes.
- C- I cannot distinguish which play depended on myth and which not.
- D- I never saw such a play.

In this question there is an attempt to explore to what extent the people in the selected group were aware of mythical elements in theatrical performances. Only 4% asserted that they had seen plays based on myths many times. This means they were very sure about mythical elements in the plays and that those elements repeatedly appear in the Omani theatre. As expected, the majority of the people, 55%, stated that sometimes they had seen plays that depended on myths. 14% were very frank and admitted that they could not distinguish plays which depended on myths from others, which did not. Those 14% plus 27%, who said that they had never seen plays depending on myths emphasize, the importance of studies in mythology and theatre in Oman.

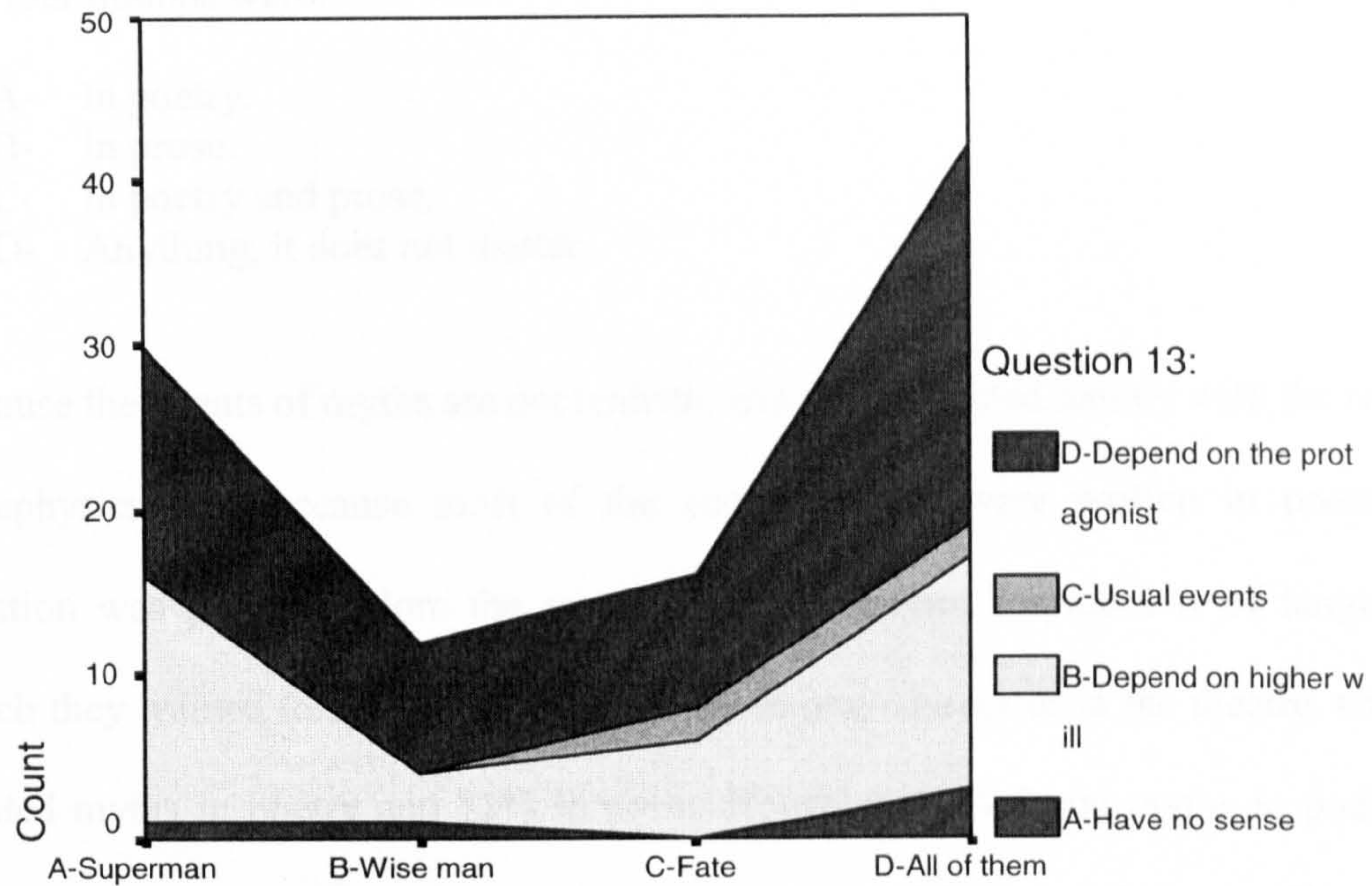
The twelfth question was: Who is the protagonist of myth?

