

**Critical Discourse within European Plays in the First Half of the  
Twentieth Century and the Manifestations of a Similar  
Phenomenon in Modern Egyptian Drama**

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## Abstract

This thesis closely examines the utilisation of dramatic characters' comments on matters of literary and theatrical criticism. This phenomenon shaped a trend in European theatre during the first half of the twentieth century, and Egyptian theatre in the second half of the century.

My main hypotheses are, firstly, that dramatic characters' comments on literary and theatrical matters of criticism respond to specific problems that challenge theatre practice. Thus, my reading of literary and theatrical criticism within the dramatic texts studied in my thesis focuses on this criticism's reformative function to rectify the crisis that faces theatre practice in general, rather than playwrights' individual motives, such as responding to their critics. Secondly, socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects shape historical circumstances, which influence the current state of the theatre industry. Therefore, although Egyptian plays are noticeably influenced by European metatheatre, Egyptian playwrights utilise these borrowed techniques to highlight specific problems of Egyptian theatre such as the corrupt administration of governmental theatre and censorship. Finally, while Egyptian plays exploit European metatheatrical techniques, Egyptian playwrights claimed their works as a revival of intrinsically anti-illusionist traditional forms of entertainment such as the shadow play and Karagöz. This claim reflected increasing calls for pure Egyptian theatre, as part of the anti-Western jingoistic discourse of the political regime of the 1950s.

In order to examine these assumptions, my theoretical approach draws from the fields of metatheatrical studies; literary and performance studies of parody and intertextuality; the history of European and Egyptian theatre; sociological, political and cultural studies; theories of modern criticism, and critical reviews.

My contribution to the field of metatheatrical studies is in highlighting the reformative function of literary and theatrical criticism, whether as a discourse or a metatheatrical device, within a group of European plays that belong to different movements of the avant-garde during the first half of the twentieth century. More significantly, my study investigates the same phenomenon in Egyptian plays that, since the 1980s, have gradually been marginalised as fringe theatre and neglected by academic studies.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	2
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	4
<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>Chapter One:</b> Literary and theatrical criticism-within-the-play: the history of a metatheatrical device and its function.....	15
<b>Chapter Two:</b> The cooperation between literary and theatrical criticism and metatheatrical techniques .....	76
<b>Chapter Three:</b> Topics of literary and theatrical criticism within European critical metadramas.....	122
<b>Chapter Four:</b> Socio-political and economic contexts of Egyptian theatre: the birth of critical metadrama .....	188
<b>Chapter Five:</b> Critical metadrama in Egypt since 1960s: reforming Egyptian theatre through European form .....	230
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	285
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	296

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## Introduction

By the turn of the Twentieth Century, a group of European playwrights had begun a trend of integrating literary and theatrical criticism within their plays, wherein dramatic characters' speeches included comments on different aesthetic and theatrical matters. Through the first half of the century, this phenomenon consistently manifested itself within dramatic texts such as the Irishman George Bernard Shaw's *Fanny's First Play: An Easy Play for a little Theatre* (1911), German dramatist Reinhard Sorge's *The Beggar: A Dramatic Mission* (1911), Russian playwright Leonid Andreyev's *Requiem* (1916), Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni's *Genius and Culture* (1916), German Expressionist Georg Kaiser's *The Protagonist* (1920), Frenchman Jean Giraudoux's *Paris Impromptu* (1937), and Swiss dramatist Max Frisch's *The Great Wall of China* (1947).

Moreover, I found dramatic characters' discussions on literary and theatrical matters within more than one of the plays of the Italian Luigi Pirandello, the Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca, and the Romanian-born French dramatist Eugene Ionesco. Pirandello exploits his dramatic characters in order to raise critical matters within *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), *Each in His Own Way* (1924), *Tonight We Improvise* (1929), and his unfinished play *The Mountain Giants* (1936). Both Lorca's *The Public* (1931) and *Play Without a Title* (1936) are entirely dedicated to characters' comments on theatre-related matters of criticism, which also occupies the bulk of the discourse in Ionesco's *Salutations* (1950), *Victims of Duty* (1952), and *Improvisation, or The Shepherds' Chameleon* (1955).

While I have read these Italian, French, German, Spanish, and Russian dramatic texts in their English translations, I extended my study of these plays through exploring a large number of English and Arabic studies of European theatre and history. These studies enabled me to elucidate my understanding of dramatic texts as well as to widen my perspective of the socio-political and cultural circumstances within which playwrights wrote their plays.

First readings of these plays suggest that they belong to varied generic classifications; for instance, *Fanny's First Play*, *Genius and Culture*, *Requiem*, *The Public*, and *Improvisation* are usually described as representations of the discussion play, Futurism, Symbolism, Surrealism, and the Theatre of the

Absurd, respectively. However, the inclusion of dramatic characters' discussions of theatre matters is a common feature of these texts. Moreover, these discussions usually occupy the bulk of each text's discourse.

With more elaborate reading, I gradually started to realise that the vast majority of these plays include one or more of the theatrical techniques of the play-within-the-play, parody, and intertextuality, which connects them under a rubric of so-called metatheatre, whose essence is theatre's reference to itself. In this respect, because these plays include comments on theatre-related matters, literary and theatrical criticism can be considered as self-referential verbal method, which, similar to the three techniques of play-within-a-play, parody and intertextuality, achieves the metatheatricality of these plays. In addition, I spotted a high degree of resemblance between the topics around which dramatic characters' comments revolve within this group of plays. This similarity led me to realise that these plays seem to address specific problems related to theatre practice. Such an observation led me to investigate the historical context in which they were written, including the state of European theatre at the turn of the twentieth century.

As most scholars of the avant-garde of the early decades of the twentieth century insist, the common feature of movements such as Futurism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and Dadaism is their contradiction of the late nineteenth-century certainties about truth and reality in general and the notion of art and its function in particular. This sceptical vision was highly influenced by revolutionary thoughts on psychology, philosophy, and science. Freud's notions of the unconscious mind and of dreams, which he initiated in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), and his interpretation of the processes of producing and receiving the works of art and literature had gained great popularity amongst European intellectuals and artists. Similarly, Nietzsche's notions of the 'superman' and 'the death of God' as well as other thoughts introduced in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871 –1886) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885) had a great appeal to writers and thinkers. In science, Einstein's theory of 'relativity', introduced in 1905 and improved in 1916, had a great impact on human vision of the world, specifically regarding the concepts of both time and place.

The spread of Marxist political thought, apparently encapsulated in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, was accompanied by increasing calls for the significant role of art, literature, and theatre in shaping and building utopian

societies. Such a social function challenged the formalist notion of art, which is summed up by the late nineteenth-century motto 'Art for Art's Sake', and which had shaped the theoretical writings of Russian Formalism since the first decade of the twentieth century. In the heart of all these contradictory thoughts, the theatre industry had to face many challenges during one of the most complicated transitional periods of theatre history.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the strict commitment to reality by Naturalism was competing with nineteenth-century forms of commercial theatre, namely melodrama and vaudeville. In addition, the emergence of silent cinema enabled the audience to watch a more precise 'slice of life' than any naturalistic play might offer. Later, talking films started to threaten the prosperity of commercial theatre, firstly, because films adopted the popular forms of melodrama and vaudeville. Secondly, due to economic aspects of production, the ticket of cinema was much cheaper than theatre, which tremendously attracted theatregoers to become spectators of increasingly improved films. Nothing evidences the fierce rivalry between films and plays more than the fact of turning theatres into cinemas.<sup>1</sup>

Simultaneously, the rise of theatre directing as a job with increasing authority over performances resulted in an increased highlighting of theatricality by the foregrounding of visual elements rather than the verbal language. This concentration on the visual reached its peak with the insistence on the marginality of dramatic texts in performance whose nonverbal languages are able to produce what the French theorist and director Antonin Artaud names the 'poetry for the senses'.<sup>2</sup> In their turn, many playwrights faced the crisis of theatre by adopting experimental, anti-Naturalistic approaches to representing the world, which is the kernel of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century from the Synthetic Theatre of Italian Futurism in the 1910s to Absurdist drama of the late 1940s.

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<sup>1</sup> For information about the conversion of theatres into cinemas during the early decades of the twentieth century on the two sides of the Atlantic, see Ligtelijn 48, Singer 168, and Filewod 138.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout my thesis, I examine the influence of Artaud's thoughts, as he expresses in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938), on successive directors and playwrights. Similarly, I refer to the Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold's highlighting of the significant role of the visual elements in performance within his group of articles *On the Theatre* (1913). At the same time, while the Austrian director Max Reinhardt insisted on creating spectacular scenery, the German theorist and director Erwin Piscator exploited visual elements to deliver the political message of his theatre in the 1920s.

One specific feature of playwrights' attempts to reform theatre in the first half of the twentieth century was the adopting of anti-illusionist techniques, namely the play-within-the-play, parody, and intertextuality. Because these techniques challenge dramatic illusionism, metadrama was considered by several scholars as a self-critique of theatre itself. Likewise, literary and theatrical criticism, which is as self-referential as these techniques, challenges Aristotelian illusionist drama. Moreover, literary and theatrical criticism includes verbal critique of, and comments on, theatre-related matters. In other words, plays that include literary and theatrical criticism take a further step towards the reformation of theatre because dramatic characters *literally* address the defects of the theatre industry. Therefore, I have suggested the term 'critical metadrama' in order to distinguish plays that include literary and theatrical criticism from the self-critique that is a common aspect of all metadrama of the early twentieth century.

Because critical metadrama shares the device of literary and theatrical criticism as a reformative function, my thesis is able to study these dramatic texts as a homogeneous group of examples, regardless of their belonging to different movements of the historical avant-garde. Such a reformative goal is underscored by the consistency of dramatic characters' discussion on literary and theatrical criticism, which dominates the structure of these plays. According to this decisive factor, I exclude those metadramas without such a reformative intention, such as John Osborne's *The Entertainer* (1957) and Günter Grass' *Thirty-Two Teeth* (1959).<sup>3</sup>

In addition, while Pirandello's trilogy, especially *Six Characters*, is regularly mentioned by studies of metatheatre, with different degrees of focus on dramatic characters' comments on theatre-related matters, the vast majority of these studies read self-referential criticism within Pirandello's plays in a limited way, as a reflection on the playwright's own vision of theatre and his

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<sup>3</sup> While the discourse of criticism within Grass' play is very marginal and limited to occasional lines, Osborne's play employs characters' discussions of the descent of the theatrical form of music hall as a metaphor of the decline of the British Empire, which is the main concern of his play. Similar to Osborne's, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Meteor* (1966), which is out of my study's range of time, utilises the discussion of artistic matters as a method of exposing social hypocrisy.



philosophical thoughts such as the relativity of truth and the relationship between life and art.<sup>4</sup>

By highlighting the reformatory function of literary and theatrical criticism, my thesis studies Pirandello's plays along with a group of critical metadramas, some of which precede the Italian playwright. Thus, my contribution partly relies on considering critical metadrama as a unique aspect of the avant-garde theatre during the first half of the twentieth century, which I trace back to Chekhov's *The Seagull*. However, the main contribution of my study is my investigation of critical metadrama in the Egyptian theatre, which cannot be undertaken without the exploration of the original practice of the phenomenon in European theatre.

As an Egyptian practitioner and scholar, I was aware of some examples of raising critical matters within Egyptian plays during the 1960s. While such a phenomenon nearly disappeared in the 1970s, it returns to take the shape of a tendency in Egyptian theatre in the three last decades of the twentieth century. The 1960's emergence, the 1970's disappearance, and the 1980's resurgence of literary and theatrical criticism within Egyptian theatre demanded an investigation of socio-political, economic, and cultural circumstances which are completely different from the contexts of critical metadrama of the twentieth-century Europe. However, because the influence of European theatre is a constant feature of Egyptian theatre since its beginnings in the nineteenth century, both the form of Egyptian critical metadrama and the topics of discussion included within dramatic characters' speeches cannot be investigated without the guiding of my reading of their European ancestors.

I stress two major and inseparable hypotheses that crucially regulate my approach to the study of examples of both European and Egyptian critical metadramas. Firstly, I suggest that despite playwrights' own motivations to include literary and theatrical criticism within their plays, the topics of dramatic characters' conversation reflect on more general and reformatory concern with the state of theatre practice, which in turn is influenced by several historical contexts. Secondly, because the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism, as a verbal device, within the imaginary realm of dramatic texts influences both structures and themes of critical metadramas, there is a dialectical and

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<sup>4</sup> While most studies of Pirandello focus on *Six Characters*, which they link with the playwright's stress on the relativity of truth and the relationship between life and stage, Pirandello's other plays relatively get less interest. For a detailed discussion of scholars' over-focusing on *Six Characters*, compared to *Tonight We Improvise* and *Each on His Own Way*, see Giudice.

interactive relationship between literary and theatrical criticism and the rest of the metatheatrical techniques within critical metadrama.

In order to examine these assumptions, I composed the following group of questions: How do both Western and Egyptian studies define the concept of metatheatricality in general and metadrama with literary and theatrical criticism in particular? How do socio-political, economic, and cultural circumstances urge playwright to adopt metatheatrical formalist techniques and the verbal method of literary and theatrical criticism? How does literary and theatrical criticism within metadramas dominate and modify the dramatic structure of these plays? What common topics of discussion do dramatic characters of these plays raise? And to what extent do these topics reflect on historical contexts in general and the state of the theatre industry in particular? How do specific socio-political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts in Egypt distinguish the topics of dramatic characters' discussion on theatre matters within Egyptian metadramas from their European antecedents?

Seeking answers to these questions, I have divided my thesis into five chapters. The first chapter is titled 'Literary and theatrical criticism-within-the-play: the history of a metatheatrical device and its function'. In order to define the focus of my thesis and its contribution to theatrical studies in general and to the studies of metatheatricality in particular, this introductory and fundamental chapter draws a map of the studies of metadrama, starting with Lionel Abel, who coined the term in 1963.

Abel distinguishes metatheatricality as a concept, from 'metadrama' that describes the plays in which the aspects of metatheatricality exist. In other words, a metadrama is a metatheatrical play. However, the vast majority of his followers' studies use both terms identically. Moreover, some scholars suggest a group of alternative and interchangeable expressions to describe both the concept and its manifestation within dramatic texts such as metatheatricality, metatheatrical play/text, self-referential play/theatre, theatricalist and anti-theatricalist play/theatre/drama. Likewise, terms such as self-conscious and self-referential, whether describing a dramatic character or an entire play, are utilised as synonyms. Such multi-terminology adds to the complication of studying metatheatricality. As my thesis adopts Abel's differentiation between metadrama and metatheatricality, I use these two terms as benchmarks by which I judge other terms suggested by post-Abel scholars.

Drawing on my understanding of Abel's terminology and my reading of a large number of his successors, my thesis considers metadrama as a dramatic text within which the play-within-the-play, intertextuality, and/or parody are utilised in order to represent the practice of theatre and/or its practitioners. In this respect, I agree with Katherine Newey's claim: 'If metatheatre is defined broadly as "theatre about the theatre," then the play within the play, the rehearsal play, the play set backstage, and the play about actors, managers or writers are all clearly and obviously metatheatrical' (Newey, 87).<sup>5</sup>

In the footsteps of Abel, most scholars have a tendency to study metadrama from a formalist standpoint. Consequently, the vast majority of these studies concentrate on the devices that achieve self-reflexivity, of which the play-within-the-play is the most dominant. Even when some scholars widen their perspectives by suggesting that the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within plays is one of the metatheatrical devices, they do not examine either the effect of such literary criticism—as a method—in the structure, or the content of it—as a discourse. Instead, such studies limit the purpose of literary and theatrical criticism to its direct self-referential function, just like other metatheatrical devices such as the play-within-a play, parody and intertextuality.

The significance of revealing the linkage between the content of literary criticism within plays and the contemporaneous state of theatre led me to realise another shortcoming in the formalist approaches to the study of metatheatre, which is the tendency to consider the use of metatheatrical devices as an arbitrary or purposeless stylistic choice of playwrights. In contrast, my study analyses the content of literary criticism as a deliberate response to specific historical and socio-cultural contexts, including dominant aspects of the theatre industry. Exceptions from the formalist reading of metatheatre are introduced by studies of Newey (1997), Tobin Nellhaus (2000), and Mary Ann Witt (2013).

Compared to the large number of Western scholars, who investigate metatheatre, there is a real lack, not to say absence, of studies of metatheatre in Arabic. My initial explanation of this fact was based on my observation of the dominance of Brechtian theory over Egyptian theatre criticism, which reached its peak with the great appeal of Marxist visions during the socialist regime of Nasser between 1954 and 1970. Therefore, since the 1960s, most of the

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see the studies of Baker-White, Golder, and Witt.

Egyptian practitioners, and a large number of critical writings about all metatheatrical techniques, tended to simplistically link these techniques with Brechtian notions of anti-illusionism, which was also utilised to describe Pirandello's theatre, mainly *Six Characters*. Later, Egyptian studies started gradually to distinguish between the two European playwrights by focusing on the political function of Brecht's theatre and the philosophical nature of *Six Characters* in terms of Pirandello's exploration of the relationship between life and art and his insistence on the relativity of truth. While my research gradually suggests the validity of this factor for the gap in Arabic metatheatrical studies, I started to realise that the appearance of metadrama in Egyptian theatre was a result of both European influences and the retrieving of traditional forms of popular entertainment in Egypt. Because the period after the 1952 Revolution was a jingoistic anti-West era, a large number of studies focused on playwrights' utilisation of traditional Egyptian themes and forms, while few scholars insisted on highlighting the European influence, especially of Brecht. Examples of these studies and historical circumstances are closely investigated in the fourth and fifth chapters of my thesis wherein I explore the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within Egyptian theatre.

The second chapter of this thesis explores the cooperation between literary and theatrical criticism and metatheatrical techniques, and insists that the function of the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism extends beyond mere self-reference. Because it quantitatively dominates the plays' structure, literary and theatrical criticism consistently interacts and modifies other metatheatrical devices. Specific structural aspects of critical metadrama include: dramatic characters representing theatre practitioners, who are usually more holders of critical opinions rather than rounded characters, and representations of rehearsals or performances in which dramatic characters raise theatre-related matters of criticism. While the style of the play-within-the-play usually functions as a mirror of dramatic characters' discussions in the outer play, both parody and intertextuality are utilised in order to support or contradict the specific opinions of one or more of the dramatic characters on matters of criticism.

'Topics of literary and theatrical criticism within European critical metadramas', is the title of the third chapter. In contrast to the usually unidirectional and authoritative writings of both academics and critics, literary

and theatrical criticism within these plays takes the form of debate, wherein dramatic characters adopt different opinions on the same matter of criticism. In order to define each play's overall standpoint regarding a specific topic of discussion, such an observation demanded from me, firstly, to read every character's comment in the context of the opinions of other characters, and secondly, to consider the imaginary realm of the plot, whose narrative usually indicates which point of view the dramatic text endorses. Finally, I regularly utilise critical writings about these plays, which I sometimes contradict, in order to support textual evidence within the examples of plays. The most striking feature of these topics of discussion is that they can be found in several plays, which supports my claim of the reformative function as a general rationale of critical metadrama.

'Socio-political and economic contexts of Egyptian theatre: the birth of critical metadrama' is the title of chapter four, within which I explore the circumstances that accompanied and urged Egyptian playwrights' inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within their plays. However, although my focus is on the Egyptian critical metadrama during the second half of the twentieth century, the chapter goes back to the nineteenth century for three reasons. Firstly, the beginning of both Arabic and Egyptian theatres witnessed the roots of critical metadrama. Secondly, similar to Giraudoux and Ionesco, the writers of early Arabic examples of critical metadrama were influenced by Molière's *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (*Impromptu of Versailles*). Finally, the early practice of Egyptian theatre seems to be influenced by the traditional quasi-theatrical forms of entertainment in Egypt, which were by their nature anti-illusionist. The significance of such an observation is the fact that these traditional forms were claimed to be the source for the search for pure Egyptian theatre in the 1960s, the call to which Egyptian playwrights ironically respond by borrowing from both Brecht and Pirandello.

In chapter five, 'Critical metadrama in Egypt since 1960s: reforming Egyptian theatre through European form', I trace the influence of European metatheatre in general and critical metadrama in particular on Egyptian plays during the second half of the twentieth century. Within the chapter, I support my claim for such an influence in two ways. Firstly, the chapter gives empirical evidence for channels of possible influence, through which European theatre of the early twentieth century was introduced to Egyptian playwrights, directors

and critics. Secondly, I underline specific resemblances between the twentieth-century metadrama in Europe and Egypt.

Instead of Tawfik al-Hakim's and Yusif Idris' claims of retrieving traditional forms, Egyptian playwrights in the second half of the twentieth century turned the calls for genuine Egyptian theatre into a topic of dramatic characters' discussion within European-like critical metadrama. Focusing on different aspects of the police state, which shaped the rule of successive Egyptian regimes since 1952, I investigate dramatic characters' comments on the catastrophic effects of socio-political problems on the state of theatre within Egyptian critical metadrama. Just like European theatre in the first decades of the twentieth century, Egyptian playwrights in the second half of the same century utilise literary and theatrical criticism-within-plays as a method of rectifying theatre, whose diseases are highly related to the specific circumstances of its habitat. In this respect, matters such as the brutal censorship and corrupted management in governmental theatres remarkably occupy the bulk of literary and theatrical criticism-within-plays. Even when Egyptian playwrights raise apparently similar literary matters to those within European plays, the same matter is coloured by the difference between the two societies.

Except for Yusif Idris' *Al-Farafir* (1964), all the examples of Arabic and Egyptian plays studied within my thesis are not translated into English. Therefore, I have translated all the quotations from these plays, along with my citations from Arabic theatre studies and reviews. I have two observations on my translation of Arabic materials. Firstly, the straightforward language of critical writings made them relatively easier in translation than the dramatic dialogue within Egyptian plays. Not only is the language of the plays more figurative by its nature, but many plays also are written in Egyptian dialect, whose idioms sometimes need more clarification of their connotations for the English reader than can be given by simply rendering their literal meaning. Secondly, in many cases, dramatic dialogues imply specific events, figures, social facts, and/or cultural aspects, which can be hard to understand outside their domestic context. Such instances demanded that I utilise footnotes in order to support my translation of the Arabic text.

## Chapter One

### Literary and theatrical criticism-within-the-play: the history of a metatheatrical device and its function

This chapter closely investigates the development of the concept of metatheatre, which emerged in dramatic and theatrical studies in the 1960s, and its noticeably repeated resurgence since then. Through drawing a map of the studies of metatheatre, I aim to clarify the focus of my thesis and its contribution to theatrical studies in general and to the studies of metatheatre in particular.

#### Mapping the studies of metatheatre

One of the difficulties presented by research into 'metatheatre' is the fact that the term is usually utilised to describe both a specific dramaturgical function within a play and the studies of a type of theatre. Moreover, the term 'metatheatre' itself appeared several centuries after the supposed manifestations of the metatheatrical concept in dramatic works. Elinor Fuchs explains: 'Metatheatre is an old practice but a comparatively recent critical interest' (Fuchs 2007, 39). In *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (1963), Lionel Abel coined the term metadrama to describe examples from Baroque theatre, namely Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Calderón's *Life Is a Dream* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

Unlike tragic protagonists, Abel claims that characters within metadrama are not only aware of their nature as fictional beings, but they also acquire the knowledge of drama, or as he calls it the 'consciousness of drama' (Abel 2003, 119)<sup>6</sup> that enables them to assume the role of a playwright and a director within the imaginary realm of the plays. By utilising such knowledge, a metatheatrical character is able to modify other characters' behaviour or instruct them as if they are actors. In this sense, characters have doubled self-consciousness, both of their imaginary nature and of the dramatic art of which they are part. Using *Hamlet* as a prototype of metadrama, Abel argues that nearly 'every important character acts at some moment like a playwright, employing a

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<sup>6</sup> After fifty years of inaugurating the term in his book *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, Abel broadened his discussions in *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form* (2003), from which my thesis quotes.

playwright's consciousness of drama to impose a certain posture or attitude on another' (Abel 2003, 119). In addition to Hamlet whose instructions about acting exemplify his wide knowledge of theatre, Abel suggests that Claudius, The Ghost and Polonius use their ability to act as playwrights in order to modify other characters and themselves as well (Abel 2003, 121-5). One of the most controversial hypotheses of Abel's concept of metatheatre is his claim that Shakespeare, Calderón, and Marlowe sought to write tragedies, but they failed because of the Baroque belief in two irreplaceable philosophic bases: 'the world is a stage, life is a dream' (Abel 2003, 157). This inverts the Aristotelian interpretation that sees tragedy as a representation of real life, a theatricalisation of the world. The Baroque playwrights, differently, conceived the world as a stage and life as a dream. Put differently, the object of representation itself is theatre per se.

As Abel insists, all metadramas 'have one common character: all of them are theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized' (Abel 2003, vi). In this respect, the Baroque playwrights' awareness that life is not reality prevents them from writing tragedy. To represent such theatricalised life, they seem obliged to write metadrama where dramatic characters share the mode of a playwright's consciousness. Abel argues:

Why have most Western dramatists, bent on writing tragedy, been unable to do so successfully? Much of their difficulty can be summed up in a single word: self-consciousness. First, the self-consciousness of the dramatist himself, and then that of his protagonists. [...] Now the western playwright is unable to believe in the reality of a character who is lacking in self-consciousness. (Abel 2003, 151-2)

Abel's interpretation of characters taking the role of playwrights or directors within the plot of metadrama can be conceived as one of the possible readings of these plays, especially within his consideration of historical and social contexts of the Baroque era. However, Abel's claim that the Baroque playwrights' initial intention was to write tragedies cannot be indisputably proven. Moreover, when Abel expands his study by referring to works of modern playwrights such as Pirandello, Brecht, Genet, and Beckett, he neglects historical and cultural factors that condition the emergence of metatheatricity



within the plays of different playwrights who do not belong to the Baroque period.

The most striking feature of Abel's study is that he does not mention any function of metadrama outside its closed structure. As he describes metadrama, Abel reduces it to a group of characters' self-reference to their self-consciousness. Such an absence of purpose outside the play can be in part accounted for by the influence of the close reading approaches to the study of literature, which shaped the trend of New Criticism in the mid-Twentieth Century. This movement was influenced by Russian Formalism that studied literary works by focusing on formative aspects without considering their function. Galin Tikhanov explains: 'By concentrating on the literary "device," especially in the early phase of their work, the Formalists were leaving literature to its own devices, uncontrolled by, and irreducible to, ethics, religion, or politics' (Tikhanov, 62). The same formalist approach to the study of literature dominates the writings of many theorists of the Prague School, especially Roman Jakobson. In this sense, we can understand Martin Puchner's argument that

[T]he term most closely related to Abel's metatheatre is *metalanguage*, popularized by the linguist Roman Jakobson. *Metalanguage* describes those moments when language is used not to communicate, but to talk about the act of communication, when language does not refer to the world "outside," but only to itself. In this it corresponds to Abel's definition of metatheatre as a theatre not concerned about the world "outside" the theatre, but only with the theatre itself. (Puchner 2003, 2)

Puchner's observation can be historically supported by Andrés Pérez-Simón who, in 'The Concept of Metatheatre: A Functional Approach' (2011), hints at the influence of Jakobson's model of verbal communication on Abel by affirming that 'Abel's contribution in the field of theatre studies took place in the wake of Roman Jakobson's model of six linguistic functions, which Jakobson had introduced in a conference held in Indiana five years before the publication of *Metatheatre [sic]*' (Pérez-Simón, 9).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Apart from the meta-lingual function of language, which allegedly inspired Abel's concept of metatheatre, Jakobson's model neglects neither the social context nor function of language. For more information, see Chandler 182, Waugh 13 – 15, and Galasiński 131.