The four options were:

- A- The superman.
- B- The wise man.
- C- Fate.
- D- All of them.

In this question we come another step closer to the theatre. The protagonist is another shared feature between myth and theatre. The question attempts to explore to what extent the features of the ancient protagonist are still applied in modern society in the perception of the selected group. 30% had a superman image of the mythical

protagonist, while 12% expected him to be wise. 16% expressed their thought that fate behind the scenes is the real protagonist. However, 42% were of the opinion that all these sorts of protagonist are still applied in myth and, presumably, in the theatre as well. Examples of such protagonists were given in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis.



Question 12: Who is the protagonist of myth?

The thirteenth question was: How would you describe the events of myth?

The four options were:

- A- Events have no sense.
- B- Events depend on the will of a higher power.
- C- Usual events.
- D- Events depend on the protagonist's attitude.

People's opinions regarding this question suggest indirectly their expectations from employing myths in the theatre. One can assert that such expectations, if carefully studied, could enrich theatre with various intellectual and visual images. Only 5% of respondents were of the opinion that myths contain events that have no sense. 38% asserted the metaphysical part of myths by describing their events as events that depend on the will of a higher power. Only 4% saw the events of myths as usual ones. The majority (53%) associated the events with the protagonist's attitude. The result, in

general, again emphasizes the respondents' awareness of the really important features in myth, such as the metaphysical dimension and the role of the protagonist. These features are also significant in the theatre.

The fourteenth question was: How do you like to see myth on the stage?

The four options were:

- A- In poetry.
- B- In prose.
- C- In poetry and prose.
- D- Anything, it does not matter.

Because the events of myths are not realistic and are connected mainly with the realm of metaphysics, and because most of the ancient myths were written in poetry, this question was put to explore the respondents' preference for the sort of language in which they wanted to receive myths, whether in oral sources or in the theatre. Only 5% wanted myths in poetry and 12% in prose. However, 36% found myths in poetry and prose acceptable, while 47% thought that the style of language had no effect on the essential elements of myths.

As a conclusion, the selected group in the questionnaire emphasized that myth occupied a great deal of Omani attention in the past and has a considerably similar role in particular issues in the present day. They, in general, were prepared to accept some slight modification in them, but not a major one. Some communities in Oman still have great respect for certain myths and treat them as fact or holy materials and do not accept any sort of modification to them. Myths in Oman are still mainly oral sources, with few exceptions, and this makes apparent the need for collecting and categorizing Omani myths before submitting them to further studies. People of Oman, especially those who are working in the theatre or have direct contact with it, are aware of most important features in myths, such as the intellectual, metaphysical, historical and aesthetic dimensions, and recognize some important shared elements between myths and theatre,

such as events and protagonists. However, the importance of employing myths in theatre is not clear enough in Omanis' minds. This, as well the religious dimension and rituals in myths, are areas which need to be studied intensively.

Appendix 2: The Story of Malik Bin Fahm

Malik Bin Fahm's journey to Oman was full of exciting emotional situations. It was said that when he was half-way there, his camels were longing for their grazing lands, so he chanted to them some verses of poetry urging them to go on, as there was no way of going back. Because of his big convoy of thousands of warriors, the Arab tribes he passed did nothing but wish him a peaceful and successful journey. Before he entered Oman, Malik was told that the country was occupied by Persians under the leadership of Al-Marzaban, a representative of Dara Bin Dara Bin Belien, King of Persia. Malik mobilized his companions and his army, who it was said, were close to six thousand men. Malik marched to the Qalhat area on the coast of Oman, where he left his servants, children, women and supplies. He then went with his army to a place in the desert, where he set up camp and sent for the Persian representative, asking permission to settle down in Oman. He also asked to be given land and to be granted access to water and grazing. The Persians consulted each other and then decided to refuse Malik's request. When he received the reply, Malik repeated his request, stressing that he had to settle down in Omani lands, or else war would be the only alternative. The Persians again refused to allow Malik to coexist with them and decided to resist him. Malik decided to fight the Persians. It was said that it was an appalling scene when Al-Marzaban marched with his men out of Sohar. His troops numbered 30,000 to 40,000, with gigantic elephants pushing in front. Malik was determined to fight the massive force with his six thousand men. The two parties descended on the Salhoot desert and remained there all night without attempting to start the battle. At night, Malik kept mobilizing his men, urging them to show courage, self-confidence and patience. He entrusted his son Hana'at with the right wing of the army and assigned his other son Fraheed the leadership of the left wing. Malik himself led the centre. Al-Marzaban also prepared his

men. In his description, Al-Salimi said that Malik rode a white horse and wore two hauberks, a red cap, an iron helmet, and put on a yellow turban. His two sons and all the knights of the Al-Azd rode on, wearing similar attire.