Abel's formalist approach to define metatheatres continued to determine most of his followers' studies. Nevertheless, many post-Abel scholars have established their views of metatheatres in opposition to one or more of his claims. As post-Abel studies vary in their dissenting approach, the notion of metatheatres keeps developing. All of these studies' contributions revolve around three main pivots: focusing on techniques rather than characters' self-consciousness; specifying historical circumstances that prompt playwrights to write metadramas; and defining the purpose of metatheatricity. Because of the oppositions amongst these studies, the changes in the concept of metatheatres have not taken a historical linear course. Within these studies, the consistency, quantity, and quality of argument with Abel fluctuate. The three routes in which the notion and applications of metatheatres have developed have run parallel, and sometimes intersect by building upon each other.

As the benchmark with which these studies compare their new opinions, some of Abel's thoughts are usually present in these studies as a foundation to new contradictory claims. For example, Judd Hubert's 'Molière: The Playwright as Protagonist' (1982) adopts the concept of characters' self-awareness in order to suggest that many of Molière's plays such as *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The School for Wives*, *Tartuffe*, *Don Juan*, and *The Misanthrope* are metadramas. Hubert argues that 'protagonists assume authorial functions in every comedy of Molière' (Hubert, 363). What distinguishes this study from Abel's is its consideration of metatheatricity within *comedies*.<sup>8</sup> Thus, metatheatres seem an intentional aesthetic choice of the playwright rather than a spontaneous repercussion of his/her failure to write a tragedy. Although Abel limits his comparison with metatheatres to tragedy, it can be concluded that he indirectly suggests that metatheatres are a different genre from comedy as well.

A more recent example of adopting Abel's explanation of metadrama can be found in Eszter Szlczar's study 'A modernist dramaturgy' (2009). Tracing metatheatricity within Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*, *To Damascus*, and *A Dream Play*, Szlczar claims that the 'conception of life as a dream and the world as a stage becomes prevalent in Strindberg's writing in the 1900s [wherein] Strindberg could no longer make use of the naturalist techniques he embraced in the 1880s' (Szlczar, 97). In this respect, instead of considering metadrama as

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<sup>8</sup> In what seems a response to the critique of his 1963 study, Abel's 2003 book includes a new section under the title 'Wrong and Right: The Art of Comedy'.

a replacement of tragedy, Szlczar's study highlights the contradiction between metatheatricality and Naturalism. Such opposition is mentioned in many of the post-Abel studies of metatheatrical features within modern drama.<sup>9</sup>

Despite their new approaches to delimit metatheatre, many studies—in the footsteps of Abel—apply their theoretical argument to the plays of Shakespeare and Calderón. Consequently, very important contributions to the field of metatheatre come from specialists in both the Spanish and the Elizabethan theatres. For instance, in his review of James L. Calderwood's *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet* (1983), Charles Clifton argues:

Calderwood's explication of metadrama is finally unpersuasive. Mimesis of theatrical matters does not mean that *Hamlet* is about theatre any more than the banquet scene in *Macbeth* means that the play is about food. Moreover, the discussions of metadrama distract from the centrality of the character Hamlet (character being determined, as Aristotle said, by moral choices). [...] [T]he critic's own eye [...] sometimes — often in contemporary criticism — sees its own figures instead of the artist's. (Clifton, 300-1)

The last statement suggests that Clifton is against the formalist criticism to which Calderwood's interpretation of *Hamlet* belongs. However, Clifton establishes his critique of the concept of metatheatre once again through Shakespeare and Aristotle. Furthermore, comparing the inner play in *Hamlet* with the banquet scene in *Macbeth* ignores the difference between the representation of life in the latter and the theatrical portrayal of theatre itself in the former.

While many of the post-Abel studies contradict his notion of dramatic characters' self-consciousness, most of them followed him in excluding tragedies from metatheatre. This exclusion has provoked many classicists such as Thomas G. Rosenmeyer. In 'Metatheatre: An Essay on Overload' (2002), Rosenmeyer attacks Abel and his followers, who he calls 'Abelians'. According to Rosenmeyer, Abel's claim 'demonstrates the limitations of his understanding

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<sup>9</sup> Considering the main research interests of Hubert and Szlczar, which respectively are French Renaissance theatre and Scandinavian drama, suggests that the vigorous spread of Abel's term extends beyond qualitative studies of metatheatre to include many theatre studies about specific playwrights. In addition to such expansion, Abel's comparison between tragedy and metatheatre seems to motivate many scholars of classics to integrate discussions on metatheatre within their studies.

of what happens in classical tragedy' (Rosenmeyer, 90). In addition, Rosenmeyer draws links between metatheatricality within both Greek tragedies and comedies.

In his more detailed exploration, Charles Segal's 1982 study: *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* traces Metatheatricality within Euripides' play. Segal claims that '[t]he *Bacchae* refuses fully to close this gap between the power of illusion within the fiction and the power of the fiction to convey truth' (Segal, 237). Mark Ringer's *Electra and the Empty Urn: Metatheater and Role Playing in Sophocles* (1998) contradicts Abel and his followers by reading Sophocles' *Electra* as a work of metatheatre that uses the theatrical technique of role-playing. In *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes* (2002), Niall Slater gives many examples of metatheatricality within Aristophanes' plays. Therefore, Slater affirms that 'it has become obvious in the last forty years that Lionel Abel was wrong to claim that metatheatre was a third genre that emerged only in the Renaissance' (Slater 2002, 7). In contrast to Hubert's, the studies of Segal, Ringer and Slater are examples of an increasing tendency of Abel's successors to conceptualise metatheatre according to the play's inclusion of one or more of theatrical techniques other than his limited notion of dramatic characters' self-reference to focus on the entire play's self-reflexivity. In other words, unlike Abel who insists that metatheatre is a new genre that supplants tragedy, more recent studies suggest that metatheatricality depends on specific devices whose existence within any dramatic text turns it into a metadrama.<sup>10</sup>

### **The focus on devices**

The vast majority of studies that focus on the self-reflexivity of the entire play—which shape the first route of post-Abel's oppositions to his notion—suggest that the theatrical technique of the Play-within-the-play is the most significant device of metatheatre.<sup>11</sup> According to Abel, the only condition of

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<sup>10</sup> For more examples of studies that contradict Abel by tracing metatheatricality within Greek theatre in general, see Dobrov. Focusing on metatheatricality in tragedy can be found in Dunn 2011 and Dunn 2012. For limiting metatheatre to Greek comedy rather than tragedy, see Storey 2005, 309, and Storey 2011. For tracing metatheatre within the Roman comedies, see Slater 2000, and Moore.

<sup>11</sup> The two terms of 'the play-within-a-play' and 'the play-within-the-play' are used by different theorists to mean the same theatrical technique in which the play includes two levels of representations: the frame, or framed play and the inner play. However, instead of describing

creating metadrama is the dramatic characters' self-awareness, regardless of the playwright's utilisation of specific devices. He insists: 'I wish to designate a whole range of plays, some of which do not employ the play-within-a-play, even as a device' (Abel 2003, 134). Therefore, although Abel insists on the metatheatricality of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the play which he describes as 'perhaps the most original play-within-a-play written in the twentieth century' (Abel 2003, 136), he does not choose any of Pirandello's characters in his book's chapter 'The Hero of Metatheatre'. The reason for such exclusion, as Abel explains, is that 'great as a playwright, Pirandello was not a great creator of character. Of all the characters who come on stage in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, there is not one who is convincing as more than a stage type' (Abel 2003, 170).<sup>12</sup> Apart from such a controversial verdict, this example suggests that, according to Abel, although the play-within-the-play is a metatheatrical technique, metadrama is mainly defined by its self-conscious dramatic characters.

Ironically, since the middle of the 1960s, the vast majority of theatrical studies have considered the play-within-the-play an indispensable feature of metatheatricality. What can explain this post-Abel emphasis on the play-within-the-play, which he ignores? First of all, earlier than Abel's 1963 suggestion of his concept of metatheatre, a large number of studies of the play-within-the-play focused on the utilisation of such a device within the Elizabethan theatre in general, Shakespeare's plays in particular, and, more specifically, in *Hamlet*. For instance, while Robert J. Nelson's *Play within a Play, the Dramatist's Conception of his Art: Shakespeare to Anouilh* (1958) broadly explores different examples of employing the play-within-the-play in plays written between the 1590s and the 1950s, Arthur Brown's 'The Play within a Play: An Elizabethan Dramatic Device' (1960) is exclusively confined to investigating its role in the Elizabethan drama.

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the technique as a whole, either term is sometimes utilised to mention the inner play exclusively.

<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, the six characters in Pirandello's play own what Abel describes as self-awareness of their fictional nature. Rather than Abel's claim that Hamlet assumes the role of a playwright/director, the character of the Director in Pirandello's text literally practices these jobs as part of his dramatic identity. However, what distinguishes Shakespearian character, as a protagonist, is his dominant presence in the text compared to any individual character within Pirandello's play. In the next chapter, I will discuss Abel's claim that Pirandello's characters are 'stage type[s]'.

Secondly, according to Abel, dramatic characters are competitors who use their ability to write and direct their own plays in which other characters are just actors. In the final analysis, characters' own plays seem to be variations of the play-within-the-play. In this sense, *Hamlet* is a metadrama, which includes many play(s)-within-a-play. Therefore, when Abel suggests that the play-within-the-play is unnecessary to achieve metatheatre, he seems to predict, and reply to, his reader's potential belief in the essential contribution that this theatrical technique should make in creating a play's self-reference. To support his notion of characters' self-awareness, Abel intentionally marginalises the role of the play-within-the-play.

Nothing demonstrates critics' ideas of the essential relationship between metatheatre and the play-within-the-play more than their use of the two expressions, the play-within-the-play and metatheatre, as interchangeable synonyms. In 'Metatheatre and Metaphysics in Two Late Greek Tragedies' (2011) Francis Dunn argues that 'Metatheatrical criticism [...] began as a New-Critical project, led by Robert Nelson (1958), Anne Richter Barton (1962), and Lionel Abel (1963)' (Dunn 2011, 5). Although neither Nelson nor Barton utilised the term 'metatheatre', which was to be coined by Abel later, Dunn's claim can be explained on the grounds that the vast majority of Abel's successors investigate the practice of metatheatre by focusing on the play-within-the-play. Likewise, Dieter Mehl's 'Forms and Functions of the Play within a Play', which was written in 1965, does not mention Abel's term. However, in 'Social Ontology and (Meta)theatricality: Reflexions on Performance and Communication in History' (2000), Tobin Nellhaus describes both Mehl's and Nelson's studies as part of metatheatre research.<sup>13</sup>

To give further examples of such an inseparable relationship, *The Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection* is a group of thirty articles edited by Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner, which was published in 2007. As the title of the book suggests, metatheatricality—as a method of self-reference to theatre—is limited to, and described as the-play-within-the-play.<sup>14</sup> Some of this anthology's studies produce a theoretical frame

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<sup>13</sup> While Nelson's book was published three years before the term 'metatheatre' appeared, it is hard to know whether Mehl intentionally ignored Abel's term or whether he was not aware of it.

<sup>14</sup> Even the articles that investigate the notion of self-reference in films and novels were categorised by the editors as applications of the play-within-the-play rather than being described as meta-cinema and meta-narrative respectively.

of the metatheatrical self-reference through the play-within-the-play such as Yifen Beus' 'Self-Reflexivity in the Play within the Play and its Cross-Genre Manifestation'. The first proposition of Beus' article is that '[s]elf-reflexivity can be regarded as a marking of modernity in art and literature' (Beus, 15). To prove this claim, the study traces the notion of self-reflexivity in literature back to 1797 as part of the German writer and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel's concept of Romantic Irony. Apart from Beus' conflation of Modernism and modern drama of the twentieth century, he explains Schlegel's notion through the latter's exploration of 'the comic play within the play' in *Hamlet*, which, according to Schlegel, 'reveals the central, hidden truth that Claudius has murdered Hamlet's father' (ctd. in Beus, 17).<sup>15</sup>

The second suggestion of Beus is that Schlegel's discussions 'greatly influenced the poetics of 'modern' drama' (Beus, 15), a claim that the article does not investigate in detail. Instead, Beus utilises Schlegel's notion in order to investigate the play-within-the-play in Ludwig Tieck's play *Der gestiefelte Kater* (1797), within which the inner play is a performance of the fairy tale *Puss in Boots*. Then Beus argues:

This sort of self-conscious reflection, this playing with the boundaries between fiction and reality [suggested by Schlegel's criticism and manifested within Tieck's play] remains quite common in more recent theatre and film. The *Verfremdungseffekt* (device for making the familiar strange) through laying bare the play's structure in Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre does this, for example, as does the 'anti-play' of the theatre of the Absurd. (Beus, 22)

It seems useful to mention that Walter Benjamin preceded Beus in drawing a link between the Romantic Irony and Brecht. Moreover, in contrast to Beus, Benjamin focuses on the didactic purpose that distinguishes Brechtian theatre

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<sup>15</sup> Here, I adopt Hugh Grady's differentiation between modernity and Modernism, which I capitalize as a doctrine with distinct, nevertheless sometimes diverse, features. As a qualitative break with dominant traditions, Grady traces modernity within Shakespeare's plays. Differently, Modernism, according to Grady, is a temporal phenomenon that describes specific works of art, literature, and theatre during the first half of the twentieth century. For detailed information, see Grady 1 – 19. In this respect, Modernism is a kind of modernity, but not vice versa. Therefore, the term 'modern drama'—which is usually broadened to include the works of some late nineteenth-century playwrights, namely Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg—describes Modernist theatre. For detailed discussions on the intersections between the two terms, see Barbeito.

from the formalist nature of Schlegel's concept.<sup>16</sup> Finally, by observing the manifestations of self-reference in Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), the article extends Abel's claim of dramatic characters' self-consciousness to involve the entire work of art/performance as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

Other studies of *The Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection* attempt to trace the utilisation of the play-within-the-play in a single play such as Greiner's 'The Birth of the Subject out of the Spirit of the Play within the play: The Hamlet Paradigm', or in a specific period as we can find in John Golder's 'Holding a Mirror up to Theatre: Baro, Gougenot, Scudéry and Corneille as Self-Referentialists in Paris, 1628-35/36'. In Greiner's study, he suggests that Shakespeare has introduced in the character of Hamlet what can be considered a prototype of the self-referential play-within-the-play. Such a claim seems a reproduction of Abel's reading of *Hamlet*, but with consideration of the theatrical technique.

Studying metatheatre, though, is not limited to focusing on the technique of the-play-within-the-play. One of the most pioneering and influential studies in terms of defining different devices of metadrama is Richard Hornby's *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (1986). Hornby produces a comprehensive record of metatheatrical devices, which he calls 'Varieties of the metadramatic'. Using the word 'Varieties' in Hornby's title is crucial to understand that, according to his study, metatheatricality can be achieved through, but not limited to playwrights' utilisation of specific techniques. Therefore, in addition to 'The Play-within-the-play', these 'varieties' include 'The Ceremony within the Play', 'Role Playing within the Role', 'Literary and Real-Life Reference within the Play', and 'Self-Reference'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Verfremdungseffekt is Brecht's development of Shklovsky's 'ostranenie'. For more information about Brecht's politically employed notion compared to Shklovsky's formalist concept, see White 77 – 131 and Christie. While some scholars of Brecht use the words 'Epic' and 'dialectical' as synonyms, others differentiate the latter as a development of, or a new name suggested by Brecht to describe, the former. For examples of such a debate, see the studies of Tatlow and Halliburton. For the comparison between the Romantic Irony and Brecht, see the studies of Dane and Elliott.

<sup>17</sup> Using Velázquez's famous painting as an example of self-reflexivity in painting is a common feature of a large number of the studies of metatheatre, metafiction, and metacinema. For instance, see Homan, which seems to be one of the first theatre studies to mention Velázquez's work. In turn, studies of art borrowed Abel's term to describe *Las Meninas* and similar works of other artists as meta-painting or meta-picture. For more details, see Mitchell.

<sup>18</sup> Although Hornby affirms that all these varieties indirectly involve self-referential aspects, he distinguishes self-reference as a direct anti-illusionist method, by which dramatists such as Brecht, Tom Stoppard, and Peter Handke intentionally utilise dramatic characters' speeches in order to challenge the make-believe.



Giving an example of 'Literary Reference within the play' Hornby mentions Strindberg's *The Father* wherein the Captain, in his dialogue with the Doctor, refers to Mrs. Alving, the heroine of Ibsen's *Ghosts* (Hornby, 88). By considering such a reference to Ibsen's play as a method of metatheatricality, Hornby seems to prove Abel's claim that metatheatres can be achieved by methods other than, or in addition to, the theatrical technique of the play-within-the-play. However, instead of Abel's polemic claim that dramatic characters acquire double consciousness, of their theatrical nature and of dramatic art, Hornby highlights materially manifested evidences within dramatic characters' speeches.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, Hornby's claim highlights the effect of metadramatic devices on spectators. In general, considering the function is another aspect that distinguishes some post-Abel scholars, as this chapter will explore later. However, Hornby particularly insists that the 'factors that affect the metadramatic impact of a literary reference include the degree of emphasis given to it by the playwright, and how recent and controversial the literary work referred to is' (Hornby, 90). On one hand *Ghosts* was 'only six years old when *The Father* was written, and very controversial' (Hornby, 88). On the other hand, 'the reference to Ibsen's *Ghosts* in Strindberg's *The Father* is far from major; it is tossed off very quickly, with nothing further made of it. The audience's involvement detours only briefly and then quickly returns to the play's main action' (Hornby, 90). Thus Hornby draws his reader's attention to the marginal use of the metadramatic device of literary references within Strindberg's play.

Hornby traces metatheatres in an extended period of time, which runs from the Greek theatre to the second half of the Twentieth Century. Therefore, it seems that he was obliged to neglect the historical circumstances that motivate playwrights to write metatplays in different times. That explains why Fuchs argues that

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<sup>19</sup> Hornby's explanation of the 'Literary Reference' intersects with Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, which she introduced in the 1960s to define the ways in which a text may allude to, cite, and even imitate other texts. Kristeva's notion was discussed and developed by several theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. For detailed interpretations of intertextuality according to Kristeva and later scholars, see the studies of Wagner 1996, and Orr. In Hutcheon 1985, the scholar focuses on parody, not only as an intertextual device, which satirically imitates other text[s], but also as the main aspect of metafiction.

[T]here has been little continuing effort to work out a general theory of metatheatrical dramatic form or to trace its development over time as a united field. An exception is Richard Hornby's essay, 'Varities of the Metadramatic'. However, Hornby's primary interest here is less critical than taxonomic. (Fuchs 2007, 39)

However, by suggesting a wide spectrum of metadramatic devices, Hornby frees the studies of metatheatre from the excessive insistence on the play-within-the-play.

Hornby's categorisation of metatheatrical methods has been very influential on the vast majority of later studies. Since the publication of his study, it has been mentioned in any study of metatheatre as regularly as Abel's, even when both are criticised. For instance, Jonathan Thacker's *Role-play and the World as Stage in the Comedia* (2002) utilises Hornby's notion of the 'Role Playing within the Role' to investigate Spanish plays in the seventeenth century. However, the criterion of Thacker's choice of the examples of plays within his study is based on Abel's concepts. Thacker declares:

I intend to accept a definition of metatheatre as the dramatist's creation of characters who are aware of the theatricality of life, who can act, who can play, who refuse to view themselves as predictable actors in monolithic system of prescribed behavior. Because they share an awareness with the audience that their fellow characters are acting, are part of a play, these characters often develop a close relationship with the spectators that is based on mutual understanding. (Thacker, 3)

What distinguishes such a description from Abel's is that Thacker extends characters' awareness to include 'the theatricality of life', which according to Abel, is one of the two dominant thoughts during the Baroque era that prevented playwrights from writing tragedy. In addition, Thacker differentiates self-conscious characters from the rest of the characters within the play on the grounds of their relationship with spectators.

Hsiang-Chun Chu's *Metatheatre in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama: Four Forms of Theatrical Self-Reflexivity* (2008) is an example of this double effect of both Abel and Hornby. In her study, Chu argues that there are four forms of metatheatricality in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, which are 'Role-playing', 'Playwright-characters', 'Inset-plays', 'Audience perception and

Self-reflexivity'. While Chu's explanation of 'Playwright-characters' is similar to Abel's notion of self-conscious characters, her other classifications obviously intersect with Hornby's 'Varieties of the metadramatic', of which the play-within-the-play is the most significant.

The most controversial aspect of Chu's classification is what she calls 'Audience perception and Self-reflexivity', which includes sub-plots, characters' asides and soliloquies, and the Chorus's direct speech to the audience. It seems that she ignores the fact that, as long as characters' speeches are related to the imaginary plot of the play, such types of addressing the audience are part of the theatrical conventions rather than a method of metatheatre. Although Chu investigates metatheatre in a specific time, she also ignores the influence of social context on the emergence of self-reflexive plays.

Another example of the influence of Hornby can be found in 'Kazantzakis's Metatheatrical *Othello Returns*'.<sup>20</sup> In his 1996 study, Thodoros Grammatas suggests that Kazantzakis' play belongs to a specific type of metatheatre that includes intersections with other dramatic works. Grammatas calls this method 'intertextual writing' (Grammatas, 68). In *Othello Returns*, these intertextual inclusions are well-known dramatic characters such as Othello, Desdemona, Iago, Clytemnestra, and Faust. Other examples of intertextuality as a method of metatheatre given by Grammatas are the Japanese novelist and playwright Yukio Mishima's *Tropical Tree* (1959), Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966), Steven Berkoff's *Greek* (1980), and German playwright Botho Straus' *The Park* (1983). These plays respectively include intertextual relationships with Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Sophocles' *Oedipus The King*.

Although his explanation of intertextuality resembles Hornby's notion of 'Literary Reference', Grammatas takes a further step by underlining, albeit briefly, the significance of historical context by linking the increasing presence of intertextuality within metatheatre with postmodernism. However, Grammatas' study does not differentiate between the rewriting of classic or old plays and the limited insertion of chosen parts from original texts for a specific purpose. Such

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<sup>20</sup> While the Greek playwright Kazantzakis wrote *Othello Returns* in 1937, the play was not published until 1962.

a subtle difference is crucial in order to recognise the function of borrowed parts within any metadrama.

### **The emphasis on historical context**

The second route of studying metatheatre has sought to relate it to socio-cultural aspects in order to gain more understanding of such a theatrical phenomenon. According to this tendency, metatheatre is described as a response to specific factors in a particular society at an exact time. In his study 'Is the Spanish Comedia a Metatheater?' (1975), Thomas O'Connor tries to contextualise the metatheatricity in Calderón's *Life Is a Dream* on a religious basis rather than Abel's two philosophical rules of metatheatre. O'Connor claims that supposing that 'the world is a stage' and 'life is a dream' contradicts the Catholicity of seventeenth-century Spain. He explains:

Metatheater is anti-Christian if taken only in Abel's understanding of the term; but in the Spanish dramatic milieu our examination of "metatheater" reaffirms the essentially Christian philosophy in which authenticity, truth and faith alone perceive reality and lead to salvation, the ultimate reality in the eschatological sense. (O'Connor, 288)

According to O'Connor, any Catholic Christian, including Calderón and all his contemporaneous Spanish dramatists should be able, or compelled, to conceive the world as authentic and truthful as their religion guarantees. To prove his argument, O'Connor insists on the moral nature of Calderón's play as he argues that '*La vida es sueño* [*Life Is a Dream*] shows that one should not be an actor or role-player because life is the true measure of man, as the temptation of the devil was of Christ, and, as such, he must strive to be authentic, true to God and himself' (O'Connor, 287). Such a claim caused a fierce debate amongst theorists of both Hispanic culture and metatheatre.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in "'Metatheater" and the Criticism of the Comedia' (1976), Stephen Lipmann directly criticises O'Connor's opposition to Abel by claiming that

It would be simpler to say that "role-playing" has serious moral consequences in Spanish Golden Age drama. O'Connor's objection to Abel's "conception" is seemingly groundless;

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<sup>21</sup> For examples of both supportive and opposite opinions on O'Connor's argument, see Larson 209 – 10.

Abel's central concern is not with the ethical problems posed by metatheatre, but with its characteristics as a form. (Lipmann, 235)

When Lipmann suggests a didactic purpose of utilising the metatheatrical technique of role-playing in the Baroque Spanish drama, including Calderón's play, he underlines the inseparable relationship between historical contexts and the rationale of writing metadrama.

O'Connor's hint at such a relationship can be understood on the grounds that the main concern of his study is to criticise Abel's philosophical bases. Moreover, just like Abel who limits contextual elements to the era's two philosophical conditions, O'Connor reduces historical circumstances to religious thoughts. Both ignore, for instance, the effect of Calderón's awareness of the political circumstances in Spain. As a monarchy, the devolution of power is just a dream unless the king accepts and the heir proves his competence and goodness. Thus, the role-playing in *Life Is a Dream* can harmonise, consolidate and combine both Abel's philosophical and O'Connor's religious arguments. Supported by God, the king's ultimate authority enables him to move his son between life and dream in order to test the latter's capability of being a good ruler. Such an example suggests that dominant social and cultural values can be crucial reasons for the occurrence of metatheatricality as well as revealing the playwright's purpose in using metatheatrical techniques.

Two decades after O'Connor, the historical approach to study metatheatre was adopted in Newey's 'Melodrama and Metatheatre: Theatricality in the Nineteenth Century Theatre' (1997). By referring to several studies within which metatheatrical English drama in different eras are explored, Newey justifiably starts her study by claiming that 'Metatheatricality has always been an important feature of the English theatre' (Newey, 85). The main focus of her study is on tracing metatheatricality in the nineteenth-century melodramas and comedies. Newey suggests that any 'melodrama performance' is a metadrama. She argues:

The highly coded conventions of melodrama performance, with its over-determined practices of characterisation, acting, and staging, constitute a self-referential sign system which exploits the playfulness and artfulness of the theatre to a high degree. [...] It is the argument of this essay that what is melodramatic is also metatheatrical; that metatheatricality in

melodrama is a result of the extremity of expression in character and structure which is established by nineteenth century melodrama. (Newey, 85)

In this respect, Newey suggests that metatheatre can be achieved regardless of playwrights' utilisation of metatheatrical techniques, which was one of Abel's claims. She argues that melodramatic 'theatrical practices extend the significance of metatheatricality beyond just those plays which fit easily into the obvious metatheatrical categories such as the play within the play, the framed play, or the play about the theatrical profession' (Newey, 85). Nevertheless, as Newey traces the features of metatheatricality in two coexistent genres, she contradicts Abel's perspective on metatheatre as a unique and alternative genre to tragedy.