Early next morning, the bloody encounter began. Wearing their hauberks, showing only their eyes, carrying their shields, and brandishing their shining swords, the Al-Azd warriors marched out. Al-Marzaban advanced heavily with his massive troops, the gigantic creatures always leading. Malik called out for his men to stab the elephants. The Al-Azd fighters obeyed the call, ferociously stabbing the elephants, which fled clumsily away, trampling many Persians to death. Malik and his warriors suddenly broke into the heart of the Persian army. They had a quick and surprising success over the enemies. Al-Marzaban shouted at his men, ordering them to fight, and the two parties engaged in a prolonged and bloody battle. They fought and struggled with each other, charging once, falling back once. Only the shrill clash of the steel could be heard all day. The bloodshed continued until the darkness of the night making it impossible to see. Many Persians were killed that day.

On the morning of the third day, the two armies left their camps and again marched towards each other. They stopped for a while, holding aloft their war flags. Four of the strongest and bravest Persian warriors, of whom one was considered worth the strength of a thousand men, approached and challenged Malik. They asked him to agree to meet them in single combat. Malik accepted the challenge and immediately one of the men rode forward. He charged several times at Malik and each time the Al-Azd hero tackled the man. It took Malik one hour to get a chance to stab the Persian knight. He stabbed him so violently that the man fell off his horse. Then he stood over the man and finished him off. The second Persian knight followed. He hit Malik very hard on the head, Malik hardly moved. Then he charged at the man and split his head with his sword. The third man received a quick, strong blow on the neck that sent him dead to the ground. The

fourth Persian knight, seeing what had happened to his fellow men, feared the encounter with Malik and retreated. Then, Al- Marzaban, filled with anger and shame, charged at Malik like a lion, Malik dodged him like a fox and swiftly pierced Al-Marzaban's body with his sword, killing him at once. The Persians could hardly believe what they saw.

After that, the Al-Azd warriors attacked relentlessly, and the Persians started to withdraw in their thousands, defeated. They sent for Malik, requesting mercy on their souls. They requested him to grant them truce or reconciliation, and asked to be given one year to be able to collect their families and leave Oman.

However, King Dara, when he learned of the defeat of his army in Oman, sent more troops to fight, but the Al-Azd always came out triumphant. In spite of their power and might, the Persians finally had to leave Oman, Commanders and soldiers left quickly in the darkness of a summer's night, crossing the sea back to safety at home in Persia. Later on, many Al-Azd kings and families emigrated from Yemen to settle in Oman. The greatest of those kings was Malik Bin Zuhar, who was no less than Malik Bin Fahm in his glory and courage. This made Malik Bin Fahm cautious of rivalry between them. So, he did his best to build a good relationship with him by marrying his daughter and accepting his condition that her son, the younger son of Malik Bin Fahm, would be king of Oman after him.

Hence, Malik Bin Fahm Al-Azdi became the paramount ruler of Oman for seventy years without any rival daring to challenge him. He lived for 120 years. His death occurred suddenly and surprisingly, caused by one of his dearest and nearest. It was by mistake that his son Selima killed him. Malik used to grant special love and attention to his youngest son, Selima. This aroused jealousy and hatred in Selima's other brothers. So, they banded in a conspiracy against him. Malik had distributed the duties and responsibilities of guarding the camp among his men and his sons, lest there might be any unexpected assault. His son Selima was entrusted to keep vigil on the camp on a

specific night each week. Selima had been an excellent bow-and-arrow marksman since his childhood and he was a responsible person. However, the brothers of Selima told their father that Selima always fell asleep when it was his duty to guard the camp and that he often neglected his post. When the accusation was repeated several times, Malik became suspicious and decided to check. He sneaked out of his palace in disguise one night and approached Selima, who sensed the presence of a stranger. Selima was startled and he immediately aimed his arrow and released it. At the same moment, his father shouted, "Oh son, do not shoot, I am your father." However, it was too late. Selima replied saying, "The arrow has met its target", and this became a saying for many generations afterwards up to the present day. The arrow pierced the heart of Malik and killed him (Al-Salimi 2000, 19-37).

Appendix 3: The Story of Selima

Selima, after killing his father Malik Bin Fahm, feared his brothers' vengeance, so he escaped over the sea to Persia, to a place called Jashik where he married and had a son. Later on, he moved to another Persian region called Karman. The King at Karman in that time was the son of Dara, son of Dara the first son of Bahmen. He was oppressive and tyrannical, to the extent that he imposed on his people odd rules, such as one which stipulated that any bride in the country should sleep with him before going to her bridegroom, otherwise he would kill her husband. Although the people of Karman hated their king, nobody could do anything to him, because he lived in an impregnable fort and surrounded himself with numerous guards. Selima, as soon as he arrived in the country, introduced himself as the son of a king to some noble families, who received him hospitably and trusted him enough to tell him every thing about their king. Selima, after thinking for a short time, told the people that he had a plan to rid them of their bad king, if they would accept his condition that he and his successors would be kings of Karman and take all their harvests and taxes. In addition, he was to choose his men from the Arabs and marry a woman from one of the noblest families in Karman. The people of Karman hesitated for a while, but in the end, when they found no alternative, they accepted his conditions. Selima, the handsome young man, asked the people of Karman to announce his marriage for a specific day. According to the rule, he had to send his bride to sleep with the king before the mentioned day, but instead he secretly put on makeup and masqueraded in a bridal dress, hiding in its folds a sharp knife. He then asked the people to carry him to the king as a bride. As soon as he was alone with the king, he pulled out the knife and stabbed the king to death. He then put on the king's hauberk and cowl and carried his sword. The next morning he left the king's room towards the gates of the fort. On his way, he confronted the king's guards, fought them

and killed most of them, which enabled him to open the gates where his people were waiting. He stood up on a high place facing them, raising the bloody sword in one of his hands and threw the body of the king towards them with the other one. The people of Karman were encouraged and entered the fort, where they proclaimed Selima as the new king of Karman. Al-Salimi continues that Selima ruled the country for a while without any problems, until some Persian nobles became unwilling to remain under an Arab ruler. Therefore, Selima sent to his brother Hana'ah, the king of Oman, asking him for help. Hana'ah sent him 3000 horsemen from the best of Al-Azd's heroes, with their weapons. This assistance enabled Selima to control the country again and he remained king of Karman until he died, leaving 10 sons who were involved in terrible conflict with each other and with local dignitaries, which brought their kingdom to ruin (Al-Salimi 2000, 38-43).

Appendix 4: The Story of the Daughter of the Radish Seller

“The Daughter of the Radish Seller” is about the beautiful daughter of a radish seller whose mother dies and whose father marries a woman who is a witch widow and has an ugly daughter from her previous marriage. When the prince of the city wants to marry, he designs a specific dress and decides to marry the girl whom the dress fits. His assistants ask the girls of the city to wear it, one after another. The daughter of the radish seller is the lucky girl whom the dress fits. When the prince sees her beauty, he falls in love with her. While the poor daughter of the radish seller is enjoying total happiness, her stepmother is extremely angry and jealous because the prince did not choose her daughter as she had planned. On the wedding night, the stepmother bewitches the daughter of the radish seller by inserting a pin in her head under the hair and transforming her to a bird in order to put her own daughter in her place. The prince, surprised to find that the girl he has married is not the one he had chosen, becomes very angry and orders her father, the radish seller, to be buried alive under the doorstep of his room, believing that he was the person who concocted the conspiracy. The gardener on the prince’s farm is astonished by a bird that starts to come early morning everyday and sing near the well, asking about the radish seller. When the gardener tells the bird that the radish seller is buried alive, the bird starts crying and with its cry, the sky starts raining. Then the bird continues singing asking about the prince. When the gardener tells the bird that the prince is very sad and has abandoned his present bride because he misses and thinks of his original bride, the bird starts laughing and with its laugh, the sky starts to rain pearls. This happens repeatedly for many days until one day the gardener decides to catch the bird to find out what is behind it. When the gardener catches the bird, he finds a pin in its head. The gardener removes the pin and as soon as he does, the bird transforms into a beautiful young girl. The daughter of the radish seller

tells the gardener her story. Then the gardener takes her to the prince, who is very happy to find his beloved bride. Then the prince orders his guards to release the radish seller and put the witch stepmother in his place, buried alive under his doorstep. The prince and his wife, then, live in peace and happiness (Al-Busaedi 2000).

Appendix 5: The Story of the Human Dog

The second Cinderella story is called “The Human Dog”. It concerns a girl whose mother dies, leaving her with her father, who marries another woman. The stepmother is a cruel woman. She tortures the girl and makes her work beyond her capacity. She never has mercy on the girl, nor does she listen to the poor girl’s complaints. The father, also, ignores his daughter's grievances and does not take any action against his wife, until he dies, leaving the girl to face her destiny alone. The stepmother becomes increasingly cruel to the girl and even appoints a muscular manservant to make the child’s life a misery. The girl’s only friend and consolation in life is a dog that speaks human language, but only to its owner.