In terms of metatheatricality within the nineteenth-century comedies, Newey gives compelling examples of plays which 'generally use two devices: the play within the play, or the interrupted performance, and the entry into the world behind the curtain, which may include a play within a play' (Newey, 87). Thus metatheatricality is achieved by the inclusion of inner plays wherein melodrama performances, with their metatheatrical nature, are parodied. In her reading of Charles Selby's *Behind the Scenes, Or, Actors by Lamplight* (1839), Newey explains how the scenes of the play move between the outer and the inner play.

Consequently, the play intentionally reveals the discrepancy between backstage, where the actors enact normal activities and their performance of their heroic and highly emotional roles. Moreover, when the inner play sarcastically imitates the plot of a particular melodrama, the audience realises that melodrama and its real performers are the target of the parody (Newey, 89 – 90). It is hard to decide whether these comedies' attack on melodrama is a kind of 'playful' celebration of the co-existent form of the popular stage, or whether the comedies of the nineteenth-century, out of rivalry, denounce the exaggerating nature of melodrama. In either case, parody seems to be a common feature of metatheatre.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For more details about parody as a self-reflexive technique, see Hannoosh 113, and Hornby 46.

One of the most significant aspects of Newey's study is its insistence on defining socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts that account for the popularity of these metatheatrical performances of melodrama and comedies. She argues:

While melodrama establishes the primacy of the feeling individual as a defence against the depersonalising forces of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, it also stages Victorian anxieties about the existence of the individual, and the innate theatricality involved in the performance of the self. (Newey, 86)

On one hand, more clearly than O'Connor and Lipmann, Newey marks the way in which historical circumstances urge playwrights to write metadramas, within which these contexts are indirectly reflected.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, tracing metatheatricality, an allegedly high cultural product, within popular theatre challenges the inferior image of *popularity* as an aspect of low forms of entertainment. Such a point is crucial in my thesis, within which the term popular theatre is used to describe theatre that has great appeal to an audience without any negative connotation.

By mocking melodrama performances, parodies seemingly go further than the mere representation of Victorian individuals' anxieties within melodrama. Newey claims:

[D]espite the deep suspicion of the theatre and theatricality in Victorian culture, the evidence of plays about the theatre in the nineteenth century suggests that such anxieties were mixed with delight in the power of the theatre and theatricality, and use of its performance energy to counter anxieties about identity and its representation. (Newey, 86)

Thus, in addition to their critique of melodrama, Victorian comedies seem to rectify, or at least challenge socio-cultural dominant circumstances. In their turn, these melodramas can inform us about the state of theatre industry of their time. Newey claims:

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<sup>23</sup> Many scholars argue that the popularity of melodrama in European theatre during the nineteenth century was partly due to its ability to reflect on individuals' increasingly tenuous relationship with their Capitalist society. For examples, see Singer 131 – 48, and Kleinhans 158.

[A]n understanding of the metatheatricality of melodrama provides a special insight into the self image of the nineteenth century English theatrical profession, its codes and eccentricities, as well as suggesting the degree of complicity with which the audience viewed the whole theatrical enterprise'. (Newey, 85-6)

In this sense, investigating these melodramas can reveal the contexts of their production and reception.

Similarly, Golder makes a link between historical circumstances and the function of self-referential dramatic characters who represent theatre practitioners. Throughout his reading of four French post-Renaissance plays, the main argument of Golder's 2007 study is that these plays should inform us about the French theatre in their period. The importance of such a claim is its consideration of the self-reference within the 'plays about theatre' as a reflection of particular traditions of a specific theatrical practice in a defined period of time. Golder argues that 'playwrights may not have been writing for the benefit of the future historians, their work may nonetheless speak to us very eloquently' (Golder, 83). From this standpoint, such information seems to be a by-product of the playwrights' original purpose, which was 'to advertise, to propagandise, to satirise, to satisfy the viewer's curiosity to know how things work, to look backstage with prurience' (Golder, 83). Just like Catholic Christianity in Baroque Spain and the condemnation of actresses in nineteenth-century England, theatrical traditions in seventeenth-century France were well established norms when they stimulated playwrights to write metatheatre. In contrast, Nellhaus' 'Social Ontology and (Meta)theatricality: Reflexions on Performance and Communication in History' (2000) examines the effect of changing socio-cultural elements on metatheatre.

Nellhaus suggests an analogous relationship between what he calls 'social dynamics' and theatrical performance. He defines social dynamics to include three levels: Discourses (theories and fictions); Agents (people and their actions); and Structures (economics). According to Nellhaus, the equivalents of these three levels of social dynamics within the performance are, respectively, theatrical level (actors/audience relation), dramatic level (characters, plots ...etc.), and scriptive level (plays, ideas). In addition, he claims that any change in certain social structures should generate changes in performance strategies (Nellhaus, 14-18). By applying his model to the English Renaissance, Nellhaus



claims that the transformation from the culture of manuscript to the printing era provoked Ben Jonson to emphasise his authority as the owner of the meaning of the play through his connoted presence in the text. Nellhaus affirms that 'in several plays (such as *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and *The New Inn*) he [Jonson] includes a character who is much like himself. [...] In the plays' prefaces and prologues, he presents himself through his opinions' (Nellhaus, 7). In this respect, Nellhaus seems to suggest that metadramas extend their self-reflexivity by referring to playwrights themselves.<sup>24</sup>

As the previous examples suggest, focusing on historical circumstances usually leads to a consideration of the function of metatheatricality, which in its turn was gradually foregrounded to shape the third route of studying metatheatre, a further divergence from Abel's formalist vision.

## **Spotlighting the purpose: the function of metatheatricality**

### **a. the significance of the audience**

The function of metatheatre essentially focuses on, and concerns the effect of metadramas on their audience. In this context, Hornby, Newey and Golder insist on the crucial role of spectators in realising metatheatricality. For instance, Newey claims:

Some of the most clearly metatheatrical plays of the nineteenth century stage were comedies, which, typically, included a satirised or burlesqued melodrama as a play within a play. [...] These apparently naïve comedies rely on a knowledgeable audience, confident in its understanding of and participation in theatrical conventions, and able to recognise the comic disruptions to performance and its medium. (Newey, 87)

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<sup>24</sup> The conflation between Jonson's own opinions and his dramatic character's speeches is polemical. However, perhaps Nellhaus is influenced by many studies' reading of comments on theatre within Jonson's plays as part of Jonson's exchanged revenge with John Marston by the end of the Sixteenth Century. For a detailed discussion about what is called 'Poetomachia' or the 'Poets' War', see Bednarz. In general, it seems that plays' inclusion of characters of authors encourages critics to suppose that these characters represent the dramatists themselves. Similar to Nellhaus, June Schlueter, Hornby, and Mary Ann Witt respectively identify Shaw, Chekhov, and Cocteau with dramatic characters within their plays. See Schlueter 2 – 3, Hornby 92, and Witt 155. As far as my reading of the plays studied in this thesis is concerned, it is usually difficult to define playwrights' points of view, especially when several dramatic characters give contradictory opinions on the same theatrical matter.

Newey's observation suggests that when a metadrama includes references to other plays, the difficulty of spectators' recognition of its self-reflexivity significantly increases.

In 'Metatheatre and the Comedia: Past, Present, and Future' (1999), Catherine Larson argues that 'The most recent studies of metadrama tend to concern themselves less with questions of generic purity and more with issues of contemporary interest: what metadramas do and how they are perceived by their audiences' (Larson, 212). The most significant part of Larson's opinion is her suggestion that the growing concentration on the purpose of metatheatrical technique echoed a general turn in the focus of literary research on the process of reception. Such a claim can be understood in the frame of the emergence of the theories of the Reader-response, which reached its peak with the writings of theorists such as Norman N. Holland, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss between the late 1960s and the early 1980s.<sup>25</sup>

June Schlueter's *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama* (1977) is one of the earliest examples of such a trend. Although she adopts the notion of self-conscious characters, Schlueter contradicts Abel by arguing that playwrights purposely create self-referential characters. Throughout a group of modern plays such as Pirandello's *Henry IV*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Genet's *The Maids*, and Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Schlueter identifies self-conscious theatre as 'supremely aware of itself as artifice and is unabashedly self-reflective' (Schlueter, 3). Thus, playwrights deliberately write metadramas to achieve a specific purpose which, in this case, is revealing the dialectical relationship between life (reality, actor) and art (illusion, character) in different ways. Schlueter's suggestion of the function is still limited by Abel's argument about the two philosophical bases that regulate the Baroque viewpoint. However, instead of Abel's suggestion that the playwrights' awareness of the relationship between the world/life and stage/dream is the cause for writing metatheatrical plays, Schlueter claims that the audience's realisation of this debatable relationship is the purpose of writing modern metadrama.

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<sup>25</sup> Many scholars consider that studies of the reader-response emerged as a contradictory reaction to the formalist aspects of the New Criticism. For examples of such a claim, see Matterson 174, and Tompkins ix.

More recent examination of the function of metatheatrical techniques can be found in Ringer's study of Sophocles, where he assumes that the metatheatrical technique of role-playing increases the amusement of spectators. He argues:

An audience's experience becomes doubly exciting when characters within a play assume roles in addition to their main assignments. I call this kind of metatheatrical occurrence role-playing-within-the-role, wherein a character becomes an "internal actor," a doubly theatrical figure in acting a deceptive role as part of the "actual" role. (Ringer, 8)

Although Ringer draws direct links between the metatheatrical technique of role-playing and its impact on spectators, what he describes as the audience's double excitement is hard to measure or prove by tangible evidence.

The focus on the function of metatheatrical techniques, though, is not a mere result of the increasing consideration of their impact on spectators. In a contradictory response to Abel's combining both the Baroque and modern plays under the same title of metadrama, many of the post-Abel scholars claim that modern metadrama uses self-referential techniques—mainly the play-within-the-play—in order to change overriding theatrical forms that adopt Aristotelian conventions. Accordingly, the use of metatheatrical techniques works as a critique of Aristotelian traditions. Such a vision of a functional metatheatre, I argue, was hugely influenced by both Brechtian theory and practice.<sup>26</sup>

#### **b. Reformative function: from a change of society to a critique of theatre**

On one hand, Brechtian anti-illusionist aspects enabled scholars, including Abel himself, to consider Brecht's plays as examples of metadramas. On the other hand, Brechtian utilisation of anti-illusionism as means of social and political change, rather than a self-contained formalist method, seemingly inspired post-Abel scholars to search for, and to define a function of metatheatricity. However, instead of reforming society, the function of metatheatricity was seen by some post-Abel studies as reforming theatre. In this respect, it seems useful to look at the notion of metatheatre within the

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<sup>26</sup> Likewise, several studies of metafiction utilise Brechtian theory to define the function of self-reference within narrative works. For examples, see Hutcheon 1985, 1991, and 2002, and Mazurek.

studies of both Abel and his successors through the lens of Brechtian metatheatricity.

Brechtian theatre contradicts Abel's concept of metatheatre. While Abel limitedly emphasises on dramatic characters, the self-reference in Brecht's theatre is achieved by every single dramatic and theatrical element. For instance, Brecht intentionally reveals the lighting equipment as Michael Patterson declares: 'Of particular importance for Brecht was that the source of lights should be visible to the audience' (Patterson, 169). In this case, the members of audience are forced to realise the theatrical device instead of just watching its make-believe effect, recognising the intention was to induce them to be alert. Another metatheatrical way to control an audience's awareness using lights is mentioned by Ronald Gray, who explains that Brecht 'often required very strong illumination of the stage throughout, even in night-time scenes, to avoid giving the spectator any opportunity of sinking into reverie or of feeling himself linked in the darkness with those around him' (Gray, 67). Brecht's employment of lights as a method of arousing his audience's consciousness echoes his other anti-illusionist dramatic and theatrical elements, such as the style of acting he called for, and his mode of scenographic design. While every single element keeps 'declaring its own artifice' (Brooker 2006, 215), all of them contribute to the didactic function of Brecht's theatre.

Abel himself refers to the organic unity among different self-referential dramatic and theatrical elements in Brechtian theatre. He affirms that Brecht 'took care to order not only his plays but also their décor and the style of acting he needed for them. He introduced an antinaturalistic logic into acting and stage design as well as into his own dramatic construction' (Abel 2003, 182). Nevertheless, Abel only focuses on the role of the actors in Brechtian theatre. Perhaps, because of their essential association with dramatic characters whose self-consciousness is the essence of Abel's concept of metatheatre, Abel claims that 'Brecht's most characteristic theatrical device [...] was his deliberate insistence that feelings be played by his actors as if they were acted and not directly felt' (Abel 2003, 163).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For a detailed discussion on the role of actors in Brecht's theatre as one of the methods of achieving self-referential *Verfremdungseffekt*, see the studies of Rouse and Eddershaw.

Brecht's insistence on the self-awareness of the actor, not the character, is highlighted by J. L. Styan. In the introduction to his 1986 study *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, Styan argues:

Comedy works, as Brecht confirmed, when an audience is not emotionally involved with the drama, [...] he is given the freedom to laugh. In the new jargon, we are skirting the hazy but exhilarating universe of 'metatheatre', where actor and audience alike self-consciously indulge the imaginative pleasures of dramatic pretence. Actors in their masks of character let it be known that *they* know they are on stage. (Styan 1998, 13)

Styan's claim suggests that actors and spectators share both the self-consciousness of the theatrical artifice and the 'pleasure' of revealing/realising such 'pretence', which seems to be a function of metatheatricality within the Restoration Comedy.

Apart from Abel's simplified explanation of Brecht's theatre in order to fit his concept, Abel hints at the social role of metatheatricality in highlighting the political message suggested by the verbal content of Brecht's dramatic text by referring to Brecht's 'idea of interfering with, interrupting, restraining the response of the spectator' (Abel 2003, 164). Nonetheless, just like his claim of the purposelessness in self-reference of the Baroque theatre, Abel considers that the effect on the audience of Brecht's plays is itself the ultimate goal of metatheatricality. In what seems to repeat his unproven claims about Shakespeare's failure in writing tragedy, Abel speculates Brecht's intentions by claiming that

Perhaps Brecht did not want this to happen, and I think it correct to say he did not want this to happen because of his political views. [...] Certainly, Brecht's idea of recalling the spectator from involvement would be a contradictory one had Brecht been trying to write tragedy or realism; it is not contradictory, considering that what he actually wrote was metatheatre. (Abel 2003, 164)

The most noticeable problem that faces this attempt to confine Brecht's theatre within the formalist notion of metatheatre appears when Abel insists on linking Brecht's theatre with the two hypotheses of metatheatre: 'the world is a stage' and 'life is a dream'. Abel claims:

Now I am not going to assert that Brecht entertained either of these postulates as truths to be demonstrated by his work. What I do claim is that Brecht, by having rejected the significance of the individual and of moral experience, had to rely on these concepts to give his plays form. (Abel 2003, 163)

Abel suggests that, because Brecht's theatre contradicts both moral suffering in tragedy and the suffering of individual characters in Realistic plays, he adopts the form of metatheatre, which means, according to Abel, that Brecht's theatre indirectly relies on metatheatre's binary philosophical foundation.

More polemically, Abel seems to suggest that Brecht was in denial, or unaware of his belief on the conditions of writing metatheatre. Abel argues: 'Could this hardheaded, practical-minded man have believed that life is a dream? [...] I do not think he would have consciously asserted any such thing' (Abel 2003, 163). In addition to basing his verdict on Brecht's personality, not works, this controversial claim seems to lead to a fallacy that deliberately neglects all political, philosophical, and artistic influences on Brecht's theory such as Marxist ideology, Hegelian dialectic, and East Asian theatre, respectively.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from Abel, Brechtian purposeful metatheatricality seems to encourage other studies to consider the function of metatheatricality within modern metadramas as an opposition, critique, and a response to specific problems of theatre practice. Claims of the critical attitude of metatheatrical techniques in modern drama can be found in Emanuele Licastro's '*Six Characters in Search of an Author and its Critique of Traditional Theatre: Mimesis and Metamimesis*' (1991). As the title of the study suggests, Licastro argues that metatheatricality, which he calls metamimesis, by its nature challenges the illusionist theatre. Before exploring Pirandello's play, the study traces such a confrontation within Lope de Vega's *Lo fingido verdadero* to which Licastro applies Abel's notion of the self-conscious characters.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Through my brief exploration of Brechtian functional use of metatheatrical techniques, it seems impossible to give a detailed record of the large number of studies that explore sources for influence on Brecht's theory and plays. Including Russian Formalism, examples of cultural, political and theatrical influences on Brecht can be found in the studies of Kiebuszinska and Tsubaki.

<sup>29</sup> Although Abel refers to Lope de Vega as a writer of metadrama several times, his study does not mention any of the Spanish playwright's plays. Investigating the play-within-the-play and role-playing within *Lo fingido verdadero* can be found in Newberry, within which, nevertheless, Abel's notion of metadrama is not mentioned. Instead, Newberry's study traces features of Pirandello's theatre within the works of Spanish writers before and after the Italian playwright.

However, the study limits this awareness to characters' theatricality and ignores Abel's controversial claim about the playwright/director character. In addition, Licastro focuses on using the play-within-the-play as a vital method of contradicting traditional theatre. Supporting his claim by adopting Raymond Williams' statement about the decisive role of *Six Characters* in raising questions about Naturalistic conventions, Licastro states that Pirandello 'converts the stage from a pseudonatural space into formal artistic space; he too flattens the realistic person-character into timeless characters' (Licastro, 211).<sup>30</sup>

More analytically, Elinor Fuchs's 2001 study 'Clown Shows: Anti-Theatricalist Theatricalism in Four Twentieth-Century Plays' suggests a new approach to describe metadrama, which she calls 'theatricalist plays'. She argues that 'the structures of theatricalist [metatheatrical] plays are indebted to Plato's epistemology of ontological levels.'<sup>31</sup> Dramatic conflict in such plays arises from the contest between planes of representation depicting 'more real' and 'less real' ontologies' (Fuchs 2007, 55). From Plato's standpoint, the perceived world is just an image of the ideal world, which is created by gods. Consequently, any artistic work cannot be more than an imitation of these images; separated from the truth/the ideal by two levels.

On the grounds of Fuchs's use of the platonic model, any metadrama includes three levels of reality. In addition to the real world of the real audience, which Fuchs calls the 'Real real' (Fuchs 2007, 48), there are two levels of reality within the play itself. If we apply this thought to the play-within-the-play, for instance, the outer play as the second level of reality is less real than the 'Real real'. Yet, this outer play is more real than the inner play as the third level of reality.

Such an explanation enables Fuchs to consider Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a metatheatre—or 'theatricalist play' if I use Fuchs's terminology—alongside a group of modern plays such as Genet's *The Blacks* (1958), Handke's *Kaspar* (1967), Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* (1977), and Suzan-Lori Parks' *The America Play* (1994). However, she claims that these modern plays—unlike Shakespeare's—are 'anti-theatricalist' plays which 'cultivate a

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<sup>30</sup> For more details about Raymond Williams' opinion on the significance of Pirandello's play, see Williams 1969.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed explanation of Plato's three-level scheme, see Andriopoulos.

true dis-illusion, a final understanding of the theatrical event that is deeply suspicious of the activity and metaphors of theatre' (Fuchs 2007, 48).<sup>32</sup> Thus, for Fuchs, what distinguishes the Baroque metatheatre from its modern successors is the latter's elements of dis-illusion.

In *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality, and Drama* (2002), Puchner develops Fuchs's thought of discrepancy to a kind of progression. Throughout wide-scope examinations of some works of Yeats, Brecht, and Beckett alongside the theories of Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin, Puchner tries to draw an image of modernist anti-theatricalism which, as stated by him, 'becomes a productive force responsible for the theatre's most glorious achievements' (Puchner 2002, 13). In this sense, metatheatrical techniques seem to function as a revolutionary way to enhance the art of theatre in general. Moreover, in his introduction to Lionel Abel's *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form* (2003), Puchner suggests that there are two different types of metatheatre:

The term metatheatre tells us that the theatre reflects on itself, but it does not yet tell us anything about the spirit in which this self-reflexivity occurs; in other words, it does not tell us whether the theatre is viewed with approval or suspicion. It may be that the theatre is simply delighted with itself, but it might also be that the theatre is rather self-critical, and self-critique is precisely the mark of much of modernist metatheatre. (Puchner 2003, 17-18)

Thus, self-critical metatheatre is the modernist version of the Baroque self-approving, or self-adoring, metatheatre.

To distinguish the playwrights of modern metadrama such as Pirandello and Brecht from Shakespeare and Calderón, Puchner seems to recycle Abel's thought about playwrights' consciousness. Puchner argues:

Their important difference from their baroque relatives [...] is that far from celebrating the theatre, these modernist playwrights view the theatre with mistrust and suspicion. [...] Modernist playwrights are still self-aware, but what this means for them is that they are all too aware of how problematic theatre really is. (Puchner 2003, 17)

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<sup>32</sup> Although Fuchs' study was first published in 2001, it was reprinted in an anthology in 2007 from which my thesis quotes.



In this sense, the awareness of modern playwrights extends to include their recognition of theatre's need for reform, which they seek to achieve through self-critique. Thus, Puchner creates a compromise between Abel's abstract notion and the historical state of theatre. As the title of Pérez-Simón's article 'The Concept of Metatheatre: A Functional Approach' (2011) suggests, he considers modern drama's use of metatheatrical techniques as means of reforming theatre. Pérez-Simón describes modern metatheatre, especially in Pirandello and Brecht, as 'anti-illusionist', which means 'self-reflectivity, a critical relationship to previous models' (Pérez-Simón, 3). Pérez-Simón's stance combines Puchner's view of the self-critique with Fuchs's insistence on the 'dis-illusionist' attitude of Modern drama.

Such a reformative, self-critique function of metatheatre can be understood on the grounds of the state of theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. Puchner recalls the attempts of many directors and theorists, including scene designers and composers such as Edward Gordon Craig, Oskar Schlemmer, Nicolai Foregger, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Adolphe Appia, Nikolai Evreinov, and Jacques Copeau to save theatre which, according to them, was suffering from 'the greed of theatre managers, the vanity of star actors, the hackwork of dramatists, and the vulgar tastes of audiences' (Puchner 2002, 6). For instance, while Artaud was searching for the intrinsic nature of theatre in the early 1930s, he developed a notion of theatre that emphasises the visual elements rather than the dialogue. Artaud affirms:

I maintain the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language. I maintain that this physical language, aimed at the senses and independent of speech, must first satisfy the senses. There must be poetry for the senses just as there is for speech, but this physical, tangible language I am referring to is really only theatrical insofar as the thought it expresses escapes spoken language.<sup>33</sup> (Artaud 2010, 26)

Only by depending on its essence of non-verbal languages, will theatre be able to create this 'poetry for the senses'. Artaud's call reflects a gradually increasing trend to marginalise the role of dramatic texts.

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<sup>33</sup> Artaud firstly introduced his revolutionary thoughts about theatre in his essay 'The Theatre of Cruelty: First manifesto' (1932).

On this basis, we can understand why Puchner claims that playwrights were considered part of theatre's problems. Josette Féral declares:

What had been a clearly defined theatrical aesthetic at the end of the 19th century, outlining normative practice, was, during the 20th century, systematically reexamined. [...] At the same time, stage practice began to distance itself from the text, assigning it a new place in the theatrical enterprise. Once under siege, the text was no longer able to guarantee the theatricality of the stage'. (Féral, 94)

As Féral suggests, the dominance of dramatic texts was an important part of the problem that confronted directors and theorists. In this context, the claim that metatheatricality was a critique of the dominant traditions of theatre, mainly Aristotelian illusionism, can be considered as playwrights' participation in solving theatre crisis. Put differently, adopting metatheatrical techniques was the playwrights' equivalent to the directors' experimental practice in order to reform theatre.<sup>34</sup>

Such equivalence can be indirectly realised within David Roberts' 2007 article 'The Play within the Play and the Closure of Representation' wherein Puchner's dichotomy of self-referential approval/critique is applied to Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*.<sup>35</sup> Roberts commences his exploration of the binary purposes of self-reference from Jacques Derrida's interpretation of Artaud. The core thought of Derrida's comment on Artaud is the latter's insistence that theatre must not represent reality. Instead, the only thing that theatre might represent is theatre itself. Roberts claims that the only possible way to achieve such a paradoxical call is metadrama. In Roberts' opinion, using the play-within-the-play involves a reduplication which simultaneously affirms and challenges the process of representation. He argues that

[O]n the one hand reduplication can produce a *self-critique* of representation; on the other hand, it can produce a *self-*

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<sup>34</sup> Apart from the wide, sometimes vague, spectrum of meanings related to the expression 'experimental theatre', I exclusively use it to describe dramaturgical and performative anti-Naturalistic aesthetics during the first half of the twentieth century, which accord with Andrew Webber's description of the European avant-garde during 'the first four decades of the twentieth century' as 'radical experimentation', which itself is based on Peter Bürger's notion of 'historical avant-garde movements', which both scholars distinguish from the 'neo-avant-garde' trends during the second half of the twentieth century. For more information, see Webber 1 – 16, Bürger 1984, and Bürger 2010.

<sup>35</sup> *Der Besuch der Alten Dame* (*The Visit of the Old Lady*) was written in 1956.

*affirmation* of representation. These two possibilities are familiar as the two basic types of metadrama: the inset drama, the play-within-a-play, and the framed drama, the *theatrum mundi* or World Theatre. (Roberts, 38)

Because he establishes his argument from Artaud's vision of theatre as a self-contained structure, Roberts narrows Puchner's notion of self-critique. Instead of being a method by which the self-referential play censoriously comments on the art of theatre, Roberts reduces it to a formalist element that shapes the relationship between the two components of the metatheatrical technique of the-play-within-the-play. Therefore, Roberts' study is another critique of Abel that focuses on metatheatrical techniques rather than the notion of dramatic characters' self-consciousness, but these techniques are seen as purposeless outside the closed structure of metadramas. Such an observation, again, reveals the eclectic nature of many studies of metatheatricality in terms of the three main oppositions to Abel, namely the focus on techniques, the historical contexts and the function of metatheatricality.

From exploring the attempts to specify the *function* of metadramas, we can conclude that some of these studies' quests lead them to consider historical circumstances of theatre. As far as these studies are concerned, playwrights' adoption of metatheatricality shapes a *self-critical* reformatory response to a crisis that faced the art of theatre in their time. However, scholars such as Puchner, Roberts and Pérez-Simón reduce the function of Brecht's metadrama to a method of theatrical reform per se rather than a political enlightenment.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, and most importantly, this suggests a relationship between metatheatricality's intrinsically self-critical function and the turbulent state of theatre at a given moment in history that is convincing. However, it ignores the fact that examples of metadramas can be found in earlier theatre, centuries before the early decades of the twentieth century, modern drama and Brecht. Furthermore, the ability to utilise metatheatricality as a method of self-critique within some of these examples extends beyond the indirect challenge of dramatic illusionism to involve the content of characters' dialogue.