One day the dog sneaks into the house and hears the stepmother and the servant making a plan to get rid of the girl. The dog runs out of the house to tell the girl, but the servant catches sight of it and starts chasing it. The dog finds the girl and tells her of the plot and they prepare to run away. Soon the dog realises that the girl will not be able to escape if she keeps the same speed and that the servant will surely catch up with her and kill her. The dog tells the girl that he is an old dog, tired of life, and suggests that the girl should kill him, and wear his skin so that the servant will think the dog became hungry and ate the girl. At first, the girl rejects the idea, but when the dog explains that the only alternative will be her death, she agrees and does as the dog has suggested. On his arrival, the servant is relieved to see only the dog, with some blood and flesh, thinking that it had become hungry and eaten the girl. The servant returns and tells the stepmother, who is quite satisfied, while the homeless girl wanders on the moors.

The king of that region has two sons. The elder one is very conceited and tyrannical with people and animals, whereas the youngest son is kind and gentle. The young son has a she-camel that starts, for no obvious reason, to look quite unhealthy. Because the

young prince likes his she-camel very much, he determines to discover the camel's disease. He notes that the illness of the she-camel coincided with the arrival of a homeless dog. One day, the prince follows the group of camels, including his own, in order to discover what is making his camel so weak. As the group of camels starts to roam in the meadows and graze, his camel remains alone. The prince is surprised and wonders why. He continues observing the camel secretly. He sees a dog standing beside it. Suddenly, the dog takes off its skin and a beautiful young girl emerges. The prince is stunned to see such a beautiful human being in such an unexpected place. He waits until the girl gets inside the skin again. The prince keeps following his camel every day in order to watch the girl emerge from the dog skin without interrupting her in any way. As the days pass, the prince finds himself deeply in love with the *dog/girl*. Therefore, one day he decides to take the dog with him to the palace and to ask his father's permission to marry it. The king becomes very angry at such a request, and charges his young son with madness, as does the elder prince. The young prince insists on his demand and imprisons himself in his room without eating and drinking until he becomes very weak. His mother worries about him. She and the king's advisors meet the king and convince him to let his young son marry the dog, saying that he will learn the error of his ways practically. The king eventually agrees. A great wedding party is prepared, and the young prince carries home his bride/dog, to the wonder and astonished looks of the people of the region. When the young prince enters the room alone with his bride/dog, all the royal family members and people of the region remain waiting outside expecting some kind of surprise. Later on, people hear the dog bark at the prince and some guards hurry to rescue him, but the king stops them, asking them to leave the prince to face his choice. Inside the room, when the bride/dog starts to bark at him, the prince smiles and tells her that he knows her secret, asking her to take off the dog skin. The girl obeys and comes out. Next day, the royal family and the people are

surprised that the dog has been transformed into a beautiful girl. The elder prince becomes jealous and insists that his father let him, too, marry a dog. His father gives him permission. So, he chooses one of the biggest dogs, thinking that it will transform into a girl more beautiful than the one of his brother. After the wedding party, when the elder prince is alone with the dog, he draws close to the dog and asks it to take off his dog skin. The dog starts to bark at him. The elder prince, when he finds the dog does not obey his order, tries to remove dog's skin with his hands. The dog is angry, barks at him loudly and eventually attacks him. The royal family and people outside hear the dog's bark and noise inside the room but nobody does anything, as they are convinced everything will turn out well. Next day, when they go to visit the elder prince, they find him stained with blood and his body full of wounds (Al-Shuaili 1995).

Appendix 6: The Story of Ajab

The story of Ajab tells about a small girl called Ajab, who lives peacefully and happily in the care and attention of her father and mother in the suburbs of a town. Like most children of her age, Ajab goes to the Master every morning to learn reading and writing with other children. This was a traditional way of education in which the teacher held sessions in his house or in the courtyard beside his house, where he taught the children the Holy Quran, reading and sometimes writing. One day Ajab leaves home early to go to “school”/ the Master’s house. As soon as she reaches the area of study, she realises that she is the only person there, as the other pupils have not yet arrived. Ajab sneaks into the house to the room where the teacher stays. When she pulls aside the curtain to say hello to her Master, she sees a sight that sends shudders through her body and makes her hair stand on end. She sees that her Master is a ferocious cannibal, devouring the corpse of one of her classmates. Ajab is petrified. She clumsily starts walking out of the house wishing to run away as fast as her feet can carry her. Just before she leaves, the Master catches a glimpse of her. Ajab hurries to her house. Her parents are surprised to see her come back, but she is too terrified to tell them the truth. She tells them that she has returned in order to go to school with other girls, friends of hers, and they believe her.