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<sup>36</sup> In contrast, focusing on the inseparable relationship between the political function of Brecht's plays and his use of metatheatrical techniques is mentioned in Foster 162, and Orbison 95.

### Literary-criticism-within-the-play

In Aristophanes' *Festival Time* (411 BC), the Athenian women seek revenge from the tragic writer Euripides because of the negative image of all his heroines, which contradicts, as the women believe, reality. Apart from the tiny hint of feminist gesture, the play raises the matter of the relationship between theatre and its society. Later in 405 BC, Aristophanes extended the critical content in *The Frogs*. In this play, the styles of Aeschylus and Euripides are judged by Dionysus, the Greek god who comes to Hades to bring one poet back to the world. The discussion between the two dead writers of tragedy takes the shape of a competitive debate that covers several aesthetic and theatrical topics. In these two examples, the self-critique is more complicated than only using dis-illusionist techniques; it involves the dramatic characters' dialogue, which seems to be an aesthetic and theatrical discourse of criticism. That explains why Georg Lukács describes the critical discussion within *The Frogs* as 'literary criticism within literary contexts' (Lukács, 204).

In 1939, decades before the emergence of terms such as metatheatre or metafiction, in his article 'Schriftsteller und Kritiker'<sup>37</sup> (Writer and Critic), Lukács comments on the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' play. Lukács wonders: 'does it not provide an acute analysis of the social, moral and aesthetic factors in the dissolution of Greek tragedy, in the demise of the tragic era?' (Lukács, 204). In addition to drawing our attention to the existence of this type of 'literary criticism' within literary texts as early as Aristophanes' plays, Lukács' observation highlights the impact of the decline of tragedy as an historical circumstance that contextualises Aristophanes' utilisation of his dramatic characters in order to comment on a contemporary matter of theatre.

Since Aristophanes, consecutive examples of what Lukács calls 'literary criticism' can be found within a large number of European plays such as Molière's *Impromptu of Versailles* (1663), Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779), and Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in 1895. Furthermore, the Baroque era, whose self-referential plays are described by Puchner as approving, to differentiate them from self-critical modern metadrama, contains similar 'literary criticism'. In his comment on *Hamlet*, Lukács argues:

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<sup>37</sup> The article was reprinted in *Probleme des Realismus*. Berlin: Claassen-Verlag, 1955: 271-284, which was published under the name of György Lukács. The article was translated into English by Arthur Kahn and first published in New York by Grosset and Dunlap in 1971.

What are Hamlet's Speech to the players and his subsequent Hecuba monologue (apart from their dramatic and poetic significance) but extraordinarily profound theoretical disquisitions on the aesthetics of the drama and, even more, on the relationship of art to reality? (Lukács, 204)

Here, Lukács insists on Shakespeare's ability not only to assume the role of a critic, or a theorist, who includes his insightful opinions on matters of criticism within his plays, but also to maintain artistic values. This seems to be a key attribute of all critic-writers. Lukács argues:

Examples of such literary criticism within literary contexts are numberless. From the Hamlet discussions in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* through Balzac to Tolstoy and Gorki there is an unbroken chain of splendid examples of this organic unity of literary effectiveness and theoretical insight. (Lukács, 204)

Thus, in addition to being an old phenomenon, literary criticism within texts has been utilised by prominent writers in many eras in order to reflect on matters of criticism. Moreover, while literary criticism within both narrative and dramatic texts may involve self-critique of negative aspects of contemporaneous theatre, its content usually extends beyond such a critique to include a kind of theorisation in more general matters of literary and theatrical aesthetics or practice that concerns the writers of these texts in which the discourse of criticism is included.

If Lukács was the first to mention the inclusion of literary criticism within literary works, in which he includes dramatic texts, Hornby takes a further step by considering such a critical discourse within dramatic texts as a metatheatrical device.<sup>38</sup> Under the title: 'Literary and Real-Life Reference', the fifth chapter of Hornby's study defines adaptation, allegory, parody, and citation as four forms of referring to other literary or theatrical works. Thus, Hornby expands metatheatrical methods to include verbal devices as well as formalist techniques, which, I repeat explains why Hornby uses the word 'Varieties' rather than 'techniques' to describe metatheatrical devices. The most striking feature of Hornby's explanation of these literary references is his insistence that within some plays these references are 'used as a form of literary criticism' (Hornby,

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<sup>38</sup>*Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* does not include any reference to Lukács.

91).<sup>39</sup> In other words, a play may utilise literary or theatrical references, as a metadramatic device, without including literary or theatrical criticism, which is the case with the Captain's comment on *Ghosts* within *The Father*.

According to Hornby, the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism can be found within plays such as Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*, Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Giving an example of theatrical criticism within metadrama, Hornby argues that Hamlet's speech to actors, in which he asks them to avoid some of acting's defects, 'was in part an attack on the grandiose acting style of Edward Alleyn, the leading actor of the Lord Admiral's Men, the principal rivals of Shakespeare's company' (Hornby, 92). The Elizabethan audience was likely to realise the indirect scorn within Shakespeare's instructions to the actors, which, according to Hornby, was simultaneously, 'a positive commentary on the more restrained acting of Richard Burbage, who played the part of Hamlet and thus spoke these very words' (Hornby, 92). Here, Hornby underlines the possibility of the playwright's subjective purpose as a reason for using the metadramatic device of theatrical criticism.

In this sense, Hamlet's comments on acting can be considered a kind of intentional critical statement that reflects the opinion of Hamlet, and perhaps Shakespeare, on acting in general and, specifically on the acting in his time. That explains why Anne Barton in her study *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, which was first published in 1962, argues that

The relationship of world and stage is reciprocal: the actor holds a mirror up to nature, but the latter in its turn reflects the features of the play. Basically dissimilar though they are, illusion and reality meet at innumerable points. In *Hamlet*, these meeting-places tend to refer either directly or indirectly to the contemporary stage. (Barton 1977, 158-9)

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<sup>39</sup> Hornby combines both literary and theatrical criticism as a metadramatic device. However, he differentiates between them when he gives examples of dramatic texts. While Hornby describes dramatic characters' comments on dramaturgical aspects as literary criticism, he calls characters' discussions of performative matters, such as acting, a theatrical criticism. Despite the claim that most plays are able to be read as literary works, my thesis considers dramatic texts' intrinsically included aspects of performance. In addition, dramatic characters' comments on both dramaturgical and theatrical matters overlap within dramatic texts. Therefore, my thesis explores literary and theatrical criticism as interactive components of plays' response to, and comment on, features of theatre profession, including contexts of both production and reception. Such features in turn reflect on historical and cultural circumstances at the time of playwrights.

Although Barton's study does not focus on the purpose of metatheatrical techniques, which she considers as manifestations of the world/stage duality, the remarkable point of Barton's claim—similar to Newey's insistence on the benefits of understanding the metatheatricality of the Victorian popular stage and Golder's observation about the seventeenth-century French theatre—is its suggestion that *Hamlet* reveals aspects of the Elizabethan theatre specifically. Such an ability to reveal features of the state of the current theatre industry is a significant gain from studying plays about theatre, where the theatre profession is represented, in general and, in particular, when metadramas include literary and theatrical criticism that comments on such a profession, whether allusively or directly.

It is hard to affirm whether Hamlet's advice to the actors was provoked by Shakespeare's intention to attack his rival, to criticise a specific type of acting, or perhaps both. In either case, the introduction of an alternative way to perform reveals that *Hamlet*/Shakespeare recognises a deficiency, and suggests a rectification. Thus the play's reformative function goes further than being a self-critique of illusionist theatre. In other words, the function of literary and theatrical criticism seems more akin to Brechtian purposeful utilisation of metatheatricality than a mere self-reflexive comment on illusionist theatre, which was adopted by Licastro, Fuchs, Puchner, Roberts, and Pérez-Simón.

I do not claim that Shakespeare intentionally exploits Hamlet's speech to contradict illusionist theatre, or to achieve Brechtian-like political purpose. What I am insisting on here is that, by representing, evaluating, and preferring one of the two styles of acting within its time, *Hamlet* encourages its audience to realise, compare, and perhaps compose an opinion on an acting-related theatrical matter.<sup>40</sup>

According to Hornby, 'Literary and Real-Life Reference', just like all the 'Varieties of the metadramatic', intrinsically breaks dramatic illusionism. He argues that 'the imaginary world of the main play is disrupted by a reminder of its relation, as a literary construct, to another literary work or works' (Hornby, 88). Such interruption of the 'imaginary world of the main play' by the literary/theatrical reference is achieved whether this reference includes critical comments or not. Put differently, even when the literary reference within the

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<sup>40</sup> For detailed discussions of the link between the metatheatricality of Shakespeare and Brecht, see the studies of Edelman, Morley, and Faber.

play is not ‘used as a form of literary criticism’, spectators realise that the action of the play they watch is ‘disrupted’. Hornby argues:

This direct reference to Ibsen’s well-known play *Ghosts* [...] has the effect of a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, breaking the dramatic illusion for a didactic purpose, in this case to emphasize Strindberg’s anti-feminist message. The play stops being a play for a moment, as the audience is reminded of Ibsen, his feminism, and Strindberg’s notorious opposition to it. (Hornby, 88)

This retrospective utilisation of Brecht’s notion to read the literary reference within Strindberg’s play is extended by Hornby’s explanation of the effect of including literary criticism within *The Seagull* on its audience. He argues that ‘when literary citation within the play moves toward literary criticism, ... [its] audience cannot help but apply the same standards that are being propounded against the play itself’ (Hornby, 92). Thus, spectators are invited to see the play in a wider context than its imaginary plot. In other words, they practice the role of a critic, whose criteria are suggested by the literary criticism within the play itself.

Commenting on Treplev’s speech in Chekhov’s play, within which the dramatic character compares both his own vision and style of theatre with Trigorin’s, Hornby argues:

[T]his speech not only turns the audience’s attention to the writing of the characters Trigorin and Treplev, it also turns their attention to the play they have been watching, which follows the “Trigorin” style—except for the symbolist play within the play, by Treplev. The metadramatic effect is enhanced by the fact that this Trigorin bears strong resemblances to Chekhov himself. (Hornby, 92)

The most significant point of Hornby’s comment is his explanation of the effect of literary criticism within the play on spectators. As Hornby suggests, the audience of *The Seagull* is urged to utilise their critical minds to think of the ‘style’ of Chekhov/Trigorin as it is manifested in the play itself. Moreover, spectators are invited to compare this ‘style’ with an alternative ‘non-representative’ theatre suggested by both Treplev’s speech and the show which occupies the inner play.



Such a reading of the function of literary and theatrical criticism seems to replace the Brechtian audience's socio-politically driven thinking of political matters by theoretical consideration of literal and theatrical issues. Thus literary and theatrical criticism within a metadrama makes its audience critically aware. Firstly, by revealing the play's artifice it distances the spectators from the imaginary realm of the plot. Then by dramatic characters' discussions of matters of literary and theatrical criticism, the play urges its audience to think and perhaps composes an opinion. Put differently, literary and theatrical criticism within the play literally turns its spectators into literary and theatrical critics.

The controversial claim of the similarity between Chekhov and his character seems to be a result of Hornby's disregard of the historical circumstances that urge playwrights to include literary and theatrical criticism within their plays. Ignoring such contexts seems to suggest that the rationale of addressing theoretical matters within plays is limited to individual playwrights' opinions. I argue that although playwrights' own opinions may tint their dramatic characters' discussions of critical matters, the most important aspect of literary and theatrical criticism within plays is that it reflects on general interest in factual debates by academics, critics, and practitioners, which include discrepant standpoints. That is what Robert Sholes suggests when he claims that 'when a novel assimilates critical perspective it acquires the power not only to act as commentary on other fictions, but also to incorporate insights normally formulated externally in critical discourse' (Sholes, 21). Considering the discrepancy of opinions that shape this 'externally formulated discourse' may explain why playwrights choose to address critical matters in the form of dramatic characters' discussions in the first place rather than in articles or books.

Therefore, it seems necessary to read dramatic characters' discussions of literary and theatrical matters within *The Seagull* as a result of, and a response to socio-cultural circumstances, including the state of current theatre in Russia by the end of the nineteenth century whose last decade witnessed a fierce debate among Russian critics, artists and writers on the social function of art and literature. On one side, an increasing call for political literature was a

response to the soaring spread of Marxist thought, within which literature is supposed to have a vital role in changing societies.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, the Russian Symbolists were insisting that literature had to be not only apolitical but also independent from all sorts of thoughts. Avril Pyman argues that the line 'A thought, once spoken, is a lie', from Fëdor Tyútchev's poem *Silentium*, was chosen by Symbolists to be their motto (Pyman, 10). In the heart of this cultural dispute, Russian theatre has been suffering from several problems. Richard Gilman explains:

[T]he theatre Chekhov was nourished on and that continued to surround him even after his own plays ought to have shattered all complacencies was in almost every one of its sectors a place of banality and contrivance. Chekhov was thoroughly aware of this state of affairs. His notebooks and correspondence are full of disparaging references to the stage in Russia. (Gilman 1999, 124)

As Gilman's comment suggests, Chekhov's 'notebooks and correspondence' indicate the playwright's awareness of, and opinions on the crisis that faced the Russian theatre at his time.

Similarly, the studies of Chekhov's theatre that focus on these historical circumstances can help in realising the playwright's standpoint, which can be described as neither Marxist nor Symbolist. For instance, Emma Polotskaya argues that 'Chekhov's rejection of the class-oriented model of change, as well as of all forms of violence, made it impossible for him to accept the revolution which he felt was about to break out' (Polotskaya, 27). On the other hand, Milton Ehre claims that:

Chekhov wrote his major plays at a time when Russian poetry was enjoying a revival. Russian decadence and symbolism (the terms were used interchangeably) dominated the scene roughly from 1894 to 1910. Chekhov rejected the aestheticism of decadence and the mysticism of Russian symbolism. (Ehre, 7)

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<sup>41</sup> Marx's writings include *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), and *Capital* by its three volumes: *Critique of Political Economy* (1867), *The Process of Circulation of Capital* (1885), and *The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole* (1894). The second and third volumes were published by Friedrich Engels after Marx's death to contain a combination of his earlier thoughts.

Such observations may function as suggestions of the reasons for Chekhov's inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within his play in general and for raising specific matters in particular. In other words, the role of these historical circumstances in reading *The Seagull* is limited to contextualise and to explain what characters' speeches within the play suggest.

In their turn, these textual evidences of literary and theatrical criticism within the play must be considered as a whole whose parts cooperate to shape the overall comment of the play on these socially and culturally influenced literary and theatrical matters. For instance, it is important to realise that Treplev's opinions change through the play. At the beginning of the first act of *The Seagull* he argues that 'modern theatre is nothing but tradition and conventionality. [...] We need new forms of expression. We need new forms, and if we can't have them we had better have nothing' (Chekhov, 350). However, in what seems to be a confession, a reevaluation of his earlier claim, a few moments before he ends his life, Treplev declares 'I have talked so much about new forms and now I feel that little by little I am falling into a convention myself' (Chekhov, 414). Whether Treplev's gradual conversion to write against his earlier beliefs is conscious or not, he is aware that writing according to conventions is the reason for his relative success, which Polina describes in her statement: 'No one would have guessed or thought that you would have become a real author, Kostya.<sup>42</sup> And now, thank God, they send you money from the magazines' (Chekhov 402). Out of all dramatic characters of the play, Polina's interest in artistic and literary matters is the least.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, her evaluation of Treplev's success is limited to the fact that he gets money for what he writes.

Although Treplev desperately needs both money and recognition, he seems unable to betray his dream of writing non-realistic theatre. However his play, as an attempt to achieve this anti-conventional form, is repeatedly described by Madam Arkadin, his mother, as 'decadent' and 'delirium'. Treplev predicted his mother's reaction to his play, which he thinks a well-known actress' jealousy of Nina, his play's heroin whom he loves. Treplev argues that his mother 'is annoyed to think that even on this little stage Nina will have a

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<sup>42</sup> Kostya is the shortened version of Konstantin, Treplev's first name.

<sup>43</sup> Even Polina's husband, Shamraev, who is the steward of Sorin, Madam Arkadin's brother, gives opinions on acting and operatic singing.

triumph and not she' (Chekhov, 349). Gilman goes further by suggesting that the mother is against Treplev himself. Gilman affirms that Madam Arkadin is 'clearly disgruntled by her son's having dared to step onto her territory' (Gilman 1995, 82). Perhaps she is also worried that Trigorin can be 'annoyed' because Treplev 'dared' to invade the famous playwright's 'territory'. Apart from Madam Arkadin's undeclared motives for interrupting her son's play, what literary and theatrical criticism within *The Seagull* insists on is that her negative verdict is not completely subjective. Moreover, she is not the only character who has a negative opinion on Treplev's play. Even Nina describes the play as 'uninteresting' (Chekhov, 369). As she reveals her fondness of Trigorin's writing, Chekhov's play suggests that Nina's dream of being an actress is highly connected with her admiration of conventional theatre, which Trigorin represents not only as a playwright, but also as a celebrity whose tiny attempts at flirting leads her to fall in love.

The most highlighted comments of the dramatic characters on Treplev's play come from Dorn, the doctor, who expresses his admiration of the vitality of Treplev's style. Nevertheless, he repeatedly insists on the play's lack of aim, and, most importantly, the absence of rationale behind the young playwright's initial desire to write. Dorn explains to Treplev: 'In a work of art there ought to be a clear definite idea. You ought to know what is your aim in writing, for if you go along that picturesque route without a definite goal you will be lost and your talent will be your ruin' (Chekhov, 365). Eventually, Treplev realises that he must write according to his preferences instead of consciously thinking of the form of his writing. He concludes: 'I come more and more to the conviction that it is not a question of new and old forms, but that what matters is that a man should write without thinking about forms at all, write because it springs freely from his soul' (Chekhov, 415). But for others, what 'springs freely from his soul' is 'uninteresting' and/or 'decadent'.

More importantly, Treplev becomes convinced that his theatre will be always aimless, which is Dorn's main critique of Treplev's play. Even the hope for retrieving Nina is destroyed within Treplev's last meeting with her. In Nina sudden visit, she tells Treplev that, although the famous playwright abandoned her, she loves Trigorin 'even more than before' (Chekhov, 420). Therefore, Treplev chooses to adhere to his beliefs by committing the most decadent action he can: shooting himself dead. In this respect, I can understand Ehre's

claim that, in his play, Chekhov 'parodied the decadent manner' (Ehre, 7). In other words, what *The Seagull* criticises is decadence in both theatre and life, not Symbolism.

Similarly, by considering the inseparable relationship amongst different dramatic characters' scattered comments on theatrical matters, I claim that *The Seagull* parodied the fakeness in theatre and life, each of which seems to reflect on the other, represented by both Trigorin and Madam Arkadin. First and foremost, their hypocritical relationship, within which they act the roles of devoted lovers, is based on her selfishness and his subservient nature. Even when he asks her to end their relationship because of his fondness of Nina, she insists on keeping him by a mixture of begging and mind control. Then he declares: 'I have no will of my own ... I have never had a will of my own ... Flabby, feeble, always submissive—how can a woman care for such a man? Take me, carry me off, but don't let me move a step away from you' (Chekhov, 396). The importance of such a confession is that it differentiates Trigorin from Madam Arkadin in terms of their endless acting in life, wherein she seems to be an actress in an illusionist drama; not only does she pretend to be a young lover in a secure relationship, but she also assume the role of a good mother, who has no money to help her son. No one believes her, especially Treplev and her brother Sorin.

In contrast, as though Trigorin is an actor in an Epic play, he seems to consciously observe his role of a happy, famous, and successful writer and a lover. Put differently, to use Brechtian expression, Trigorin is aware of the 'distance' between his fact and his pretension. Therefore, he is able to comment on both. In what seems to be a response to Treplev's defence of his style in the first act, Trigorin claims to Nina:

I love this water here, the trees, the sky. I feel nature, it arouses in me a passionate, irresistible desire to write. But I am not simply a landscape painter; I am also a citizen. I love my native country, my people; I feel that if I am a writer I am in duty bound to write of the people, of their sufferings, of their future, to talk about science and the rights of man and so on, and so on, and I write about everything. (Chekhov, 381)

Here, it seems that Trigorin draws an image of himself as a committed writer, whose awareness of his social role requires him to ignore his 'desire to write'

literature without any social function, which recalls Dorn's description of Treplev's writing.

However, Unlike Madam Arkadin's denial of the distance between her made-up mask and her truth beneath it, Trigorin is aware of the falseness of his image as a socially-oriented writer. Moreover, he expresses his awareness. Trigorin declares: 'I dislike my own work. The worst of it is that I am in a sort of delirium, and often don't understand what I am writing. [...] I feel I can only describe scenes and in everything else I am false to the marrow of my bones' (Chekhov, 380 – 1). Trigorin's verdict about his literary fakeness extends beyond his awareness of writing against his own preferences. Furthermore, he criticises the way in which his literature depends on short and hasty descriptions of both things and people within his notebook. He explains:

I hurriedly make a note: a sickly smell, a widow's flower, to be mentioned in the description of a summer evening. I catch up myself and you at every sentence, every word, and make haste to put those sentences and words away in to my literary treasure-house—it may come in useful! (Chekhov, 379)

In this respect, in addition to Trigorin's awareness of the falseness of his conventional socially-derived writing, he complains that his constant, practical, and conscious pursuit of new sources for his literature deprives his everyday life of spontaneity. This spontaneity, as he repeatedly affirms, must be the aspect of both life and art.<sup>44</sup>

Commenting on Madam Arkadin's claim that her son must write according to theatre conventions, Trigorin says that: 'Everyone writes as he likes and as he can' (Chekhov, 360). It takes years for Treplev to realise that, in contrast to Trigorin, he *cannot* spend his life writing what he *dislikes*, regardless of any appreciation this writing might get. Therefore, I partly agree with Aleksandr Chudakov, when he argues that 'Trigorin and Treplev in *Seagull* [sic]

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<sup>44</sup> As the title of Tennessee Williams' *The Notebook of Trigorin* suggests, the play is a re-writing of *The Seagull*. Within the UK's premiere of Williams' play, which I watched in February 2008 at the Northcott Theatre in Exeter, such fake is highlighted by Trigorin's excessive use of his notebook. In addition, by making Trigorin a homosexual, Williams highlights the character's submissive aspect and pretension of being a womanizer, an equivalent to Trigorin's image as a committed author. Likewise, the performance underscores Madam Arkadin's pretension of elegance by the character's exaggerated, nearly hysterical, gestural expressions of love. Thus, Williams' play emphasizes the contradictory portraits, drawn by Chekhov, of the professional and amateur practitioners of theatre, where the sincerity, albeit naïve, of both Treplev and Nina exposes the fake of both Trigorin and Madam Arkadin.

represent opposing views of art. But both the novice Treplev and the experienced writer Trigorin themselves call their basic theses into question' (Chudakov, 193). What distinguishes the acclaimed writer from the amateur is that Trigorin does manage to live with this discrepancy between what he 'likes' and what he 'can' write in order to become a successful author. Put differently, once Treplev reaches the answer to his questions, he takes an action to end his life/self-contradiction. On the contrary, Trigorin repeatedly vents his feeling of self-pity.

By this reading of *The Seagull*, I attempt to underscore the significance of considering socio-political and cultural contexts with which the literary and theatrical criticism within plays interacts. In this respect, it is hard to claim that the overall message of the play itself ultimately advocates one of the two sides/styles: decadent Symbolist or shallow committed Naturalist, neither of which can precisely describe the style of Chekhov's play. Many of Chekhov's scholars insist on his unique style that merges both Realistic and Symbolist aspects. For instance, Geoffrey Borny claims that within his late works, including *The Seagull*, Chekhov 'developed his techniques of using the expressive power of symbolism while retaining his adherence to the conventions of realism' (Borny, 87). Ehre goes further by claiming that 'Chekhov did not remain untouched by the symbolist movement and may in turn have influenced it—indeed, the symbolists claimed him as one of their own' (Ehre, 7). Such a mutual influence between Chekhov and the Symbolists may explain why the playwright's works would be criticised later by the communists. Lewis Coser affirms that: 'To Lenin, the heroes of Turgenev and Chekhov, so intensely introspective that they have no capacity to act, seemed the very embodiment of those pernicious tendencies that had to be rooted out if Russia was to be pushed forward' (Coser, 191). David Allen argues: 'After the Revolution, [...] Chekhov had to be reinterpreted, even appropriated, to make him seem relevant to a new age' (Allen 2000, 74).<sup>45</sup>

However, whether Chekhov's hybrid style indicates his conscious attempt to evolve playwrighting, literary and theatrical criticism within *The Seagull* significantly reflects on a general state of aesthetic uncertainty that

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<sup>45</sup> For detailed discussions on the exchanged influence between Chekhov and the Russian Symbolism, see the studies of Tabachnikova and Bogomolov. For more information about the brutal measures of the communist regime against artists who did not commit themselves to the so called 'Socialist Realism', see Counsell 48, Farber 22, and Rosenthal 331.

seemingly continued to concern several Russian playwrights about their style of writing during the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1912, Andreyev wonders: 'Who am I?—for blue-blooded decadents, a despicable realist; for congenial realists, a suspect symbolist' (qtd. in Gerould 1981, 111). The most important point of Andreyev's statement is its suggestion that the conflict between 'realist' and 'symbolist' styles was a common debate in the 1910s.

As Chekhov himself suggests, the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism challenges the dominant conventions of Naturalism. While Chekhov was writing *The Seagull*, he sent a letter to a friend,<sup>46</sup> describing the play. He declares: 'I'm enjoying writing it, although I'm doing dreadful violence to stage conventions. It is a comedy, with three parts for women, six for men, four acts, a landscape (view of a lake); many conversations about literature, hardly any action, and 185 pounds of love' (qtd. in Whyman, 79). Chekhov's observation also hints at the mutual effect between the 'conversations about literature' and the fictional realm of the play.

Therefore, through my reading of *The Seagull*, I seek to stress that the content of literary and theatrical criticism seems to be self-contained a quantity within the play. However, this discourse of literary and theatrical criticism within the play is essentially pertinent to, and perhaps dependent on its imaginary plot. In his comment on *The Seagull*, Gilman argues: 'The play's chief subjects are art and love, never far from each other thematically. Or perhaps a better way of putting this in the form of questions: What does it mean to be in love? What does it mean to be an artist? And to be both in love and an artist?' (Gilman 1995, 70). Chekhov's utilisation of his dramatic characters, as theatrical practitioners and intellectuals, seems crucial in creating dramatic situations that enables the play to include such a critical discourse.

Finally, it is important to mention that Treplev, like Hamlet, criticises the exaggerated style of acting. In the last act, when Treplev reveals that he watched all the performances Nina acted in since her escape, Chekhov's protagonist declares: 'She always took big parts, but she acted crudely, without taste, screamingly, with violent gestures' (Chekhov, 407). Later, in their last conversation, Nina comments on her amateur and shaky style by declaring: 'I

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<sup>46</sup> Aleksey Suvorin was a prominent publisher and journalist. Chekhov's letters to Suvorin are usually mentioned by studies, especially in the context of exploring the playwright's opinions on art in general and on his plays in particular.



acted stupidly. ... I did not know what to do with my arms, I did not know how to stand on the stage, could not control my voice. You can't understand what it feels like when one knows one is acting disgracefully' (Chekhov, 418 – 9). Apart from acting as an exclusively theatrical matter, most discussions about theatre within *The Seagull* usually tend to expand their spectrum to include theoretical judgments on art in general and literature in particular.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Hornby's differentiation between literary and theatrical criticism could be understood as comments on dramaturgical and performative issues, respectively. On one hand, the expression 'literary criticism within plays' can be utilised to describe dramatic characters' discussions of critical matters that concern art and literature, not theatre. On the other hand, reading Chekhov's expression 'conversations about literature' on the grounds of Lukács' explanation of 'literary criticism' suggests that both terms mean all sorts of critical comments on art, literature, and theatre included in dramatic characters' speeches. In this respect, Hornby's distinct effort relies on his interpretation of what Lukács previously described as 'literary criticism' through exploring it as a device of metatheatricality. However, I do not claim that Hornby is the only scholar who has mentioned the occurrence of literary and theatrical criticism within metadramas.

### **Literary and theatrical criticism in the studies of metatheatre**

As previously mentioned, while some of the post-Abel studies stick with his notion of characters' self-consciousness, many scholars contradict Abel by studying the play-within-the-play as the essence of, or even the equivalent to, metatheatre. The formalist approach to metadrama does not allow either group to extend their investigation to the *content* of the discourse of literary-theatrical criticism when it appears in metadramas.<sup>48</sup>

However, regardless of whether they use the expression of 'literary and theatrical criticism', the textual phenomenon, described by both Lukács and Hornby, can be realised within few studies. With different degrees of insistence,

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<sup>47</sup> In addition to addressing the literary and critical dispute between Symbolism and both socially-directed literature and superficial Naturalism, *The Seagull* includes many complimentary references to Russian and European writers and actors such as Tolstoy, Turgenyev, Shakespeare, Maupassant, Pashka Tchsdin, and Eleonora Duse.

<sup>48</sup> While Hubert's study of Molière's plays traces characters that 'assume authorial functions' and Chu claims that Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama include 'Playwright-characters', other scholars such as Mehl, Golder, and Greiner focuses on the play-within-the-play.

the number and volume of the examples of literary and theatrical criticism within plays given by these studies are dependent on each scholar's central interest. For instance, as part of giving evidence of the effect of social factors on the emergence of metatheatres in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Nellhaus briefly refers to Ben Jonson's inclusion of critical opinions on theatrical matters within his plays. Similarly, Schlueter concisely comments on *Fanny's First Play*. She argues:

In early modern drama, it is not uncommon for a character to serve as an authorial spokesman, espousing the philosophical and social ideas of both the fictive character and its creator. And frequently there is a playfulness involved in an author's self-consciousness, as, for example, in *Fanny's First Play* (1910), where Shaw's characters discuss the discussion play Shaw so delighted in creating. (Schlueter, 2-3)

Because Schlueter's study focuses on the notion of self-reflexive dramatic characters, she reduces the theatrical critique that occupies the bulk of the play's discourse to a sign of the self-conscious author. In addition, similar to Hornby's suggestion that Trigorin represents Chekhov and Nellhaus' observation on Jonson's presence within his plays, Schlueter's argues that there is a similarity between 'the fictive character and its creator' regarding the latter's opinions on theatrical matters raised within his/her play.

In *Plays about the Theatre in England, 1737 – 1800: The Self-conscious Stage from Foote to Sheridan* (1979), Dane Smith and M. L. Lawhon occasionally refer to dramatic characters' comments on different matters of theatrical criticism in the plays of Samuel Foote and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. For example, while the dialogue in Foote's *Englishman Returned from Paris* (1756) contains a comparison between the French playwrights and Shakespeare, Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779) attacks obstinate critics. However, such scattered references are introduced by Smith and Lawhon as part of the main claim of their study that these plays draw an image of the English theatre in the last two thirds of the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> While Sheridan's play can be read as a comment on critics and reviewers of his time, the eighteenth-century ongoing cultural debate on nationalism, neoclassicism, and international politics may account for comparing Shakespeare with French dramatists within Foote's play. Such circumstances highlight the role of the current state of the theatrical industry as well as socio-political contexts in motivating playwrights to include literary and theatrical criticism within their plays.

As part of reconstructing a thorough image of the Restoration Comedy, Styan describes what can be considered an inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism as a common feature of the plays of the period. Styan argues: 'The author develops a special skill in commenting, slyly or openly, on his own business as a craftsman, as if he were on the stage himself' (Styan 1998, 13). Such a claim seems to suggest that playwrights' comments are limited to self-referential notices about their works. However, Styan gives examples of plays, wherein these comments extend their topics to include more general aesthetic and theatrical matters. Styan declares:

It is not surprising that this is also an age of burlesque, which is metatheatre at its most outrageous. Burlesque soon erupts with [William] Davenant's *The Playhouse To Be Let* (1663), an entertainment using its whole first act as a framing device in which lowly playhouse workers, tirewoman, charwoman, housekeeper, player, musician and dancing-master, discuss their situation before the drama's 'teeming muse, big with imagination', throws out a medley of comedy and farce, heroic and burlesque opera. (Styan 1998, 13)

The most striking point of Styan's comment is his observation that playwrights' utilisation of parody, which—by its critical nature—seems to be an essential aspect of the vast majority of plays that include literary and theatrical criticism as the next chapter of my thesis insists. In another example given by Styan, he refers to some playwrights' mocking critique of the rival genre of Restoration Tragedy. Styan argues: 'The impulse towards parody comes to early maturity with Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* (1671), which mocks the conventions of comedy's tragic counterpart unmercifully' (Styan 1998, 13).<sup>50</sup> In this respect, *The Rehearsal* seems to be the predecessor of Victorian comedies within which, as Newey's study suggests, melodramas were parodied as a rival form of theatre.

In his study, Licastro briefly refers to literary and theatrical criticism within *Six Characters*. He claims: 'No matter now [how] many stage tricks, theatre props, and discussions on art, the symbiotic contrast of content and medium is always present in *Six Characters*' (Licastro, 217). Nevertheless, Licastro's study

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<sup>50</sup> The play was written by George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham and others. For detailed information about satirical critique of tragedy and comments on different aspects of the current state of theatre within the plays of the Restoration Comedy, see Ware.

does not consider the content of such ‘discussions’. Instead, as his comment suggests, Licastro limits the function of the ‘discussions on art’ within Pirandello’s play to their self-referential effect, just like the impact of both characters’ self-conscious and the play-within-the-play.

The main concern of Rosenmeyer’s study is to rebut Abel’s claim about tragic characters. Nevertheless, he refers to ‘the play as a discourse on playmaking’ (Rosenmeyer, 89), which ‘performs a hermeneutics of itself, that it examines or judges or raises questions about or is about itself or the tradition in which it stands, or raises questions about theatre as a whole’ (Rosenmeyer, 97). However, when he briefly mentions Handke’s *Offending the Audience*<sup>51</sup> as an example of this type of metadrama, Rosenmeyer limits the function of ‘the discourse on playmaking’ to its discrepancy with Aristotelian rules. Similar to Rosenmeyer, and influenced by Puchner and Fuchs, Pérez-Simón reads Nikolai Evreinov’s *A Merry Death* (1909) and Josef and Karel Čapek’s *The Fateful Game of Love* (1911) as anti-illusionist modern metadramas. Therefore, although he briefly mentions some theatrical matters which are discussed by dramatic characters within the two plays, such as attacking commercial drama, criticising bourgeois spectators, and the troubles of censorship on theatre, he reduces the role of such discourse to be an anti-illusionist device.

Newey refers to Hornby’s ‘varieties of the metadramatic’, including ‘literary and real-life reference’ (Newey, 99). However, she does not mention ‘literary and theatrical criticism’. The reason for such neglect is her study’s main concern, which is proving that melodrama, by its nature, is metadramatic, irrespective of using metatheatrical devices. However, I argue that in the course of her study of the ‘plays about the theatre’, Newey indirectly highlights the inclusion of theatrical criticism within both nineteenth-century melodrama and comedies. The most striking example of theatrical criticism within Newey’s study relies on its observation that the awareness of the degraded image of the female performers in the Victorian era provoked the playwrights of both melodrama and comedies to portray the world of theatre wherein actresses reflect upon their agony of being treated as a sexual commodity. Through Newey’s reading of plays such as John Palgrave Simpson’s *The World and the Stage* (1859) and William Schwenck Gilbert’s *Comedy and Tragedy* (1884), she

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<sup>51</sup> In Rosenmeyer’s study, the German title *Publikumsbeschimpfung* is translated into *Insulting the Audience*.

explores female performers' speeches, within which they express 'the physical and metaphysical vulnerability and exile of the actress. [...] Even in comedy, the vulnerability and apparent accessibility [sic] of the actress' body is a topic of discussion' (Newey, 94 - 5). The phrase 'topic of discussion' seems to precisely distinguish plays that include literary and theatrical criticism from a wider range of plays about theatre. By extending historical contextual factors to include the dominant theatrical traditions in the time of playwrights who use their metadramas to express their critique of such traditions, Newey's study, similarly to Hornby's, suggests that metadrama can work as a method of rectifying what seem to their writers to be problems in theatre's practice. The most significant contribution of Newey's study is giving several examples of the way in which the parody collaborates with the play-within-the-play not only in order to condemn theatre-related social values (the inferior image of female actors), but also to criticise specific aspects of the current theatre (melodramatic style).

Mary Ann Witt's *Metatheater and Modernity: Baroque and Neobaroque*. (2013) includes one of the most detailed examples of considering literary and theatrical criticism within metadramas. Under the title 'Metatheater as Manifesto: The Impromptu', the last chapter of her study investigates 'the use of plays or rehearsals within plays to serve as manifestos to defend particular theories or conventions regarding theater as seen in the French tradition of the impromptu' (Witt, 171). On one hand, I claim that this chapter in Witt's book supports my suggestion of the validity, not to say the necessity of studying literary and theatrical criticism within a metadrama as a distinct phenomenon from the mere employing of metatheatrical techniques in order to achieve self-reference. On the other hand, the examples of European metadrama my thesis investigates extend beyond the form of the impromptu, on which Witt's chapter focuses.<sup>52</sup>

As Witt's comment reveals, she traces several impromptus written by French playwrights as a response to critics' attack on specific aspects of their style or previous works. Because Molière's *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, with which such a particular form was inaugurated, was followed by Copeau, Jean Cocteau, Giraudoux, and Ionesco, Witt understandably considers the

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<sup>52</sup> Being published in 2013 I did not have the opportunity to read Witt's study until I was finishing the final corrections of my thesis.

impromptu a 'French tradition'.<sup>53</sup> In addition to these plays' common aspect of functioning as a defence of playwrights, Witt investigates this group of plays according to the main goal of her study, which is comparing metatheatricality within the plays of the Baroque and new Baroque. By the latter she means both Modernism and Postmodernism.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from insisting on Molière's subjective purpose in writing *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, Witt's study mentions that the play goes further than such a defensive goal. Witt declares:

In *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, Molière not only responded to these attacks but satirized the grandiloquent tragic acting styles at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, notably that of the grossly fat actor Montfleury, made famous two centuries later in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Montfleury's son, in turn, wrote *L'Impromptu de L'Hôtel de Condé*, in which he defended the Hôtel de Bourgogne troupe without attacking Molière personally.<sup>55</sup> (Witt, 146)

However, Witt does not distinguish such comic *imitation* from the characters' *verbal* comments on the critics' attack on Molière in terms of their theatrical method. Compared to such satirical imitation, which *alludes* to the exaggerated performance of Montfleury, Hamlet's advice to actors, for example, goes further by taking the form of a *spoken* critical opinion. Although both can be interpreted as an attack on rivals or a reformative suggestion, the comment on acting within Shakespeare's play belongs to what my thesis mainly focuses on, which is discursive theatrical criticism within characters' speeches, while Molière's mocking representation of exaggerated acting utilises parody.

To make my point clear, I will give an example of theatrical criticism within *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, when the character of Brécourt claims:

As the business of comedy is to represent in general all the imperfections of men, and principally of the men of our age, it is impossible for Molière to write any character which won't hit somebody in the world; and if he must be accused of having aimed at all the persons in whom the faults he describes are

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<sup>53</sup> The same insistence that the form of impromptu is a French tradition can be found in Hatte.

<sup>54</sup> Within the four first chapters of Witt's study, she combines and compares metadramas of Lope de Vega with Sartre, Corneille with Tony Kushner, Gian Lorenzo Bernini with Pirandello; and Shakespeare with Stoppard.

<sup>55</sup> For more information about both the historical circumstances of Molière's play and its critique of his enemies see Lindsay 373 – 8, and Forman 204 - 5.

to be found, he must certainly make no more comedies.  
(Molière, 333)

Apart from the degree to which this description of comedy can be accepted, Brécourt defends Molière on the grounds of his declared definition of comedy, which insists on the mocking nature of comedy. Furthermore, although Brécourt's speech is a defensive response to Molière's enemies, the character's argument seems to extend its function by defending all the writers of comedy. Put differently, while Brécourt insists on Molière's right to mock and criticise his contemporaries, *L'Impromptu de Versailles* simultaneously, and most importantly, affirms the right of comedy, as a theatrical genre, to attack and reveal both personal and social defects. Therefore, I agree with Cecile Lindsay when she argues that despite its defensive goal, Molière's play 'provides an occasion for discussing the nature of drama' (Lindsay, 375). Here, it can be useful to use Lukács argument about 'critic-writers', whose subjective goal of literary commentaries within their works 'provides only the point of departure and the foundation for the artistic investigation. Despite their diversity and often bitter opposition to each other, all these attempts represent a search for objective truth' (Lukács, 207). In this respect, the purpose of the impromptus extends beyond defending their playwrights. While these impromptus respond to, or even attack, critics, dramatic characters usually assume the role of theorists, whose speeches can be read as a critique of criticism: that combines both defensive and reformative goals.

Such a binary—subjective/defensive and objective/reformative—rationale can be traced through literary and theatrical criticism within the examples of metadramas studied in my thesis, which include two of what Witt calls the 'new baroque' impromptus: Giraudoux's *Paris Impromptu* and Ionesco's *L'Impromptu de l'Alma*. Thus, instead of focusing on the affiliation of these two impromptus with their ancestors of the 'French tradition', my thesis investigates them as part of a wider tendency for utilising dramatic characters' conversations on literary and theatrical criticism within metadramas of the first half of the twentieth century. Without neglecting the subjective purpose of playwrights' defensive responses to their critics, the common feature of literary and theatrical criticism within the metadramas of Shaw, Andreyev, Pirandello, Lorca, Kaiser, Giraudoux, and Ionesco is that the topics of dramatic characters' discussions of

theatrical and literary matters are provoked by, and are a comment on, specific aspects of the theatre industry in the playwrights' time. Even playwrights' defence of their works against previous criticisms, which understandably varies according to each individual playwright's style and the type of attack he/she received, seems to be woven with the common topics that address more general theatrical and aesthetic matters.

### **Critical metadrama**

From exploring all these examples of studies, it can be concluded that literary and theatrical criticism is a verbal device, not a technique, of metatheatricality. The distinct feature of such a device is its inclusion of one or more of literary or theatrical 'topic[s] of discussion' addressed by dramatic characters within the imaginary realm of the plot. Through the history of theatre, the vast majority of metadramas, which utilise metatheatrical techniques of the play-within-the-play, parody, and/or intertextuality, do not include such literary and theatrical criticism. Even during the early decades of the twentieth century literary and theatrical criticism is absent from a large number of metadramas such as, just to give few examples, Andreyev's *The Life of Man* (1906), the Irish playwright Gerald MacNamara's two one-act plays *The Mist that Does Be on the Bog* (1909) and *Thompson in Tir-na-n-og* (1912), Lorca's *The Butterfly's Evil Spell* (1920), Pirandello's *Henry IV* (1922), the French Surrealist Roger Vitrac's *The Mysteries of Love* (1924), Noël Coward's *Hay Fever* (1925), and Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* (1932).

To different extents, the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within dramatic texts, which can be traced back to Aristophanes, recurred several times at specific moment of theatre history, whether within one or more of the dramatic texts of an individual dramatist or as a phenomenon that can be realised within the plays of a group of playwrights. In either case, each 'topic of discussion' mainly reflects on the state of the current theatre industry, which in turn is usually influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and sometimes political, circumstances.

Whether as part of dramatic characters' dialogues, monologues, or direct speeches to the audience, the function of dramatic characters' discourse of literary and/or theatrical criticism includes, but extends beyond revealing the play's self-referential nature. As part of experimental theatre, metadrama in the



early decades of the twentieth century conforms to Peter Bürger's claim that 'historical avant-garde movements [...] call the institution of art into question (Bürger 2010, 696). However, instead of limiting these questions to the *metaphorical* level by using anti-illusionist techniques, the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism *literally* questions dominant conventions of the current theatre industry. Put differently, as with other metatheatrical devices in modern metadrama, the theatrical-criticism-within-the-play is an anti-illusionist method that acts as self-critique of specific models of theatre. Furthermore, its verbal nature allows metadramas to literally turn part of their characters' speeches to a discourse of criticism. This discourse comments on a wide range of aesthetic and theatrical matters. Therefore, although the term 'self-critique'—as employed by scholars such as Puchner, Roberts, and Pérez-Simón—is adequate to describe metatheatricality in general, it seems insufficient to distinguish the specific type of metadramas that includes a discourse of literary criticism. I suggest we identify aspects of metatheatricality that may be specifically called 'critical metadrama' to insist on the comprehensive existence of the discourse of literary and theatrical criticism within such plays, especially when the presence of literary and theatrical criticism extends beyond occasional comments to become a dominant feature of the dramatic texts' discourse.

Consequently, literary and theatrical criticism within a critical metadrama, which occupies the bulk of dramatic characters' speeches, is highly connected with the imaginary realm of the plot. In this respect, I will use Hornby's notice about the 'degree of emphasis', which playwrights give to literary reference in general, to claim a distinction between a *marginal* occurrence of literary and theatrical criticism within a metadrama, such as Hamlet's advice to actors, and the *consistency* of the comments on literary and theatrical matters within the group of European critical metadramas of the first half of the twentieth century, which I closely examine by focusing on their inclusion of the dominant literary and theatrical-criticism-within-the-play. Drawing on my reading of these examples, of which *The Seagull*, I argue, can represent a prototype, my thesis highlights the inseparable relationship between the historical circumstances of writing these metadramas and the topics of literary and theatrical criticism chosen by playwrights to be addressed by dramatic characters.

### **The significance of historical circumstances**

The first half of the twentieth century seems to have been an unprecedented exhibition of several aesthetic and critical trends, which draw on a wide spectrum of theoretical backgrounds. I claim that such a momentum itself can be seen as a reason not only for European playwrights' adoption of metatheatres in general, but also for the inclusion of dramatic characters' discussions on literary and theatrical criticism within these metadramas in particular. By the turn of the twentieth century, several theatre reformers expressed their opposition to illusionist theatre. For instance, in 1904 Appia claims: 'Until now it has been believed that staging must achieve the highest possible degree of illusion; and it is the principle (unaesthetic though it is) which has barred our progress' (Appia, 15 – 16). Consequently, a series of doctrines such as Expressionism, Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, and Surrealism were established with different visions of both art and life. Noticeably influenced by psychological and philosophical revolutionary thoughts of theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche, the common feature of most of these artistic doctrines is their opposition to the dominant aesthetics of the late nineteenth-century popular theatre, namely Naturalism, melodrama and vaudeville. Even the influence of a scientist like Einstein, whose theory of 'relativity' significantly changed the way in which both time and space are considered, can be seen as one of the factors for challenging the nineteenth-century belief that humans are able to thoroughly understand the world. Such a belief seemed to lead Naturalism to suppose the ability of theatre to represent life thoroughly.<sup>56</sup>

Simultaneously, during the early decades of the twentieth century it seems that there was a revival of the late nineteenth-century calls for 'Art for Art's Sake' as it was raised, for instance, in Oscar Wilde's article: 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' (1891). An increasing tendency of criticism suggests the emphasis on the stylistic and linguistic elements of literature. Mainly suggested by Russian Formalism and the Anglo-American New criticism school, this formalist approach to study literature nevertheless did not prevent the

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<sup>56</sup> For references to the role of both Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche in shaping the notions of the German Expressionism, see the studies of Aschheim and Minden. Detailed discussions on the intersections of the thoughts of Freud and Nietzsche within the Futurist works and their influence in Surrealism can be found in Poggi and Kadri, respectively. For information about the effect of theorists and scientists of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century on the avant-garde, see Cardullo 2001, 1–39, and Webber 1–3.

developed manifestations of the nineteenth-century Marxist thought. The latter was reflected in various visions of socialist theorists. Among them was the French Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), the German Max Weber (1864–1920), and the Hungarian Georg Lukács whose study *History and Class Consciousness* (1922), according to Andrew Bowie, ‘played a pivotal role in the emergence of critical theory’ (Bowie, 191). The essential feature of Marxist criticism is the insistence on the inseparable relationship between art and society not only in terms of the process of production, but also regarding the social function of art, literature, and theatre. Politically, the vigour of communist perspectives was motivated by the success of the 1917 Russian Revolution, especially with the economic recession of 1920-22 in the United States, where Capitalism is most exemplified.<sup>57</sup>

Culturally, the spread of Marxist thought can be considered an opposing reflex to the increasing capitalist exploitation of art and literature in order to achieve financial profits. Dominic Strinati argues that ‘the industrialisation and commercialisation of popular culture on a grand scale [...] began to gather momentum in the 1920s and 1930s. [...] If culture can’t make money then it is unlikely to be produced’ (Strinati, 10). The most striking feature of the Marxist critique of the popularity of commercial theatre, for instance, is reversing the long-time analogous dichotomies of high-popular cultures and upper-lower social classes. Daniel Bell declares: ‘For several hundred years, a sharp distinction has been made between high culture and low (or popular) culture. [...] High culture has always had an aristocratic bias, as T.S. Eliot pointed out’ (Bell 2000, 309-10). In contrast to social, economic and political hierarchy of social classes, Marxism relates popular theatre to bourgeoisie, whether as a producer or a consumer of commercial performances, while socially orientated theatre is mainly meant to address the neglected and marginalised public of the proletariat.<sup>58</sup>

While this Marxist vision seems to be one of the bases on which Brecht establishes his notion of politically enlightening Epic drama, Lorca’s *Play Without a Title* (1936) utilises literary and theatrical criticism in order to attack

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<sup>57</sup> For more information about the spread of communism in both Europe and the United States in the 1920s, see Draper and Thorpe.

<sup>58</sup> Despite turning the traditional positive correlation between the level of social class and the quality of preferred culture into a negative correlation, Marxism adopts the distinctive classification of superior-inferior cultures. Such a biased qualitative standpoint is challenged by more recent culture studies. For more information, see Brooker 2003.

both solely entertaining theatre and its consumers of the middle-class audience. However, Lorca's play does not address a proletarian audience to raise their awareness of the capitalist defects of their society. Instead, *Play Without a Title* chooses the most difficult mission of changing the theatrical preferences of the middle class, to which the characters of Spectators within the play belong. In an introductory speech, the Author onstage talks on behalf of an absent poet, who is supposed to be the writer of the play. In this speech, the Author directly challenges the expectations of the middle-class audience of the inner play. The Author declares:

You come to the theatre with the sole desire of being entertained by writers whom you pay, and that is fair enough; but today the poet shall confine you here, because he wishes and aspires to move your hearts by showing you the things you do not wish to see, by shouting aloud the simplest truths you do not wish to hear. (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 107)

As the prologue turns into successive verbal confrontations with the middle-class spectators, the Author eventually becomes convinced that theatre will not be able to represent real social matters unless the bourgeois audience is replaced by ordinary people. Therefore, while the Actress warns the Author that the members of the working class will destroy his theatre, the Author allows them in:

ACTRESS. Shut the doors, shut them!  
AUTHOR. Open them! The theatre belongs to everyone. It is a school for the people. (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 117)

This Marxist-like vision of the function of theatre can be partly explained by claims that Lorca had leftist inclinations.<sup>59</sup>

However, and apart from Lorca's political beliefs, the Author calling for a social function of theatre within *Play Without a Title* cannot be reduced to Lorca's alleged pro-communist drive. As far as historical circumstances are concerned, Lorca's play is rather a reformatory comment on the defects of the playwright's contemporary Spanish theatre. David George declares:

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<sup>59</sup> Many references to Lorca's increasing belief in communism during the 1930s are mentioned in Edwards 2007, 307 and Delgado 11 – 36. In contrast, Edwin Rolfe, who is cited in Nelson 1990, 52, insists that Lorca was not a Marxist. For a detailed discussion of such a debate, see Rogers 186 – 94.

It may seem surprising that the social turbulence of the early years of the [twentieth] century in Spain was not reflected in drama produced, a fact that partly accounted for by the deep-seated conservatism of Iberian society. The Catholic Church was particularly powerful and able to impose its moral beliefs in many areas. The social questioning and exposure of moral decadence associated with naturalism was anathema to conservative opinion. (George, 481)

Despite any possible influence of the spread of communist thoughts through European countries since 1917 on Lorca, attacking merely entertaining theatre within *Play Without a Title* seems to be evoked by Spanish theatre's avoidance of representing its society.