When Ajab and the other pupils go to attend the Master’s lessons, they find the Master is waiting for them. They greet him and he replies very calmly. Then he starts to teach them as usual. When the lessons are over, the Master allows all the pupils to leave, except Ajab, whom he asks to wait for a while. Although Ajab is afraid, she says nothing. As soon as the others have left and Ajab remains alone, the Master comes close to her and asks, "What did you see of your Master, Ajab?" The frightened girl replies

that she saw nothing but good sense and good manners³⁶. Then the Master allows Ajab to leave. On her return home, she finds that her mother has died. On the next day, the Master asks her the same question and she gives him the same answer. When she returns home, she finds her father has died, and so on, every day when Ajab returns home, she finds one of her family members or relatives has died. She loses her grandfathers, uncles and aunts until one day she remains alone in the world.

Ajab thinks that her life has no significance, so she decides to end it. At that moment, she sees the gushing floods or rainwater forming a rapid stream. Ajab thinks quickly. She makes a wooden box and puts it in the course of the stream. She gets inside the box and closes it. Soon, the box floats on the water and the floods carry it downstream. The box passes before the palace of the Sultan, who happens to be watching the floods from his balcony. Suddenly one of the servants shouts, "Oh, look your majesty, a strange-looking box is being carried by the stream". The Sultan immediately orders that the box be collected and brought before him. The box is brought and opened in the Sultan's presence. The Sultan is surprised to find a beautiful little girl inside it. The servants rush to help the girl and she stands up. They ask her name and she answers that it is Ajab. They try to find out more about her, but Ajab refuses to tell them anything more. Then the Sultan realises that perhaps she is shy of the people around him. Therefore, he orders them all to leave. When Ajab is alone with the Sultan she wants to tell him her whole story, but fear of the cannibal Master prevents her. She is content with telling him that her story is a sad one and that she does not wish to talk about it because she would feel even more miserable. The Sultan comforts Ajab and does not force her to tell what she does not want to reveal. He asks if she has any relatives who could bring her up, and she answers that she has no one left in the world. The Sultan's heart softens to the girl

³⁶ This is a personal interpretation of the Arabic version of the statement. In the current writer's opinion, the word 'sense' refers to righteous acts.

and he decides to adopt her and bring her up with his only son. Ajab grows up into a lovely young girl and the prince becomes very much attached to her. The Sultan endows Ajab with his paternal love. He also asks the young prince to marry her and the latter agrees. The wedding is a grand one. Day by day life passes wonderfully for Ajab, like a dream. A year after her marriage, Ajab gives birth to a boy who keeps her busy most of the time. She looks after her son well and he grows up into a handsome two-year old child.

Ajab almost forgets everything about the magician Master. One day Ajab goes into the bathroom with her child to wash him. Suddenly the magician cannibal Master appears to her and asks her the same question “What did you see of your Master?” She repeats the same answer; “I saw nothing but good sense and good manners”. As soon as she completes the sentence, the child dies in her hands. Ajab cries in horror, and becomes very sad, but she accepts her fate in life. After some time, another child is born to Ajab. When he is two years old, the magician cannibal Master appears to Ajab again in the bathroom, and asks her the same question. When he receives the same answer, Ajab loses her second child. The sad mother becomes sadder, but she cannot tell her husband the truth because she is afraid.

At first, the prince, who becomes Sultan after his father’s death, comforts his wife and shows patience and endurance. However, women from royal family are envious of Ajab for the special attention she receives from the new Sultan and the important place she occupies in the palace. They form a conspiracy against her. They make the Sultan believe that she is a witch and that she kills her own children when she finds herself alone with them in the bathroom. Therefore, the Sultan becomes very angry and gives the order that Ajab be thrown into a dark, dirty room and locked up to live the rest of her life alone with cockroaches and reptiles. Ajab dwells in her dungeon for many years, brooding and repenting her bad luck.