Such reluctance to addressing real social problems was reflected in the popularity of entertaining plays, which is exploited by commercially orientated producers to gain profits. In his study of the Spanish playwright Valle-Inclán (1866 – 1936), John Lyon declares that commercial plays dominated Spanish theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century (Lyon, 1 – 6). Lyon's observation is affirmed by George who claims that

Impresarios preferred to stick with tried and trusted formulae, with mild drawing-room comedy or new-Romantic melodrama. The likes of Valle-Inclán and Lorca were to complain bitterly about what they saw as the sorry state of the commercial theatre in their country. (George, 481)

In this respect, although the Author criticises Capitalist commodification of theatre, *Play Without a Title* is not an ideological agitprop for Marxism against Capitalism. It is a response to the factual dominance of commercial performances over the Spanish theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Negative consequences of the popularity of entertaining plays though are not limited to their asocial subject matter. The Dramatist within Lorca's earlier play *The Shoemaker's Wonderful Wife* declares:

[B]ecause the theatre is often simply a business, poetry has disappeared from the stage in search of other places where audiences will not be shocked, for instance, when a tree becomes a buff of smoke, or three small fishes, obeying a command, becomes three million to satisfy the hunger of the multitude. (Lorca *The Shoemaker's*, 3)

Not only do entertaining plays fail to achieve their supposed social purpose, but the popularity of these commercial performances also harms the art of theatre itself. In addition to blaming commercial theatre for the vanishing of verse from drama, the Dramatist's example of poetry seems to extend beyond the use of verse to the metaphorical utilisation of visual elements of performance. Such an anti-Naturalistic representation matches Artaud's notion of the 'poetry for the senses'.<sup>60</sup>

Even within *Paris Impromptu*, which is described as Giraudoux's responses to his critics, subjective reasons for including literary and theatrical criticism are indivisible from contextual elements, which shape the overall message of literary and theatrical criticism within this critical metadrama. On one hand, it seems that dramatic characters comment on other matters such as spectators' lack of interest in theatre, playwrights' right to rewrite classic plays, and actors' fondness for the plays of Shakespeare, Racine, and Molière. On the other hand, as a large number of theatre studies suggest, when Giraudoux wrote his impromptu, the capitalist commercial theatre in France was reaching one of its peaks. In contrast to Giraudoux's insistence on writing his plays with high linguistic qualities, French playwrights of the so-called boulevard theatre foreground dramatic actions with patent melodramatic or comic effects on the audience who seek pure, not to say trivial, entertainment at the expense of sophisticated speeches.<sup>61</sup>

Jouvet, the director in *Paris impromptu*, and the members of his troupe express their agony of performing for empty auditoria, defend the rewriting of classics, and demand the French government assume the position of Louis XIV, who was the patron of Molière, by supporting more *serious* theatre. Thus, Giraudoux's play concurrently and connectively reflects on both the imperfect state of the current state of French theatre and Giraudoux's advocacy of his refined and poetic language. Giraudoux's defence of his theatre is also mingled with his characters' attack on Naturalism which, alongside melodrama and

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<sup>60</sup> Some scholars suggest that Artaud influenced Lorca's plays in terms of the significant role of visual elements. For example, see Monegal. Considering that *The Shoemaker's Wonderful Wife* was written in 1931, a year before Artaud's 'First Manifesto', may suggest that the influence was in an opposite direction.

<sup>61</sup> Witt's reference to specific critics' attack on Giraudoux's previous plays seems very useful because very few English studies relate this term to Giraudoux's style. For instance, see Gassner 360 and Grossvogel 103. For detailed information about the dominance of melodrama and vaudeville comedy over French theatre in the 1930s, see the studies of Pao and Lehning. A brief references to such dominance can be found in Davidson 75 – 102.

vaudeville represents a contradictory type to Giraudoux's style. In other words, as in *The Seagull* and *Play Without a Title*, the overall function of literary and theatrical criticism combines both subjective and objective purposes, which together shape the reformative rationale of the play's comments on literary and theatrical matters.<sup>62</sup>

Other circumstances of the early decades of the twentieth century include the increasing popularity of cinema, especially with the new art's adoption of the nineteenth-century forms of commercial theatre such as melodrama and vaudeville. Emerging as a new art of representation by the turn of the twentieth century, the cinema increasingly threatened the popularity of theatre. Peter Boenisch argues that:

Soon after cinema appeared on the screen theatre was asked to leave the stage by some critics and artists, while others promoted a re-theatricalization of the stage, concentrating on what they thought were theatre's very own and exclusive powers. It is possible to see the history of the theatre avant-garde in the first half of the century, from Craig to Artaud, in this light. (Boenisch, 103)

Compared to the ability of films to copy visual aspects of the world literally, seeking to represent a 'slice of life' on stage by strict Naturalism seemed futile. That partly explains why, for instance, Artaud's insistence that theatre must not represent anything other than itself. In 1915, within their manifesto about what they call the 'synthetic theatre', the Italian Futurism indicated the dangerous popularity of the cinema as they claim: 'With this essential synthetic brevity the theatre can bear and even overcome competition from the *cinema* [sic]' (Marinetti, 19).<sup>63</sup> Both Boenisch's observation and the Futurists' statement suggest that the cinema was part of the crisis that faced the theatre industry during the early decades of the twentieth century, on which dramatic characters of critical metadrama comment.

Another new element that has influenced the theatre industry since the late decades of the nineteenth century is the increasing and disputed

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<sup>62</sup> Louis Jouvet was the director of most of Giraudoux's plays. In addition, the names of the actors and actresses within *Paris Impromptu* are similar to real members of Jouvet's troupe. For more information about such resemblances, see Bradby 1991, 4.

<sup>63</sup> The first manifesto of Futurism was written in 1909, which was followed by Enrico Prampolini's *Futurist Scenography* (1915). An elaborated discussion on Futurist notions of theatre can be found in Berghaus. For information about the influence of the Futurist theatre in the avant-garde in Europe and the US, see Gaborik.

crystallization of theatre directing. As an alternative to previous types of dominance over performance practiced by the actor-manager, the author-director, and the star actor, the rise of the director was accompanied by highlighting the role of visual elements of the performance at the expense of dramatic text. In addition, the increasing appeal of Constantin Stanislavski's system of techniques that help actors in the process of characterization and Brecht's controversial theory of Epic drama with its revolutionary concepts were some of the aspects that seemed too influential to be ignored by the writers of European critical metadrama during the first half of the twentieth century as I will investigate in the third chapter of this thesis.

Considering the significance of historical, socio-political and cultural contexts as factors for motivating playwrights to comment on theatrical matters within their dramatic texts is crucial in understanding the works of critical metadrama in Egyptian theatre during the second half of the twentieth century. The inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within Egyptian plays has always been influenced by European theatre in general and critical metadramas in particular. Such an impact was a result of several, sometimes contradictory, political and cultural circumstances. For instance, after the 1952 Revolution, there was a noticeable boom in translating, studying and producing European plays. Such a phenomenon, which was part of the political regime's insistence on the importance of modernising Egypt, was accompanied by the return of many practitioners and scholars who studied abroad. In chapter five, wherein I highlight the influence of European metadrama on Egyptian theatre in the second half of the twentieth century, I will give examples of these translations and productions of the works of European playwrights, such as Brecht, Pirandello, Ionesco, and Frisch.

Simultaneously, this post-colonial era witnessed increasing calls for defining and underscoring a pure Egyptian cultural identity. Firstly, such calls led to searching for roots of theatrical practice within traditional forms of entertainment, which by its nature, similar to metatheatre, are anti-illusionist. Secondly, and most importantly, these calls for pure Egyptian theatre have materialised within more recent Egyptian critical metadramas in two ways: by imposing traditional forms of entertainment within the European form and through dramatic characters' debates on the necessity of retrieving these popular forms, which, again, contradicts playwrights' drawing on European



critical metadrams. A further example of the significant role of historical circumstances in urging playwrights to write critical metadrama is that specific topics of discussion are raised within the plays of many Egyptian playwrights. Through their speeches, dramatic characters of these plays comment on and reveal the distinct challenges that face theatre practitioners in Egypt such as the police state, censorship, administrative corruption and bureaucracy of governmental theatre.

Even more universal issues, which shape the kernel of literary and theatrical criticism within the vast majority of European metadrama, such as the tension between directors and playwrights or the social function of theatre, are pertinent to discussions about deficits of cultural and theatrical administrations or the maintenance, and protection of Egyptian identity from the so-called Western cultural invasion.

In the introduction to his pioneering study: 'Egyptianizing Theatre in Egypt, 1963-1970: A Descriptive and Critical Examination of the Clash Between a Quest for Authenticity and a Tendency to Assimilate Western Metatheatre' (1985), Hani Metawie explains the notion of metatheatre by drawing solely on Abel's study. However, through his analysis of Egyptian metadramas in the 1960s he uses a selective approach that combines Abel's notion of self-referential dramatic characters with later studies' focus on metatheatrical formalist techniques.<sup>64</sup>

One of the main arguments of Metawie's study is that all the aspects of metatheatre within the works of Egyptian playwrights in the 1960s are borrowed from Western theatre. Although the influence of European playwrights on Egyptian theatre in the 1960s was repeatedly underlined by both Egyptian and Arabic reviewers, critics, and academics, Metawie's notable contribution is connecting these influences with the notion of metatheatre. My thesis contradicts Metawie's study in two main aspects. Firstly, he reads Egyptian plays of metatheatre by merging Abel's notion of self-conscious dramatic character who assumes the role of a playwright with the play's use of the play-within-the-play. In contrast, my thesis investigates the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within Egyptian metadramas to focusing on its reformative function. Secondly, and most importantly, Metawie refers to the playwright's

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<sup>64</sup> Out of the large number of the examples of Egyptian critical metadrama, which I study in my thesis, *Al-Farafir* is the only play included within Metawie's study.

imposition of traditional Egyptian forms of entertainment within the borrowed form of European metatheatre as a superficial response to the calls for an authentic Egyptian theatre. However, Metawie neglects, or fails to realise that these traditional forms are intrinsically anti-illusionist. Consequently, he ignores the fact that the Egyptian audience, which has been intersecting with these anti-illusionist popular forms of entertainment for centuries, is prone to metatheatricality. Therefore, while he concludes that metatheatre in Egyptian theatre appeared and declined in the 1960s, I trace the roots of Egyptian metatheatre back to the beginning of the twentieth century and focus on its noticeable presence until the 2000s.

In the first two chapters of *Al-masrah fi al-Maraya: She'riat al-Metamasrah wa Eshteghalwha Fi al-Nass al-Masrahi al-Gharbi wa al-A'rabi* (2004), Hassan Yusufi defines metatheatre through Manfred Schmelting's discussion of Abel's notion, wherein Schmelting relates metatheatre with the play-within-the-play and intertextuality.<sup>65</sup> The third and fourth chapters of Yusufi's study trace these two metatheatrical methods within a wide range of plays from *The Frogs* to *L'Impromptu de l'Alma*.

Under the title: 'al-*Meta-masrah al-Ta'sili*' (The Root-defining Metatheatre), the fifth chapter of Yusufi's study investigates three Arabic metadramas. As the title of the Egyptian playwright Ya'qub Sannua's *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* (1912) suggests, and the play itself clearly reveals, Sannua imitates *L'Impromptu de Versailles*.<sup>66</sup> Although such dependence on Molière's play is mentioned by Arabic and Western scholars, as far as my research in Arabic studies of theatre is concerned, Yusufi is the first scholar who describes Sannua's play as an example of metatheatre.<sup>67</sup>

However, Yusufi's references to dramatic characters' comments on theatrical matters within Sannua's play are brief and partially mention what resemble the speeches of Molière's characters. Differently, by reading Sannua's play as a critical metadrama, my thesis thoroughly investigates the literary and

<sup>65</sup> Schmelting, Manfred. *Métathéâtre et Intertexte: Aspects du Théâtre dans le Théâtre*. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1982 is not translated into English or Arabic. Similar to most Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian scholars, Yusufi relies on French studies rather than English references. Such observation may explain the absence of many relatively more recent English studies of metatheatre from Yusufi's study.

<sup>66</sup> The title literally means *The Egyptian Molière and What He Suffers*. Also known as James Sanua, the surname of the Jewish Egyptian playwright is sometimes written as Sanua, Sannú, Sannu', or Sanu'. In addition, as a journalist, he utilised the pseudonym 'Abu Naddara'.

<sup>67</sup> For examples of linking Sannua's play with Molière's in Arabic and European studies, see Najm and Machut-Mendecka, respectively. Yusufi's study regularly cites from the former.

theatrical criticism within *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* as a comment on specific difficulties that faced the emergence of theatre as an European art in Egypt.

The two other plays, claimed by Yusufi as examples of metatheatre that traces the roots of Arabic theatre are The Egyptian No'man Ashour's *Fagr al-Masrah al-Misri* and the Syrian Sa'dallah Wannus' *Sahra ma'a Abi khalil al-Qabbany*.<sup>68</sup> Written in the 1950s, the former belongs to the period of my study. However, I except Ashour's play from my research because, despite metatheatrical aspects of the play, its characters' speeches do not include any stance of literary and theatrical criticism. For the same reason, I exclude Ashour's metadrama *Masrah Ya'qub Sannua: Molière Misr (Ya'qub Sannua's Theatre: The Egyptian Molière)*, which is not mentioned by Yusufi. In contrast, Wannus' 1972 play is more similar to *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* in terms of the inclusion of theatrical criticism. This distinction is ignored by Yusufi.

In addition, because Yusufi limits his notion of metatheatre to the dramatic text's inclusion of the-play-within-the-play and intertextuality, his study does not mention *al-Saleet al-Hasoud*, written by the Lebanese playwright and director Marun al-Naqqash in 1851. Although my thesis focuses on Egyptian theatre, I refer to comments on theatre mentioned by dramatic characters of al-Naqqash's play as the first example of literary and theatrical criticism within Arabic theatre.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, while both Metawie and Yusufi take a formalist approach to study metatheatre, what distinguishes the former's study is its consideration of historical circumstances rather than Yusufi's adoption of thematic scope.

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<sup>68</sup> The titles of the two plays of Ashour and Wannus respectively mean: *The Dawn of Egyptian Theatre*, and *A Theatrical Night with Abu Khalil al-Qabbany*.

<sup>69</sup> The title of al-Naqqash's play literally means *The Envious Snippy*.

## Chapter Two

### The cooperation between literary and theatrical criticism and metatheatrical techniques

This chapter investigates the impact of including literary and theatrical criticism in the structure of metadramas, wherein it interacts with the metatheatrical techniques of the play-within-the-play, intertextuality, and parody. As the previous chapter suggests, the play-within-the-play seems to be the most influential technique for defining the play's metatheatricality. However, each one of these three techniques has its own role in shaping the structure of any metadrama. Moreover, they usually work together in a kind of an overlapping style, whether parody and intertextuality are included within the outer or the inner play. Therefore, I will start by focusing on the intersection between literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadramas and the play-within-the-play. Then I will thoroughly explore the role of parody and intertextuality in shaping dramatic characters' comments on theatrical matters by linking them with the structure of the outer and inner plays within critical metadrama.

My main claim is that the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadrama usually employs these metatheatrical techniques in order to achieve its own goal of raising and foregrounding the matters of criticism. This kind of control over other structural parts of the play seems to fit Jakobson's notion of 'the dominant' as he explains: 'The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure' (Jakobson, 41). As self-referential as metatheatrical techniques, the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism affirms the nature of metatheatre in general. In particular, as the overriding structural element, literary and theatrical criticism defines the specific feature of critical metatheatre. In addition, it unites their parts and modifies both dramatic situations and characters.

#### Discussions within representations of rehearsals and performances

If self-reference is the common function of all metatheatrical techniques within all metadramas, critical metadrama takes a step further by utilising

metatheatrical self-referential techniques, not only to highlight the artifice of theatre or to contradict illusionist representation, but also to create suitable dramatic situations that allow dramatic characters to address specific matters of literary and theatrical criticism. In order to weave the matters of criticism with the imaginary realm of their dramatic texts, playwrights of critical metadrama tend to portray their dramatic characters as theatre practitioners who are usually in a rehearsal or a performance. The use of the rehearsal, wherein a director and a group of actors and actresses are likely to discuss some aspects of their work, is employed by Pirandello and Giraudoux as the preliminary situation in *Six Characters* and *Paris Impromptu*, respectively. Likewise, the authority of the director in Kaiser's *The Protagonist*, which takes place in sixteenth-century England, is practiced by the Protagonist. As an actor-manager, who leads the members of his troupe in two rehearsals, the Protagonist is always involved in comments on theatrical matters within the play. The performance before the end of Andreyev's *Requiem* is a final rehearsal, watched by His Highness, who is the arrogant patron, and the Manager. During this preparation, which occupies most of the action of the play, discussions on theatrical matters mainly involve the Manager and the patron. The Director seems a marginal character as his role is limited to obey the patron's order, delivered to him through the Manager.

If the rehearsal itself may justify generating theatrical issues as a matter of practitioners' concerns, the obtrusive character should increase the chance to elaborate the theoretical discussions, especially when this character expresses his/her critical point of view. When the six characters appear in Pirandello's play, the discussion of theatrical issues becomes not only predictable but also inevitable. Because these imaginary characters belong to the theatre profession, at least metaphorically, they claim the right to implement their opinions on the way in which their story must be represented on stage. In contrast to the opinionated characters of the Father and the Step-Daughter in Pirandello's play, Robineau in *Paris Impromptu* reflects the non-professional view of the audience. Therefore, through his questions, he modestly brings several theatrical issues to the surface, giving Jouvett the chance to give extended explanations of his points of view. Although *Improvisation* does not contain a troupe in either a rehearsal or a performance, Ionesco appears in the play as the character of a playwright in the process of writing a play, which for a

playwright is the equivalent of a rehearsal for both actors and directors. This process is interrupted by the three critics, who are more aggressive than the intruders in the two plays of Pirandello and Giraudoux. Assuming the authority of judges, the critics arrogantly interrogate Ionesco, which generates a series of arguments including discussions about theatre in general and Ionesco's style in particular.

In both *The Public*, and *Play Without a Title*, Lorca chooses the context of a performance. In the former, the character of the Director is pivotal as all theatrical discussions revolve around his work and opinions. While his play is being performed somewhere offstage, the Director is confronted by different types of audiences, so that Lorca can build a series of arguments on theatrical matters. The main character in *Play Without a Title* is the Author whose prologue about the play turns into a conversation with his spectators. The collision between his preferences and their expectations fuels the discussion. Similar to the Author in Lorca's play, Dr. Hinkfuss, the director in *Tonight We Improvise* has a long conversation with spectators about the improvisational piece, which a group of actors are going to present according to his instructions. Then Dr. Hinkfuss' continual interruptions of the actors become an indirect way to discuss aesthetic and theatrical matters through several debates involving all the actors and actresses. Inside this inner play, the imaginary characters attend another play in another theatre as an audience. Finally, although none of them is a theatre practitioner, the characters decide to perform opera when they go back to their house. Thus, spectators of Pirandello's play watch three materialisations of theatrical representation.

All rehearsals and performances within critical metadramas are materialisations of two 'varieties of metadramatic', if I use Hornby's terminology: the play-within-the-play and the 'Role Playing within the Role', both crucially alter the structure of the dramatic texts they take place in.<sup>70</sup> Fischer and Greiner describe the play-within-the-play as a 'strategy for constructing play texts'

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<sup>70</sup> My claim of considering both rehearsals and performances within critical metadrama as variations of the play-within-the-play depends on the vast majority of scholars' consensus on the notion of such a technique. Within the play-within-the-play, there are two, or more, levels of dramatic representation, which are distinguished from each other: a frame/outer plane includes an inner dramatic situation wherein the theme, place, time, action, and/or characters acquire a new identity. Therefore, I contradict Witt's controversial claim regarding the formative structure of *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, when she argues that Molière's play 'never presents a play within a play but rather a much-interrupted rehearsal of a play that is never finished' (Witt, 146).

(Fischer, XI). In addition, the play-within-the-play creates different levels of dramatic time, space and action, which consequently generate different levels of reception. According to Hornby, defining such levels is essential for any play to be considered as metadrama. He claims:

[T]o be fully metadramatic requires that the outer play has characters and plot (although these may both be very sketchy); that these in turn must acknowledge the existence of the inner play; and that they acknowledge it as a performance. In other words, there must be two sharply distinguishable layers of performance. (Hornby, 35)

In this respect, regardless of being the main or the marginal part of a metadrama, outer and inner plays must 'acknowledge' each other. Similarly, when Elaine Aston and George Savona describe the role-playing, which they call 'Inner acting', they claim that it 'draws attention to its own status as acting, deconstructing the performance process and revealing the actor behind the character. It is a highly self-referential mode of performance, and has a particular currency in relation to 'radical' text'<sup>71</sup> (Aston, 48). Thus, in both the play-within-a-play and role-playing, the dramatic illusionist unity between the actor and dramatic character, and the identification between the latter and the audience are disassembled. The significance of these different levels of representation and reception within any metadrama is that they reveal to the audience the artifice of the entire play. When a metadrama includes literary and theatrical criticism, spectators' awareness of the anti-illusionist representation is exploited to enable them to think of characters' discussions of theatrical matters consciously.

By its nature, the technique of the play-within-the-play turns some of the dramatic characters into spectators of the inner play, who are usually described as the imaginary, fictional, or inner-audience to distinguish them from the real spectators. Consequently, the latter realises and judges the responses of this imaginary audience, to the inner play. Frank Zipfel's explanation of what he

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<sup>71</sup> Aston and Savona define three types of dramatic texts that represent distinctive periods through the history of drama, which are classic, bourgeois, and radical texts. In addition to the Greek tragedies, Aston and Savona extend classic texts to include plays of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Racine's *Phaedra*, while examples of bourgeois texts are Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. Finally, Brecht's *The Mother Courage*, Beckett's *Endgame*, and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* are representative of radical texts, whose spectators, according to Aston and Savona, are figuratively distanced from the identification with characters' action and emotions.

calls 'The response-centred potential functions' (Zipfel, 2005) of the play-within-the-play, argues that 'the real audience may be intended to identify with and approve of the reactions of the fictional audience or it may, on the contrary, be led to rebel against the comments and responses of the fictional audience to the inner play' (Zipfel, 2005). In addition to highlighting the possibility of discrepancy between the real audience's opinion and the imaginary spectators' response to the inner play, Zipfel insists that 'one of the most important potential functions of a play-within-a-play is to shed light on a particular conflict, theme or story/ story element from different, even mutually exclusive, points of view' (Zipfel, 2005). In this respect, regardless of playwrights' intentions to lead real spectators towards a specific choice, a member of the 'real' audience can realise, compare, and adopt/refuse one or more of the inner-audience's opinions. This interpretation seems to be a self-evident description of the process of reception of any play within which dramatic characters assume the role of the audience of an inner play. However, while real spectators of any metadrama may share the opinion of the fictional audience in a domestic conflict or socio-political dispute, for instance, the real audience of critical metadrama is evoked to adopt a point of view on theatre-related matters, which are usually pertinent to the audience.

It is important to highlight that the appearance of characters as theatre practitioners does not guarantee that these characters' speeches include comments on theatrical matters. For instance, although the characters of William Saroyan's *The Cave Dwellers* (1958) include two actors, and the main character in Françoise Sagan's *The Thorn* (1966) is an actress, the dialogue of both plays does not contain any reference to theatrical matters. Moreover, even in some plays that include a performance within their plots, such as Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1984), I was unable to find conversations on critical matters of theatre. In contrast, none of the characters in Ionesco's *Victims of Duty* belong to the theatre professions. Nevertheless, the bulk of the long introductory dialogue between Choubert and Madeleine is a comparison between Aristotelian and the Avant-garde theatre. Although it appears to be far too theoretical a discussion to be raised by ordinary theatre goers, this debate is turned into a dispute between two groups: Madeleine is backed by the Detective as a loyal fan of the traditional theatre, Nicolas shares with Choubert the admiration of the radical new theatre. That leads us to a significant aspect of



critical metadrama, which establishes a kind of conflict between contradictory points of view on literary and theatrical matters.

To give some examples, in *Salutations*, Ionesco portrays the contradictory opinions between the members of the audience. Where some of them express their dislike of the dialogue's repetition of words and nonverbal phonetic parts, others insist on praising the playwright. A more complicated way to raise critical matters by involving the audience is utilised in *Each in His Own Way*. Pirandello creates two channels of debate; the first involves the spectators of the inner play, including some critics, who are split into two groups: Pirandello's admirers and condemners. Both groups are very subjective and enthusiastic with regard to expressing their praise or critique of Pirandello's style in general or of the inner play in particular. The second channel of discussion runs between some spectators and the actors of the play-within-the-play. Commenting on the theme of the inner play, spectators discuss the right of theatre to portray the private lives of real people. On such a matter the play displays all possible opinions through splitting the audience of the inner play into three different groups. While some members ultimately support or contradict the playwright's exploitation of factual events within real people's lives, the last group of the audience defines some conditions, which must be considered by the playwright. Not only do such arguments intersect with the imaginary realm of the inner plays, but they usually become the main, or even the only conflict of a critical metadrama. In such exchanges of contradictory thoughts, dramatic characters' adherence to their point of view on theatrical matters of criticism, on which the critical metadrama is mainly focused, usually turns these characters into abstract representations, whether of an opinion on a specific matter, or of a general vision of the art of theatre.

### **Dramatic characters of critical metadramas: holders of critical opinions**

When Abel argues that he cannot find a 'Hero of metatheatre' in *Six Characters* because no character 'is convincing as more than a stage type', he seems to define one of the common aspects of the characters of theatre practitioners within critical metadrama, which is the one-dimensional representation of the characters of both practitioners and the members of the audience. As the examples of critical metadrama studied in my thesis suggest, dramatic personas seem to be stereotypes of actors, authors, directors, and

spectators, without any history, or social and psychological depth. That explains why most of them are named by their role in the theatrical process such as, First Female Spectator, the Critic, the Leading Actor/Actress, the Author, and the Director. Furthermore, because discussions on literary and theatrical criticism dominate their dialogues, their inter-conflicts are related, and sometimes limited to taking contradictory standpoints regarding specific aspects of their profession.

Hubert's study, within which she adopts Abel's notion of the 'Hero of metatheatre' by claiming that Molière's protagonists act as if they are playwrights, argues that 'a metadramatic approach to theatre tends at times to reduce characters to cogs in a machine, often at the expense of psychological and moral truth' (Hubert, 364). Although Hubert, like Abel, does not refer to the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism, I will use her claim, supposing that 'at times' means: when metadrama includes and foregrounds comments on theatrical matters as the main purpose of dramatic characters' speeches. In this respect, Abel's claim about the characters of Pirandello's play understandably describes the Manager and his company, who represent their theatrical profession only. Nevertheless, Abel's expression 'stage type' is meant to describe all the characters of Pirandello's play, including the six characters. In contrast to the Manager and his troupe, the entire lives of the six characters, especially the Father and his Step-Daughter, are relatively exposed.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, in addition to the six characters' awareness of their fictional nature, the Father and the Step-Daughter comment theoretically on theatre-related matters.

It is crucial to realise that although both characters' speeches are initially part of recalling events or emotions they experienced through their fictional lives, the content of their comments extends beyond informing the Manager about narrative details of their story, to become a kind of literary or theatrical criticism. For instance, the Father hypothesises about the relativity of meaning, which can be considered an echo of the relativity of truth: a repeated theme of

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<sup>72</sup> In addition to basing my claim about the roundness of the six characters in comparison with the one-dimensional characters of practitioners, I consider two general aspects of Pirandello theatre. Firstly, the Italian playwright intentionally draws most of his dramatic characters and situations with a degree of ambiguity, which reflects his insistence on the relativity of truth. Secondly, Pirandello's anti-Naturalistic style of writing is partly materialised in his plays' nonlinear narrative. For different approaches to explain the fragmented structure of *Six Characters*, see Bentley 1986, 57 – 77, and Balakian, 59 – 64.

Pirandello's plays and novels. The Father argues: 'We think we understand each other, but we never really do' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 224). Moreover, and most importantly, the Father seems to lecture the Manager about the superiority of imaginary characters compared to real persons. On the grounds of their immortality and truthfulness, dramatic characters, according to the Father, are 'less real perhaps, but truer' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 216-17). Even when the Manager eventually asks the Father to 'argue and philosophize less' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 269), the imaginary character proceeds in the same theorist-like tone.

In a more modest style, the Step-Daughter shows a high degree of awareness of the art of theatre. Blaming the author for leaving the six characters before turning his imagination into a written text, the Step-Daughter argues: 'In my opinion he [the author] abandoned us in a fit of depression, of disgust for the ordinary theatre as the public knows and likes it' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 269). With two intersecting love and lust triangles, including the Father, his wife, his assistant, and his Step-Daughter, the six characters' story mixes the themes of platonic love, sacrifice, disputes regarding legitimate and illegitimate children, and prostitution due to poverty. Therefore, it is understandable that many of Pirandello's scholars agree with the Step-Daughter's opinion of the story of the six characters as melodrama. Umberto Mariani describes these series of surprises and misunderstandings that nearly lead to incest, which is avoided at the last moment, as 'something of an old-fashioned tearjerker, material typical of the bourgeois theatre, the kind of literature that Pirandello rejected from the very beginning of his career as a playwright' (Mariani 1991, 195).<sup>73</sup> However, the most striking point of the Step-Daughter's speech is that she hints at the likeability of melodrama from the standpoint of the audience of commercial plays, which she calls 'the ordinary theatre'. Not only does the Step-Daughter realise the melodramatic features of the six characters' story, but she also connects the dramatic genre with the audience's preferences.

Despite such theoretical verdicts, neither the Father nor the Step-Daughter fits Abel's description of the 'Hero of metatheatre' whose awareness of theatre is similar to a playwright or/and a director. Regarding the theatrical

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<sup>73</sup> For more examples of defining the melodramatic aspects of the six characters' narrative, see O'Rawe, 75, and Mariani 2008, 60 – 2.

craft of representing the story of the imaginary characters in Pirandello's play, both the Manager and his troupe are more aware of the limits and possibilities that distinguish theatrical performance from the story-telling nature of the imaginary characters' speech. Even the Father's tendency for giving extended theoretical speeches can be seen as part of his narrative identity. That explains why the Manager insists on declaring: 'Drama is action, Sir, action and not confounded philosophy' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 270). In this respect, although the six characters have more social and psychological depth than the stereotyped practitioners, the latter are much more aware of the art of theatre. In other words, the Father, for instance, is a fully rounded character, who does not own the qualities of either a playwright or a director. In contrast, the Manager, who owns such theatrical qualities, is a stereotyped character.<sup>74</sup> It seems important to realise that, although the Father and his Step-Daughter are not practitioners, they resemble the Manager in *Six Characters* in terms of his decisive declaration of his points of view on theatrical matters. Likewise, the critical opinions of the company's members in *Tonight We Improvise* and *Paris Impromptu*, the Author in *Play Without a Title*, the critics in *Fanny's First Play*, the Director in *The Public*, and the Spectators in *Each in His Own Way* define their speeches, actions, and conflicts with other characters.

Even when the characters that belong to the realm of the theatre professions appear in different situations other than rehearsals or performances, their dialogues keep revolving around matters related to their profession. For example, although Pirandello's *The Mountain Giants* contains short scenes of a rehearsal and a performance, the discourse of criticism permeates the entire play and is not confined to these scenes. Moreover, Pirandello utilises the details of the private life of Isle, the leading actress, in order to raise the discussion about the notorious link between female actresses and prostitution. Furthermore, the characters' comments on their heroine's marriage to the Count, who loses his money as a patron of the troupe for her sake, intersects with their discussions on the audience's abandonment of their noncommercial play. In other words, when critical metadrama portrays parts of

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<sup>74</sup> The comments of both the Manager and the members of his company on turning the imaginary characters' story into a live performance will be mentioned in the next chapter through exploring the different topics of literary and theatrical criticism within the examples of European critical metadrama. For contradictory arguments about whether the six characters have a narrative or dramatic nature, see Nelson 1958, 126, and Lorch 1991, 135.

the private lives of the characters of practitioners, these characters are usually concerned with their profession. Such an observation suggests the importance of considering the dialectical relationship between the imaginary realm of the play and theatre-related discussions, which occupy most of characters' speeches within metadramas.

### **Metatheatrical techniques within critical metadrama: more than self-reference**

#### **a. The play within the critical metadrama: a mirror of theatrical criticism**

The impact of literary and theatrical criticism in the structure of the metadrama extends beyond using dramatic characters of theatre practitioners whether in a performance, rehearsal, or in their everyday life in order to express their critical opinions on theatre-related matters. Most significantly, I claim that both the narrative content and theatrical form of the inner play within critical metadramas usually support the dramatic characters' points of view on the matters of theatre criticism. A perfect example of the dominance of the topics of theatrical criticism over the content of the inner play can be found in *The Protagonist*. Out of various critical matters mentioned by the protagonist, the dichotomy of the actor and the character seems to be the main topic Kaiser's play investigates. The Protagonist, an actor in the Elizabethan era, is proud of his effect on the audience as he tells his Sister:

Why do I carry away the audience as no other player has done? Why does their blood run cold? [...] Because I am the one who is acting up there. I am the one who laughs and raves with every pore of my skin, with every line of my hand. I am he, and he I remain, and at the end I would make my exit, unable to strip off the character I was up there on the stage—I would create confusion that would end in horror—if I did not at last look into your face, the mirror of truth! (Kaiser, 135)

As the Protagonist describes, his identification with the characters he performs extends beyond convincing his audience of his acting, or even leading them to an ultimate illusion, to a kind of complete conversion. Although the Protagonist is happy to have such a great influence on spectators, he suffers from losing his

own personality to the character he plays not only on stage, but also, and most effectively, in real life.<sup>75</sup>

The Protagonist's lack of control over the character will be proven fatal, not only in terms of his profession, but also regarding his private life, which seems to be turned into part of one of his tragedies. The most striking point of the Protagonist's confession is that retrieving his own personality is conditional upon looking at his sister's face, without which, as the protagonist seems to augur, he 'would create confusion that would end in horror'. In the outer play, the Protagonist leads his all-male company to rehearse a comedy and tragic melodrama. Both inner plays are wordless and based on the same plot. Eventually, the two imaginary mimes are discovered to be related to the Protagonist's relationship with his Sister, who in turn draws the fine line between her brother's uncontrolled illusion and reality. The Protagonist claims:

I could not find my way back to myself if you didn't call me brother. The lie of my playing is shattered in the lightning flash of that word, and the trembling earth is once more steady under my feet. [...] I am still shaking with fear at falling into this frenzy—and yet I spur myself to the leap—because I can return to you-you standing before me without a lie! (Kaiser, 135-6)

Here, it seems that the Protagonist defines another stipulation in order to guarantee his return to reality from the irrepressible illusion. To be able to act as her brother's saviour from insanity, his Sister must be 'without a lie'.

When the Protagonist's behaviour towards his Sister gradually reveals his concealed forbidden emotions, his weird dependence on her presence in order to cure him from the occupying imaginary characters is explained. Kaiser uses both visual and verbal signs to expose the Protagonist's exploitation of his sister's innocence to contravene the ethical, social, and religious limits of the siblings' relationship:

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<sup>75</sup> As an actor in the Elizabethan epoch, the Protagonist's pride of his identification with his characters may reflect the Baroque belief in the resemblances between life and stage. In addition, Kaiser's dramatic character may indicate the influence of Stanislavskian thought, which will be organised later in the Russian theorist's method. According to Stanislavski, actors can successfully identify with the characters they play at moments of 'magic' on stage. For information about Stanislavski's system in general and about actors' ability to remove the borders between their individuality and their characters in particular, see Stanislavski. For detailed discussion on Stanislavski's method, see the studies of Benedetti and Farber.

*He kisses her fiercely.*

HOST *appears at the door.*

HOST, *sarcastically.* If the lady—I mean, your sister— (Kaiser, 136).

Later, as spectators we know that the Sister is already in love with a Young Gentleman, who urges her to inform her brother about their secret affair. Aware that this undeclared love will look to her brother like a lie, the Sister is reluctant to tell him until the end of the play. Then, as she breaches the condition upon which the Protagonist establishes her capability of rescuing him from a constant life in a character's soul, her brother's earlier warning about the 'confusion' that might lead to 'horror' incisively describes the play's finale.

Although this dramatic thread may seem irrelevant to either the literary criticism within the outer play or the two inner mimes of *The Protagonist*, it ends up insisting on the relationship between art and life in general and the border that separates/links the imaginary character from/with the real actor in particular. That partly explains why the comic inner play is rehearsed first while the serious melodramatic one is delayed to the end of Kaiser's play. Then both life and art are combined in the same violent action by the Protagonist. As a betrayed husband killing his cheating wife within the fictional world of the melodramatic mime, the sinful-lover brother punishes his sister for her secret love, which she has just revealed.

When the comic mime is supposed to be finished, Kaiser imposes the factual life of the outer play into the imaginary realm of the first inner play when the '*SISTER from left, quickly approaching the stage. PROTAGONIST sees her, runs up to her and embraces her fiercely. The music plays a jubilant finale*' (Kaiser, 141). At the moment the musicians play the finale, the relationship between the siblings, which is depicted by the vehement embrace, looks as if it is included within the mime. Blurring the borders between theatre (imagination) and life (reality) foreshadows the soon-to-come disaster. Similarly to the end of the first mime, the rehearsal of the melodrama is interrupted by the entrance of the Protagonist's Sister. Because the Protagonist completely monopolises every single aspect of the performance, when he starts a conversation with his sister, the other three actors are uncertain of what they have to do or say, especially the two actors who play the roles of the wife and her lover. Therefore, the stage directions state that '*the two above are utterly confused. This confusion grows*

*in such a way that the two players do not know how to continue the play. They lean out of the window and ask the PROTAGONIST for instructions. The player right has also got up and fails to understand'* (Kaiser, 143). As characters, the players still wear their costumes and try to continue their roles. Simultaneously, as actors, they try to ask the Protagonist, who is the author and the director, about the next action. The importance of this moment of confusion is to create an intermediate state between art and real life, to prepare the real audience for the next moment when art and life intersect: the Protagonist/brother uses the dagger to kill his sister.

Apart from affirming the Protagonist's forbidden love through his extreme violence as well as his tenderness, his action removes the border between life and art as he clearly declares 'there is no longer any distinction between real and feigned madness' (Kaiser, 144). In this respect, Kaiser's play seems to utilise the technique of the play-within-the-play in order to support the main topic of discussion on theatrical matters within the outer play, which is the controversial relationship between life (actors), and theatre (characters).<sup>76</sup>

Even what seems a mere self-referential method within a critical metadrama is usually related to one or more of the theatrical matters raised within the play. In other words, I argue that the dominance of theatrical criticism over the entire plot of critical metadrama, including its inner plays, turns self-reference from a function of the play-within-the-(meta)play to a means of underscoring the discursive content of literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadramas. For instance, Mee Lan, the Chinese princess in the historical inner play of *The Great Wall of China*, directly addresses the audience in an aggressive tone by declaring: 'I'm not stupid. Do you think I haven't noticed that everything here (this throne, for example, even a schoolgirl can see that) is theatrical make-believe? But you sit watching it all, you who are grown-up and know everything, you sit with your arms crossed and say nothing' (Frisch, 24). Not only does the dramatic character expose the artifice of the

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<sup>76</sup> As the next chapter explores, other topics of discussion within the outer play such as the inferior social image of actors, the peremptory behaviour of the actor-manager, and the submissive obedience of this Protagonist towards the patron's orders are represented within the two inner plays.



setting and the costumes as theatrical elements creating the dramatic illusion, the Chinese princess makes the dramatic illusion an equivalent to naivety.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, when she mentions spectators' negativity, the dramatic character seems to blame the members of the audience for more than their lack of action against the tyranny of her father within the imaginary realm of the play, which she has just exposed as an illusion. In other words, by revealing the artifice of the play, the dramatic character's speech to spectators addresses them as real persons. Consequently, by demanding they must be more active, the play seems to hint at the audience's real life rather than the fictional action of the play. Such a hint is affirmed later by speeches of other characters, who directly acknowledge the presence of spectators not only as real people, but also as contemporary members of European societies after World War II. In this respect, a political message of *The Great Wall of China* is mixed with, and based on, a discussion of the social role of theatre.

Similarly to the vast majority of European critical metadramas in the first half of the twentieth century, *The Great Wall of China* is full of self-referential characters' speeches, which have different degrees of linkage with the matters of literary and theatrical criticism. These theatrical matters in turn seem to be influenced by the historical circumstances, which include the dominance of specific political systems or the conflict between different ideological beliefs. Usually, the impact of such political and ideological contexts on critical metadrama can be traced within dramatic characters' discussions on the social function of theatre, which is intrinsically pertinent to both the dominant type[s] of production and reception. Furthermore, as a critical metadrama with the political theme of its inner play, I claim that the most significant feature of Frisch's play is its signs of the influence of both Pirandellian and Brechtian functions of metatheatrical techniques.

When the Chinese Mother directly addresses spectators as she introduces herself: 'I'm a Chinese peasant woman. My name is Olan. I am the mother, who never plays any part in world history' (Frisch, 4), she does not literally claim herself as a dramatic character. On the other hand, although such speech may seem similar to monologues and soliloquies within a large number

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<sup>77</sup> Nearly two decades after Frisch's play, the Speakers (actors) in *Offending the Audience* bluntly inform spectators that they insult them. This insult, according to the Speakers, prevents/protects the audience from dramatic illusionism. For more information, see Handke 35.

of illusionist plays, the Chinese Mother's self-reference relies on her acknowledgment of the audience, which indirectly hints at the awareness of her theatrical nature. She plays a part in *The Great Wall of China*, in contrast to her insistence that she 'never plays any part in world history'. In addition, using the present tense in this sentence suggests that the Chinese Mother is not only aware that she represents all ordinary Chinese mothers, but also that she is a dramatic depiction of all powerless and poor people who suffer under any dictatorship.

With more direct revealing of the dramatic character's self-consciousness of its theatricality, the Modern Man informs the audience: 'My part in the play is that of an intellectual' (Frisch, 7). Considering the difference between playing a 'part' in 'history' and 'in the play' is significant to understand the standpoint of *The Great Wall of China* regarding the relationship between theatre and life. In what seems to follow Brecht's utilisation of the dramatic character as a narrator, the Modern Man introduces and comments on the historically and geographically distant actions of the inner play by linking them with the world he shares with the contemporary audience during the aftermath of World War II. When a mute young man is brutally tortured under suspicion of being the oral poet who recited revolutionary rhymes against the Chinese Emperor, the Modern Man declares his inability to defend the innocent victim of the tyrannous regime of the Emperor:

Was any one of us, any intellectual, ever able to avert disaster, merely because he saw it coming? We can write books and make speeches, even courageous speeches, telling people why things can't go on like this. But they do go on. Exactly the same. Scientists of the highest calibre get up and cry out to mankind: the cobalt bomb you are producing will be your end! – and the cobalt bomb is produced. (Frisch, 65)

In this respect, the political message of the play, which is delivered to the spectators directly, is that dominant political systems in both life and play are unjust. Therefore, these systems need to be opposed in order to be changed. However, instead of Brecht's ideological belief in the possibility of change, Frisch's play seems to be rather pessimistic by doubting the ability of both

literature and science in preventing humanity from waging wars and practising wide-scale violence.<sup>78</sup>

Paradoxically, *The Great Wall of China* itself is a kind of ‘intellectual’ cry for change. In other words, Frisch’s play does not suggest that theatre is altogether useless. More precisely, Frisch’s play challenges entertainment-seeking spectators, who predict a happy ending to the historical bloody story. In contrast, the Modern Man ruins the audience’s evening, not only because he admits his inability to intervene in the imaginary narrative of the inner play, but also, and more disappointingly, the Modern Man insists on revealing the messy state of the audience’s real world. In other words, Frisch merges his play’s political message with dramatic characters’ comments on the theatrical matter of the social function of theatre. As far as the Modern Man is concerned, the role of theatre is to shock its spectators by confronting them with the reality of their turbulent world rather than misrepresenting this world. The Modern Man’s challenge of the audience’s expectations is emphasised by the Chinese Emperor’s direct speech to the audience, within which he declares:

I know exactly what you’re thinking, you people down there. But your hope only makes me smile. You think that this very evening I shall be cast down from this throne, because the play must have an end and a meaning, and when I have been dethroned you can go home reassured, drink a glass of beer and eat a ham sandwich. That would just suit you. You and your drama! [...] I don’t stick to the rules of drama. (Frisch, 40-1)

Such a contradiction of spectators’ eagerness for a happy ending crucially deviates the end of the confrontation between the Chinese Emperor and his oppressed people—represented by the poor Chinese Mother and her mute son—from ‘poetic justice’. In other words, Frisch’s play seems to deprive its audience of the moral message of punishing evil and rewarding goodness, which is a common feature of popular entertainment, mainly melodramas.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Such a sceptical attitude towards language will soon-to-be widely adopted by the absurdist playwrights.

<sup>79</sup> For detailed discussions of melodramatic poetic justice, see Buckley 65–7, Singer 136–7, and Frick. For more information about the conflict between purely good and villainous characters as a cornerstone of melodramatic plays and films in terms of achieving emotive effect on their audience, see Rush 140–1, Mercer 80 – 1, Williams 1998, 77, and Brooks 1995, 36.

Thus, Frisch's play suggests that theatre is not a method of trivial entertainment, by which the spectators escape the formidable problems of their society. Although less aggressive than the Author in *Play Without a Title*, the Chinese Emperor, the Chinese princess, and the Modern Man mock and challenge spectators' expectations of an appeasing theatre, which makes its audience feel better about the world. In this respect, the characters of both Lorca and Frisch seem to repeat the Italian Futurists' claim: '*It's stupid to pander to the primitivism of the crowd, which, in the last analysis, wants to see the bad guy lose and the good guy win*' (Marinetti, 20). However, while attacking the middle-class audience in Lorca's play reflects on the conflict between Capitalism and Marxism in the 1930s, *The Great Wall of China* comments on the function of theatre after a disastrous war, created by both Capitalist and Communist countries. Therefore, Frisch's play condemns spectators' negativity in both life and theatre, regardless of their social class. In other words, although dramatic characters of the two plays of Lorca and Frisch share the same opinion on the social function of theatre, each play represents specific historical circumstances.

Similar to *The Protagonist*, the narrative of the inner play of *The Great Wall of China* is related to the topic[s] of theatrical criticism raised by dramatic characters. The ultimate goal of moving between the frame and the inner plays within both critical metadramas—in addition to emphasising self-reference—seems to be the underscoring of the connection between dramatic characters' discussions on theatrical matters and the imaginary plot of the inner play. What distinguishes *The Great Wall of China* from the *The Protagonist* is that revealing the borders between life and theatre is integrated within the plot of Kaiser's play. In contrast, the dramatic characters of Frisch's play intentionally expose theatrical artifice in a sort of scornful attack on the dramatic illusionism. Such a mocking attitude, whether towards the inner play's own narrative or style, seems to be a common feature of most critical metadramas.

#### **b. The parody within the critical metadrama: a method of criticism**

As a 'mocking imitation of the style of literary work or works, ridiculing the stylistic habits of an author or school by exaggerated mimicry' (Baldick, 248), parody is usually utilised by playwrights to attack specific aspects of writing or theatrical representation within the inner play of their critical metadramas.

However, instances of parody may occur within the outer play. A good example of employing parody within critical metadrama as a method of scornful condemnation can be found in *Improvisation*. The bulk of Ionesco's play, which is usually described by scholars as Ionesco's harsh reply to specific critics' writings against the playwright's previous plays, seems to be a contemptuous attack on three French critics.

Determining that these critics are Roland Barthes, Bernard Dort, and Jean-Jacques Gauthier is mainly based on realising that the play includes some deliberately distorted quotations from their published works of criticism. Ronald Hayman claims that 'much of the dialogue is made up of quotations lifted directly from their articles in *Théâtre Populaire*, *Bref* and *Le Figaro*' (Hayman, 58). In addition, Ionesco gives the three characters of the critics the same name 'Bartholomeus', which is an apparent alteration of the surname of Roland Barthes. Ionesco himself seems to affirm such an interpretation of *Improvisation*, which is adopted by the vast majority of studies of his theatre. Commenting on the play, Ionesco declares:

*L'Impromptu de l'Alma [Improvisation]* is a rather wicked joke. I put on the stage friends like Barthes, Dort, etc.... To a large extent this play is a montage of quotations and complications drawn from their erudite studies. [...] There is also another character that is Jean Jacques Gauthier. I have not made a success of this character, but in spite of his verbal ferocity I don't hold this against him. (Ionesco 1964, 133)

However, what the playwright calls a wicked joke is a harsh mockery that extends to include most of Brecht's notions and terms, which are ridiculed through the critics' naïve improper use.<sup>80</sup>

Mocking didactic theatre is the central topic around which attacking all aspects of Brechtian theory and practice revolves. In the heart of this attack is the Brechtian social goal of influencing spectators by raising their awareness of their society's problems, which is also declared by the Author in *Play Without a Title*. Regarding the function of theatre as an educational method, the critics engage in many successive debates that turn the figurative description of

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<sup>80</sup> In Ionesco 1964, 68, the playwright claims that his bad relationships with critics were the reason for their attack on his plays. This is one of several contradictions between Ionesco's different statements, which act as a reminder that playwrights' declarations cannot be considered as facts.

theatre as a school for spectators to a grotesque image as the following dialogue suggests:

BART II: The theatre will be a night school. [...] A compulsory course [...] The theatre's a lesson in things. [...] If any playgoer fails to understand ...

BART I: Or wants to leave the room [...] He must raise his hand ...

BART II: And ask permission to go [...]

BART I: Every playgoer will be expected to come and see the play several times and learn it off by heart. (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 126 - 27)

Thus, the critics literally draw an analogy between all the elements of theatre performance and attributes of both schools and education.

The excessive tucking of Brechtian terms within their lines is a common feature of the critics' speeches. To give examples, Bart II claims: 'He sounds dishonest to me, that is to say, dialectically, honest' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 132). Mocking the 'dialectic' is mixed with a meaningless explanation of the distance between the actor and the role when Bart I argues that 'dialectically speaking, it's called: The Being-In-on-the-Outside-and-Out-on-the-Inside (*To the other two Bartholomeus*). It's also the Being of not-Being and the Not-Being of Being in the know' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 118). Similarly, Brecht's term: the 'gestus' is being utilised in order to evaluate Molière negatively. Bart I declares: 'All it means is that Molière failed to express the social gestus of his age' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 121). In addition to this blunt use of Brecht's terms, Ionesco's play sometimes indirectly condemns the German playwright's theory of theatre. For instance, when Bart I claims: 'A new theatre, with a scientific director and a young company of scientific actors who want to launch out with you. You will get scientific treatment' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 111), *Improvisation* hints at Brecht's claim that the 'dialectic' theatre in the 'scientific age' is able to achieve the audience's entertainment and 'pleasure'.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Ionesco combines both verbal and non-verbal elements to make fun of Brecht's notion of alienation. According to Bart II, alienation means that 'Instead of the expression "get out of" say "get away from", which means "alienate yourself", and then you'll understand...the more alienated you are. It's

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<sup>81</sup> Brecht's claim was initially introduced in his study: *A Short Organum for the Theatre* (1949). For detailed explanations of Brecht's notion, see White, 234 – 7.

the electrical shock of alienation' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 117). Then the three critics collaborate in what seems to be an educational demonstration of Brecht's devices of alienation; while one of the critics reads the stage directions, the other two seriously act as if they are trying to install a new complicated instrument by following strict instructions:

BART I [*reading from the treatise*]: It is essential to put up a sign to indicate the action... [*At the front of one side of the stage BART III puts up a sign which reads: A PLAYWRIGHT'S EDUCATION... [...] BART II abruptly sweeps all the books and papers from the table and hangs up a sign which reads: FALSE TABLE [...] that it makes no claim at all to represent a real place.* (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 137)

As these examples from *Improvisation* imply, it seems that Ionesco's play simultaneously attacks the critics' ignorance and most aspects of Brecht's theatre. But if *Improvisation* was only a revenge on the critics' negative response to Ionesco's plays, why does Ionesco attack Brecht? On one hand, Barthes and Dort had leftist inclinations, which perhaps were seen by Ionesco as the reason for their critique of his own work, especially considering their praise of Brecht. That explains why Bart II claims: 'I'm for Brecht! ... Brecht is the only god for me. I am his prophet!' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 138). On the other hand, within both Ionesco's dramatic texts and critical writings, the playwright attacks all sorts of imposing ideologies in theatre, especially Marxism, which Brecht's theory and practice represent as the most prominent, not to say the dominant form of political theatre in the twentieth century.

For Ionesco, political theatre seems as harmful as all forms of bourgeois entertaining theatre. In one of his articles, Ionesco controversially claims: 'Political theatre makes us as unconscious metaphysically as *boulevard* theatre. We must depoliticise theatre' (Ionesco 2001, 15). Moreover, at the finale of *Amédée* (1953), after the protagonist's failure in writing more than three lines of his play, *Amédée* declares: 'I believe in social realism' (Ionesco *Amédée*, 225). Here, it is important to insist that, firstly, Brecht is not mentioned within *Amédée*. Secondly, Brecht's theatre is much too artistic to be reduced to the so-called 'Social Realism', which, according to Daniel Gerould was 'officially proclaimed at

the First soviet Writers' Conference in 1934' (Gerould 1994, 196), to become the central rule that regulated Soviet arts and criticism for decades.<sup>82</sup>

The significance of considering Amédée's line and Ionesco's own statement about political theatre is that they both contextualise the mocking of Brecht's theatre and scorning of Marxist critics within *Improvisation*. More than a mere vengeful reply to critics, such a parody is part of the absurdist playwright's opposition to the ideology-based criticism and drama. Therefore, defining the message of literary and theatrical criticism within *Improvisation* mainly relies on the textual evidence of characters' comments on theatrical matters. Regardless of whether the characters of the critics represent real persons or not, they are a parody of negative aspects of critics. Similarly, the character of Ionesco within the play cannot be identified with the real playwright, especially with the character's submissive attitude towards the three critics. As an imaginary character, Ionesco is a parody of all practitioners who overrespect, and perhaps fear, critics' judgment. The awareness of such a figurative, rather than literal, nature of parody is crucial to understanding the comments of fictional spectators on the inner play of Ionesco's *Salutations*. Commenting on the inner play, which is exclusively based on repeating the same words or syllables, the members of the imaginary audience argue:

THE LADY SPECTATOR'S NEIGHBOUR [*in a stage whisper to her*]: Anyone could do that! [...]  
 3<sup>RD</sup> SPECTATOR [*from the audience, to the LADY SPECTATOR's neighbour*]: You try it then. It's not so easy!  
 (Ionesco 1968, 168 –9)

As the 3<sup>rd</sup> Spectator's comment suggests, the real target of parody is both spectators and critics, who attack such a style, which is a mockingly exaggerated reproduction not only of Ionesco's stylistic method, but of most absurdist plays wherein repetition is one of the noticeable aspects.