One day, the Sultan decides to travel to India. He gathers all the women of his palace and his relatives and asked them one after the other what she wants him to bring to her when he comes back from abroad. Then the Sultan remembers that he has a wife in the dark room. His heart softens to Ajab, so he sends one of the servants to ask her what she wants him to bring her from India. The servant returns to tell the Sultan that his wife wants a herb, locally known as "Sabra"³⁷. The Sultan wonders why she asks for such a cheap thing, which already exists in the country. However, when he returns from his journey, he brings the "Sabra" with him and sends it with a servant to his wife. At the same time, the Sultan follows the servant and enters the place where his wife is imprisoned. He hides himself where his wife cannot see him but he can see her. When she receives the "Sabra", Ajab starts to talk to it, recalling her miseries. Every time Ajab tells the "Sabra" part of her tragedy, the "Sabra" inflates, as if it is responding to her talk. Ajab keep asking the "Sabra" to be patient, "Oh Sabra be as patient as myself, I saw my Master devour my classmate, and I was patient". The "Sabra" inflates more. "I saw my cannibal Master cause the death of my mother and all the other members of my family, and I showed nothing, but patience". The "Sabra" inflates more and more. "Be patient, Sabra." continues Ajab "I saw my teacher cause the death of my dear young boy, and I showed nothing but patience". The "Sabra" keeps inflating, unable to bear what it is hearing. The prince listens to all of this. "Oh, have patience, Sabra, I saw my Master cause the death of my second boy, and here I am imprisoned in this dark, dirty room for no fault of mine." At this point, the "Sabra" cannot bear any more; it explodes in horror. Then Ajab starts shouting, "Oh, Sabra. Why you do not bear what you hear? Your name is derived from patience. Then how do you expect me, a frail, miserable, lonely human, made of flesh and blood and feelings, to bear all this misfortune?" The

³⁷ 'Sabra' is a spice vendor's product. It is simple and very cheap. What is more important about the choice of this material is the connotation of the word "Sabra" from which the name of the product is derived (Patience).

Sultan, who is still listening, learns all about Ajab, her bad luck in life, and understands the injustice he has done to her.

As soon as he returns to his palace, the Sultan orders that Ajab be given her rightful place in the palace. He restores all the love and attention of which he once deprived his wife. After some time, the happy couple have a third son. The child grows up to be a lovely three-year old boy. One day, Ajab takes him to the bathroom to give him a bath. The Sultan sneaks into the bathroom to see what might happen. Ajab is quite afraid. As soon as she starts washing the child, the Master suddenly appears and asked Ajab the same old question, "What did you see of your Master, Ajab?" Before the woman can answer, the Sultan jumps forward with his sword, saying, "This is what she saw, you wicked cannibal", and stabs him deep in the heart. The magician cannibal falls down dead. Ajab, finally, continues her life happily with her husband and child. The story ends at this point (Al-Busaedi 1996).

Appendix 7: The story of Zaid Bin Anan

Zaid Bin Anan is a good-tempered and high-minded young man. He is in love with his beautiful cousin Al-Khahlah. When Zaid goes to his uncle to ask him to marry Al-Khahlah, his uncle agrees, but on the impossible condition that he gives her a case full of gold and an anklet. Fathers in those days used to ask for unreasonable dowries for their daughters as a matter of pride. Because Zaid does not have this dowry, he leaves his home and travels through a barren region aiming to visit some other countries where he might find the dowry, and swears he will never return without it. Near sunset, in a remote place, Zaid sees a horseman coming towards him. When the veiled horseman blocks his path, Zaid asks him to move out of the way. The horseman unveils his face and says, "I am Al-Khahlah your cousin, I came to be with you and help you in your task". Zaid refused her aid, telling her that it is his own responsibility and he will do it alone. Zaid orders Al-Khahlah to go back. Al-Khahlah tries to join him three times but Zaid every time insists on her going back.

Zaid travels through wildernesses, wasteland and mountains. Near to a valley, Zaid sees a woman hanging by her hair. He goes up to her, takes her down and asks about her plight. She tells him that she was travelling with her son when some thieves attacked her, stole her son and hung her by her hair. Zaid then chases the thieves until he catches up with them in a valley. According to the tradition of those days, Zaid announces to the thieves that he has come to return the son to his mother. Then he fights them one by one until he defeats them all. Zaid takes the son and returns him to his mother, who is very happy. When Zaid is about to continue his journey, the woman asks him about his goal and Zaid tell her his entire story. The woman tell Zaid that she will give him the dowry for his cousin as a reward for his nobility, but this will only happen if he will go with her to her kingdom on the seventh level of the earth and accept her hospitality for three

nights. When she sees the astonishment in his eyes, she explains that she is a woman from the jinn. The son of the woman leads the horse. Zaid and his mother sit behind him on a very long journey to the jinn kingdom, where Zaid receives hospitality before he is sent back home with a case full of gold and an amazing anklet. Mid-way on his journey, he meets a horseman who again turns out to be his cousin. He tells her about the good news that he has brought her dowry and both of them continue the journey home. On their way, they meet the prophet Mohammad, who invites them to accept Islam. They accept his invitation and remain with him for a while in order to learn Islam's principles.

Later on, they return to their home. Before they enter, the time of prayer according to their new religion, Islam, arrives, so they stop and pray. While they are praying, some of their relatives see them and hurry to their families, especially Zaid's uncle who is the ruler of the country, to inform them/him that their son/nephew and daughter have abandoned their original beliefs and adopted a new religion in which they stand, sit and touch the ground with their heads. The uncle of Zaid and Al-Khahlah's father orders the great warriors in the tribe to bring him Zaid and Al-Khahlah's heads. Thirty warriors volunteer to fulfil the task. They meet Zaid and fight him one by one. Zaid kills them all except one, whom he sends to his uncle to inform him that all his warriors have been killed and asks if he has any more to send. His uncle gathers all the fighters of the city and goes to face his nephew. In a bloody battle, Zaid kills his uncle and most of his warriors. The survivors surrender to Zaid and all of them become Muslims. Thus, Zaid enters the city and goes directly to the main fort, where he announces himself as a religious Imam who will teach the people the principles of Islam, as well as rule the country. Then Zaid announces his marriage to his cousin Al-Khahlah. Three days after their marriage, Zaid goes to visit the prophet Mohammad. While Al-Khahlah is saying

farewell to him, her anklet collides with his camel and is damaged. Zaid takes it with him in order to repair it.

Seber, Satan's magician who lives forty years beyond the world and is one of the jinn's leaders from the Jews, hears about Al-Khahlah's anklet. So, he stands up in front of Zaid blocking his road by establishing a whole city in the desert that contains many jewellers' shops and sets himself in the biggest one. Zaid enters the city and goes directly to Seber's shop, showing him the anklet and asking him to repair it. Seber takes the anklet and tells Zaid to come the next day. As soon as Seber is alone, he takes the anklet, melts it and reshapes it, imprisoning in it thousands of devils, so that they can steal Al-Khahlah and make her fly with them. One of the devils escapes from the anklet and goes three times to Al-Khahlah, telling her what has happened to her anklet and warning her against wearing it. Next day, Zaid takes the anklet from Seber and returns home, where he meets his wife and gives her the anklet, but she refuses to wear it. Zaid becomes angry with his wife and insists on her wearing the anklet, so she obeys him and wears it. As soon as she does so, she disappears, leaving Zaid in great astonishment. Zaid gets onto his camel and goes to seek his wife. He passes through many lands and countries without finding any trace of her. After a few days, when he is almost asleep on his camel, he hears a voice telling him that nobody can help him, except a woman called Sa'ada, and there is only one way to find her, and that is to walk and say repeatedly, 'Oh Sa'ada help me'. Zaid does so until he meets a black woman. He asks her whether she knows Sa'ada and can lead him to meet her. The woman answers that she is the servant of Sa'ada, but she will take him to Sa'ada only if he makes love to her. Zaid refuses her condition, saying that he will not betray his wife with any woman. The servant leaves him alone and goes to her mistress's house. In the house, she finds Sa'ada waiting for her. As soon as she meets her, Sa'ada asks her about the man she has met and blames her for her dishonest behaviour and for not bringing him to the house.

She makes her go back and return bringing Zaid with her. When Zaid meets Sa'ada, he tells her all that has happened to him. Sa'ada tells Zaid that Seber, who kidnapped his wife, is a very bad devil and that he has taken her to a very far-off place that Zaid could never reach, even if he kept walking for forty years, but she will help him to reclaim his wife. She advises him not to fight the devil face to face, but to strike him while he is inattentive. Then she gives him a stick, telling him to put it in front of his camel so that it will step over it. As soon as Zaid crosses the stick, he finds himself approaching the palace of the devil Seber. As he get closer, he hears his wife crying, shouting and calling her husband for help to free her from the irons in which Seber had imprisoned her. Zaid enters the palace and approaches Seber from behind until he draws very close to him. Then he hits Seber with his sword, cutting him in two. Zaid frees his wife and takes her on his camel, again putting the stick in front of it. As the camel crosses the stick, Zaid and his wife find themselves face to face with Sa'ada, who hosts them for three nights before letting them go. Sa'ada draws a line on the ground and asks Zaid and his wife to cross it with their camel. As Zaid and his wife cross the line, they find themselves in their homeland, where they continue their lives in peace and happiness (Al-Sa'di 2000)³⁸.

³⁸ According to my knowledge, this story is transcribed for the first time.