Within the vast majority of critical metadramas, the parody's sneering denunciation is mingled with, or even replaced by, a kind of a solemn critique of a specific style, which seems to be a feature of utilising parody in modern

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<sup>82</sup> In *Amédée or How to Get Rid of It*, which is not one of my examples of critical metadrama because it includes very limited stances of theatrical criticism, *Amédée* is a playwright who claims that he has not written more than two lines in fifteen years because of the lack of inspiration, which suggests that Ionesco's play links talentless and deluded playwrights with adopting ideology-based writing.



literature in general. Linda Hutcheon claims that the 'twentieth-century art forms teach that parody has a wide range of forms and intents – from that witty ridicule to the playfully ludic to the seriously respectful' (Hutcheon 2002, 90). These various types and functions of parody draw their links with criticism as well as their connection with theatrical forms of comedy. Baldick argues: 'Parody is related to burlesque in its applications of serious styles to ridiculous subjects, to satire in its punishment of eccentricities, and even to criticism in its analysis of style' (Baldick, 248). While considering the intrinsic connection between parody and criticism vitally accounts for the former's noticeable presence within critical metadramas, the links with both burlesque and satire help in realising how playwrights utilise parody in order to criticise, mock, and attack specific aspects of theatre practice.

In this sense, the function of parody within critical metadrama can be explained on the grounds of the Russian Formalist Yury Tynianov's concept of evolution. James Curtis declares that 'parody interests Tynianov primarily as a theoretical problem of evolution. For him, parody serves as a kind of historical "barring of the device," because it makes explicit the interpenetration of the past and the present; in parody, the past lives in the present' (Curtis, 119).<sup>83</sup> Within the vast majority of critical metadramas, parody can be seen as a response to specific problems of theatre practice. According to Hutcheon, parody seems to have the same function of critical metadrama. She claims: 'Parody develops out of the realization of the literary inadequacies of a certain convention' (Hutcheon 1991, 50). Consequently, by mocking or seriously attacking these 'inadequacies', it seems that parody shares, or perhaps regulates, the reformatory function of literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadrama. Moreover, not only does Hutcheon consider parody within works of art a reflection on the dominant discourse of criticism within the artist's time/society, but she also claims that the increasing presence of parody within art indicates artists' doubt on critics' judgment. Hutcheon argues: 'Art forms have increasingly appeared to distrust external criticism to the extent that they have sought to incorporate critical commentary within their own structures in a kind of self-legitimizing shortcircuit of the normal critical dialogue' (Hutcheon 1985, 1). Realising that critics themselves are a common target of parody within critical

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<sup>83</sup> For more information about the reformatory and evolutionary function of parody according to Tynianov, see Duff.

metadrama supports Hutcheon's claim. Put differently, critics seem to be part of the crisis of the theatre industry to the extent that urges playwrights to introduce a kind of a criticism of criticism within their critical metadramas.

The most significant feature of utilising parody to address all sorts of defects, whether scornfully or seriously, is the noticeable relationship between the target of parody and the topics of discussion on theatrical matters raised by dramatic characters within critical metadramas. Such a relationship can be found, for instance, in *Victims of Duty* within which Ionesco uses a more serious and reformatory form of parody than in *Improvisation*. While Choubert ridicules the entire history of theatre because all plays were a variation of detective drama, the plot of *Victims of Duty* itself is based on a trivial and a long investigation conducted by a detective. The play parodies the same form it adopts in different ways. Firstly, the play reveals the falseness of its case; the enigma focuses on the disappearance of someone called Mallot or Mallod whose existence is doubtful. Secondly, as far as the play reveals, it seems not important whether this anonymous person will be found or not. The most important element in the play is the process of the investigation itself, which is full of nonsensical violence and mercilessness. Finally, even the surprise, which is one of the essential aspects of mystery literature, is mocked through reversing the simplistic categorisation of good and evil characters. After humiliating Choubert and forcing him to chew the tough crusted bread, the Detective is killed by Choubert's friend Nicolas who seems to be the good hero for a while. Nonetheless, Nicolas gradually becomes the new dominant authority; he even exceeds the Detective by forcing the couple to chew the tough crusted bread. Thus, there is no melodramatic justice as the saviour becomes the new villain.

As in *Victims of Duty*, most critical metadramas that include parody adopt the theatrical style on which dramatic characters negatively comment. Hutcheon argues that, 'as a form of criticism, parody has the advantage of being both a re-creation and a creation, making criticism into a kind of active exploration of form' (Hutcheon 1985, 51). In other words, when a critical metadrama utilises parody, the criticised aspect of theatre is attacked twice: by parody and by the discourse of theatrical criticism. The Protagonist in Kaiser's play affirms: 'We are not playing for a motley crowd driven together by their stupid lust for entertainment' (Kaiser, 133 – 4). On one hand, this discriminating verdict of

general, not to say ordinary, spectators, can be understood on the grounds that the actor-manager is commissioned by the Duke, who will watch the performance with some of his elite friends. On the other hand, the comic inner play is based on a simple, not to say trivial, entertaining plot with accidental actions: a womaniser husband, played by the Protagonist, neglects his wife to whom he sends a monk in order to calm her down. The playful monk starts seducing the wife, who eventually accepts his caresses and kisses after a short resistance. Meanwhile, the husband convinces a neighbouring girl to invite him to her house. When each couple watches the other doing the same thing from opposite windows, the monk is hit by the wife and by her husband. Finally, after appeasing his wife, the husband successively moves between the two houses caressing his wife and the girl alternately.

Moreover, Kaiser utilises the same plot with its two love triangles to create the second mime, within which comic elements are turned into tragical aspects. Here, the husband leaves his house because of his wife's disinclination. Then, he joins the girl at the opposite house, and while kissing her, he realises his wife is at the opposite window with her elderly gentleman lover. Despite the girl's attempts to keep him, he angrily rushes towards his house holding his dagger. In addition to the interruption caused by the appearance of the Protagonist's sister, which removes the boundary between real life and theatrical representation, the seriousness of the second mime is challenged by the contradictory reactions of the same one-dimensional characters to the same actions within the two mimes. Put differently, the difference between representing the double betrayals as a *joke* and as a *disaster* is fragile and relies on unconvincingly imposed morality.

In addition to altering the narrative, the artifice of the scenery is revealed by turning the set round in front of the real audience as the same drawing on *'the two backcloths, showing house walls in garish colors with openings for doors and windows, facing one another at an angle* (Kaiser, 139), which is used for the comedy, became *'dark'* (Kaiser, 142) to fit the second serious mime. Moreover, Kaiser's play highlights the utilisation of music as a method of motivating spectators' emotion in melodrama. The Protagonist excludes the cello from the accompanying instruments to the comic scene because, according to him, its tones are more suitable to tragedy. Therefore, he orders the musician: 'Leave out the cello. We won't have anything serious. Any tragedy

your instruments introduce shall be wiped from the world, and the last tear turned to sweet wine' (Kaiser, 139). However, as soon as he intends to rehearse the melodramatic mime, the Protagonist reverses his instructions: 'You haven't touched the cello, now you shall make amends for your idleness. Carry through your cantabile without a break' (Kaiser, 142). Thus, dramaturgical, visual and nonverbal/audible elements that differentiate the joke from the disaster are exposed.

Furthermore, and most importantly, the outer play suggests that the shift from comedy to moral melodrama is hypocritical not only because it is invented by a brother with sinful feelings towards his sister, but also due to the fact that such a change is made to satisfy one of the Duke's friends. Just when the Protagonist finishes the rehearsal of the comic mime, according to Duke's previous order, the latter's Majordomo brings a different request: 'The unforeseen [sic] arrival of a kinsman, the bishop, necessitates a change of program [sic]. [...] His Grace wishes you to present a serious play' (Kaiser, 142). Consequently, the Protagonist reverses his comic mime into a kind of a moral mime. In addition, to avoid offending the bishop, the character of the dissolute monk is turned into 'an elderly, wealthy, worn-out gentleman' (Kaiser, 143). Apart from any metaphorical reading of the Duke and the bishop as symbols of the social and religious powers of nobility and the church, respectively, the Protagonist insists on the moral message of the plot in order to satisfy the bishop and his host. The real audience's recognition of the falseness of the actor-manager's intention of imposing the moral message within the second mime is more likely to be magnified by the Protagonist's negative description of the 'crowd' as seekers with a 'stupid lust for entertainment'.

The inner plays of Pirandello's critical metadramas are good examples of utilising the same style, on which dramatic characters comment, by taking the form of parody, where melodramatic aspects are the target of critique. Therefore, I agree with Mariani's description of what he calls the plays 'in which Pirandello deals with the art of the theatre' wherein, according to Mariani, 'The themes, the plots, all the familiar conventions (including the use of the scenic space) of the bourgeois theatre—still employed, albeit with subversive intent' (Mariani 1991, 193), by considering that such 'subversive intent' is shown through two textual evidences: characters' comments on theatrical matters and by the use of parody.

In his study, which focuses on *Six Characters*, Mariani limits this 'subversive intent' to the discrepancy between the 'naturalistic language' of the six characters' melodramatic story and the 'conceptual language' they use in their conversations with the manager. Such contrast, according to Mariani, reveals the triviality of their imaginary narrative compared to the more profound and vital desire to 'communicate' with the world; to become alive by turning into written/performed characters, rather than thoughts within an author's mind (Mariani 1991, 201). My claim is that Pirandello's 'subversive intent' to criticise melodrama within his critical metadramas extends beyond using contradictory levels of language, which expose the distance between the imaginary characters' melodramatic story and their existential dilemma. When the Step-Daughter accuses the absent author of creating the six characters to be as miserable as the popular theatre might do in order to attract and satisfy the dominant audience's taste, Pirandello's play, I argue, directly attacks melodramatic features, which are parodied throughout the play. Analysing Pirandello's style of parody relies on considering that melodrama usually tends to achieve two intersecting goals: generating spectators' sympathy with dramatic characters' suffering, and creating the so-called 'melodramatic surprise'.<sup>84</sup>

To explain the way in which Pirandello's play contradicts these two aims of melodrama, I have chosen the meeting between the Father, as a client of paid sex, and his Step-Daughter, as an inexperienced prostitute, at the disguised brothel. According to the two characters, both were oblivious of the fact that they are on the verge of incest, which was avoided by the Mother's on-time appearance and revelation of the kinship. These melodramatic circumstances reflect Oscar Brockett's and Robert Ball's claim that: 'Much of the appeal of melodrama lay in the suspense created by placing sympathetic characters in great danger and by their last-minute rescue' (Brockett 2013, 141). Consequently, the vital factor for spectators' compassion is their

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<sup>84</sup> The terms 'melodramatic surprise' and 'cheap dramatic surprise' are utilised by some scholars to describe the excessive use of unconvincing revelations within the plot of melodrama. For explanation of the notion of dramatic surprise to create tension, see Dawson 32. For using dramatic surprise in tragedy as a method of evoking the audience's compassion, see Munteanu 181 – 2. Both the terms dramatic and/or melodramatic surprise are employed by studies of novels and cinema as can be found in Bell 1991, 68, and Hallam 141, respectively.

recognition of the predicted 'danger', of which dramatic characters are unaware.<sup>85</sup>

The most striking method of preventing the melodramatic story from causing either sympathy or surprise is the six characters' hindsight of their fates, as all the incidents of their story belong to the past. Moreover, because each one of the six characters is eager to convince the Manager and his troupe of his/her own point of view, the narrative takes a non-linear style. Such non-linearity enables spectators to know the consequences of the incident before they watch its theatrical representation. Early in the first act of the play, the following conversation reveals the safe outcome of the potential 'danger':

THE SON. And he [the Father] thinks he has bought the right to tyrannize over us all with those hundred lire he was going to pay; but which, fortunately—note this, gentlemen—he had no chance of paying.

THE STEP-DAUGHTER. It was a near thing, though, you know! [*Laughs ironically*]. (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 223)

The assertive language of the Son, accompanied by his sister's testimony, leaves no chance for the later scene to motivate the audience's worries or sympathy, especially with the Step-Daughter's laughing at what is supposed to be fearful memories. Therefore, when the Father and his Step-Daughter assume the roles of performers to represent their memories of that meeting in the second act of Pirandello's play, the real spectators, similar to the members of the troupe and the six characters themselves, are aware that the sexual sin will not be committed. In addition, the occasional playful gesture of the Step-daughter's character disrupts her image in the story as a victimised prostitute, who selflessly sacrifices herself in order to save her poor family. Put differently, the Step-Daughter is neither a good nor a villainous melodramatic stereotype.

Interruption is the second parodical trick exploited by Pirandello to tackle, and sometimes to convert, the emotive effect of the melodramatic story on

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<sup>85</sup> For explanation of the significance of the audience's information about the danger in which some characters of melodrama are, see Mercer 80 – 1, which is based on the detailed discussion on the matter in Neale 1986. Scholars differentiate melodrama from tragedy according to various reasons such as the nineteenth-century forms belonging to Christianity rather than Paganism with its consequences on the nature of characters, their actions, and the dramatic conflict. For examples, see Roche 250 – 52, Felski 7 – 8, and Zarzosa 145 – 50. Some studies consider that the last-minute saving of the melodramatic protagonist from a pitiful fate is what distinguishes melodrama from tragedy. For examples, see Archer 70, and Matthews 355 – 65. Within the latter, works of melodrama are described as 'Tragedies with Happy Endings'.

spectators. The unique structure of *Six Characters*, wherein both the outer and the inner plays repeatedly interrupt each other, turns Pirandello's play into successive fragments of the two dramatic levels. Put differently, the excessive moving between the inner play—where the six characters narrate the incidents of their life—and the outer plays—where these characters engage with the Manager and his troupe in theoretical debates—represents the melodramatic story in scattered parts.

Many of the six characters' exaggerated sympathetic narrative lines are disrupted by the Manager's regular interventions. For instance, when the Manager insists that some parts of the six characters' story are unable to be put on stage, he specifically criticises the prolonged situations and finical language, as the Manager's comments on the speeches of the Step-Daughter and the Father respectively indicate. Moreover, whenever the story of the six characters reaches an emotive point, Pirandello returns to the outer play, whether by verbal or visual interruptions. For instance, during the fierce argument between the Father and the Mother on the reasons for abandoning her, the stage directions declare that the Leading Lady '*is biting her lips with rage at seeing the LEADING MAN flirting with the STEP-DAUGHTER*' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 225), which, apart from hinting at the Leading Lady's jealousy, whether as a woman or as a star actor, deviates the real audience from the imaginary story.

As the following conversation suggests, the Manager starts to intervene in the narrative from the beginning, leaving no time for the six characters to build up their fictional world:

THE MANAGER [*dumbfounded*]. I don't understand at all. What is the situation? Is this lady your wife? [*To the FATHER.*]  
 THE FATHER. Yes, gentlemen: my wife!  
 THE MANAGER. But how can she be a widow if you are alive?  
 [*The Actors find relief for their astonishment in a loud laugh.*]  
 THE FATHER. Don't laugh! Don't laugh like that, for heaven's sake. Her drama lies just here in this: she has had a lover, a man who ought to be here. (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 221)

By breaking the continuity of the potentially affective story, both the Manager's question and his Actors' mocking laughter seem to prevent spectators from the emotional illusionism, which would be more likely to develop, if the story was

not interrupted. Put differently, the series of surprises and misunderstandings, which nearly lead to incest, lose their melodramatic effect by being divided, disordered, and mocked through the entire play. Therefore, I partly agree with William Storm when he claims:

The Characters are consistently made ironic by the presence of the Actors – and vice versa. The attempt by the Actors to enact the Scene at Madame Pace’s ironizes the experience of the Father and the Step daughter, and in doing so takes away the affective authenticity. By contrast, the very truthfulness of that scene – its definitiveness – marginalizes the Actors and Director by consigning them to a realm of falsity – that is, of imitation. (Storm, 113)

On one hand, I argue that when the members of the troupe succeed the Father and the Step-Daughter in representing the scene, the incident is already deprived of its ‘affective authenticity’ by both the nonlinear narrative and a series of interruptions. On the other hand, the most significant point of Storm’s comment highlights the fact that Pirandello’s play parodies the fake performance of actors, namely the Leading Actor and the Leading Actress, who seem to be more dependent on their crafted gestures rather than attempting to comprehend the complicated emotions of the characters. However, I am not suggesting that Pirandello’s play doubts the capability of theatre to represent real life. Such a parody of the leading performers can be understood as a critique of star actors, whose arrogance and carelessness is one of the matters underscored within Pirandello’s critical plays, or/and an attack on the stereotypical and superficial styles of melodramatic acting.

With noticeably less regularity of interruption than *Six Characters*, the inner play of *Each in His Own Way* consists of two long acts followed by interludes. Within these intervals members of the spectators, including a group of critics, express their contradictory opinions on the inner play. As its plot reveals, the inner play, whose playwright is called Pirandello, is based on a melodramatic theme represented in a linear style. The first act starts with the spreading of gossip about Delia Morello, an actress who has a scandalous image because of her several disastrous relations, including the suicide of her fiancé La Vela when he thought that she had an affair with his close friend Nuti, the fiancé of La Vela’s sister. Despite the simple plot of the melodramatic inner



play, the discussions in the first interlude mainly focus on the philosophical aspects of Pirandello's theatre, which, according to some spectators and critics, make his plays difficult to understand. It is hard to decide whether Pirandello indirectly blames both the critics and spectators for their opinions on his previous plays, or whether he insists on revealing the triviality of the inner play in contrast to his style.

Only at the end of the first interlude, *Each in His Own Way* directly refers to the melodramatic structure of the inner play when one of the Spectators describes Nuti as 'the other fellow in the triangle! La Vela killed himself on Nuti's account! Nuti was to marry La Vela's sister!' (Pirandello *Each in His Own Way*, 323). What distinguishes this statement from the comment of the Step-Daughter is that, as a member of the audience, the Spectator is not part of the story. Therefore, his descriptive statement seems to be neutral; without any judgment of the inner play in general and its melodramatic nature in particular. In this respect, I claim that this brief description of the inner play of *Each in His Own Way* is meant to draw the real audience's attention to the two intersected melodramatic triangles, in which the plot of the inner play is woven. In the first triangle, Nuti is the outsider who invades the stable relationship between La Vela and his fiancée Delia Morello. In the second, Delia Morello is the invader of the stable relationship between her sister-in-law and Nuti.

The Spectator's comment seems to prepare the real audience for the main action of the second act, which revolves around the two invaders' denial of their alleged love. Whether both Delia Morello and Nuti do not realise their love, or whether they resist their feelings toward each other, the couple eventually kiss. At this point, the inner play is interrupted by two members of the audience, who are supposed to be the real people represented by Delia Morello and Nuti in the inner play. In objecting to the kiss between the two characters, the real Delia and Nuti seem to repeat the inner play by their reluctance to recognise their love. When the real Delia slaps the actress who portrayed her, the Spectators engage in a debate on the right of Pirandello—the writer of the inner play who left the theatre to escape the angry couple—to portray the life of real people in a play. Such a conversation is ended by what seems to be a reversed situation as life scornfully imitates art, when the real couple kisses each other. On one hand, this action seems to support the Father in *Six Characters* when he claims that art/theatre is 'truer' than life.

On the other hand, as playwrights are able to see what the real people themselves are unable to recognise, it seems that the overall message of *Each in His Own Way* supports the right of theatre to depict real life, of which art is able to produce a 'truer' representation. Such a message is emphasised by a comment given by another member of the audience of the inner play, who explains the angry reaction of the real couple. He states: 'They rebelled because they saw themselves there, as in a mirror, forced into a situation that has the eternity of art! [...] They have done, here before our eyes and quite involuntarily, something that the author had foreseen!' (Pirandello *Each in His Own Way*, 360-1). Considering that Pirandello's critical metadrama names this member of the audience as 'A Spectator Who Understands', suggests that his opinion is what *Each in His Own Way*, not to say Pirandello, inclines to, regarding the ethical question: do playwrights have the right to exploit the life of real people as themes of their play? The mirror of art is so sensitive that its ability to detect any aspect of real life extends beyond superficial appearances to expose the inner truth.

In addition to interrupting the melodramatic action of the inner play by the two interludes and the confrontation between the real couple and actors, this action itself is designed to contradict the melodramatic structure of the inner play. Because the two siblings, who are the abandoned lovers in the two triangles, are absent, the inner play seems to be deprived of one of the most common scenes of any melodrama: the suffering of the victim. Moreover, the two intruders of both relationships are rewarded by declaring their mutual love in both the inner play and in what is supposed to be real life. While the poignant fate of the victims of treachery is marginalised, not to say cut down, the unawareness of both Delia Morello and Nuti of their real feelings acquits them of being traitors/villains.

Unlike the finale of the inner play of *The Great Wall of China*, the end of *Each in His Own Way* is sort of a happy ending; while the Stage Manager declares that the remainder of the play will not be performed, part of the audience is divided into two groups: some declare their appreciation of the playwright's capability of 'foreseeing', while other Spectators are laughing. Thus, *Each in His Own Way* merges what are supposed to be two pitiful relationships to create a happy ending for a long-denied love story. It is important to insist that I am not suggesting that either the parody of melodrama

or the mixing of it with comedy was introduced by Pirandello.<sup>86</sup> What the playwright achieves here is the exploitation of the parody of melodrama in order to support the comments of the dramatic characters of the spectators on theatrical matters. In this respect, the two lovers' lack of awareness of their feelings towards each other is crucial not only in revealing the ability of art/theatre to represent life profoundly, but also in claiming the playwright's power of prediction. In other words, the parody of melodrama and the play's comment on the relationship between theatre and life are inseparable.

More similar to *Six Characters* than *Each in His Own Way*, the melodramatic inner play of *Tonight We Improvise* is delivered to the real audience through narration. As it is summarised by its director Dr. Hinkfuss, this inner play tells the story of Mommina, one of four beautiful daughters of a family with a notorious reputation because of its hospitality to young military officers, behaviour which contradicts the strict norms of Sicilian society. After the mysterious murder of the drunken father, the family faces severe financial troubles. When Verri, one of these officers, proposes to marry Mommina, her mother and sisters urge her to refuse his offer because of what they have heard about the obsessive jealousy of Verri's father, which allegedly caused the death of Verri's mother. Against her family's warnings, it seems that the infamous reputation and poverty of Mommina's family leave no choice for Mommina but to accept Verri's offer. After marriage, Mommina suffers from her rich husband's doubts, which keeps her isolated in his house until she dies in her thirties looking like an old woman. Therefore, When Olga Ragusa claims: 'This inner play [of *Tonight We Improvise*] has by and large been judged to be the least interesting, most old-fashioned, and unsophisticated in its harking back to the popular taste for melodrama in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ragusa, 251), she literally uses the same expressions by which Mariani describes the inner play of *Six Characters* as 'old-fashioned' 'bourgeois theatre'.

Apart from critics' explanations, the outer play of *Tonight We Improvise*, similarly to *Six Characters* and *Each in His Own Way*, includes a dramatic

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<sup>86</sup> As Newey's study compellingly argues, the parody of melodrama shapes an important part of the practice of metatheatre in the Victorian stage. In addition, many scholars insist that the writers of melodrama, whether in theatre or fiction, during the nineteenth century tend to create an analogous comic triangle to the 'serious' one. For more information, see the studies of Grimsted 171–203, and Cawelti 260–95. Such analogy seems to be adopted by *The Protagonist*, wherein Kaiser repeatedly uses the same love triangle with comic and tragic ends, respectively.

character who describes the inner play as a melodrama. However, instead of the criticising tone of the Step-Daughter and the unbiased nature of the Spectator in the two other plays, Dr Hinkfuss enthusiastically describes the inner play which he proudly directs: 'At the bottom of it, the passion that makes up all melodrama' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 72). On one hand, Dr Hinkfuss' pride in his performance seems to contradict my claim about the criticising purpose of Pirandello's insistence on drawing the attention of the real audience of his plays to the melodramatic nature of its inner plays. On the other hand, it is important to realise that Dr Hinkfuss' speech is interrupted by the performers, who confront him in order to continue the show without his instructions. In other words, Dr Hinkfuss is harshly condemned by losing his authority over the performance. Moreover, and most significantly, *Tonight We Improvise* intentionally prevents its inner play from achieving 'the passion that makes up all melodrama'.

Although the narrative of Mommina's story is presented in a linear style, it is fragmented and reduced to three scenes. In addition, these fragments that shape the inner play are introduced by Dr Hinkfuss' prolonged narration. Consequently, these scenes are deprived of both the surprising effect of dramatic actions and the emotive impact of characters' suffering. Furthermore, all emotional moments within the inner play are intentionally interrupted. For instance, the sudden arrival of the father with a deadly wound is mocked because the actor is distracted by a quarrel between two of his colleagues. Even the death of Mommina, which is the finale of the inner play, is ridiculed, not only by the return of Dr Hinkfuss who congratulates the actress on her performance, but also by the actress' temporary unconsciousness. The mockery reaches its peak when one of the actors blames Dr Hinkfuss for this incident by claiming: 'if you really want us to *live* [sic] our roles, this is what happens' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 97).<sup>87</sup>

As these interruptions suggest, challenging the melodramatic impact essentially depends on revealing the artifice, which is the core of Pirandello's third method of the parody of melodrama. Preparing for the final scene of the

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<sup>87</sup> Paradoxically, Salvini, the Italian director of the play, asked Pirandello's permission to remove both actors' quarrel and Hinkfuss' appearance in the finale in order to achieve emotional impact on the audience. The demand was refused by the playwright. This incident is mentioned in Ragusa 253, and Lorch 1996, 278. This incident affirms Pirandello's insistence on deterring the potential emotional effect of the two dramatic situations, which in turn underscores the playwright's parodical and reformatory goal.

play, the actress who plays Mommina applies the make-up of a dying, old woman in front of the audience. In addition, while other actresses are helping the Leading Actress, they pronounce the elements of disguise that draw Mommina's miserable image, such as the bags under her eyes, dusty face, wrinkles, lost teeth, and white hair. Therefore, her subsequent appearance in the scene of the inner play is more likely to lose its effect of surprise and compassion on spectators.

Perhaps the largest number of styles—included as a target of parody—within the critical metadramas, which I study in my thesis, can be found in *Fanny's First Play*. George Bernard Shaw's play creates a context that enables Fanny, the author of the inner play, her father, and a group of stubborn critics to engage in contradictory discussions about different theatrical styles during the Induction and the Epilogue. Within the inner play, these theatrical styles are mingled. Barbara M. Fisher defines the dramatic forms utilised by Shaw within the inner play, explaining:

[I]t is worth taking note that what we are dealing with is a carnival of forms seldom brought together in one continuous action. There are elements of the morality play, the comedy of manners, of stark Ibsenist realism. There is the ritual violence of Punch and Judy, the fantastic harlequinade plottings of commedia dell'arte, a dash of socialist allegory, and more than a hint of Gilbert and Sullivan light opera. (Fisher, 189)

While the parody mainly relies on the juxtaposition of these heterogeneous styles within the inner play of *Fanny's First Play*, the overall critique of such styles is defined by the dramatic characters' negative opinions on each style within the two parts of the outer play, between which the inner play is imposed. Peter Gahan explains: 'The outer play is the critical prism through which the action of the inner play is reflected by raising direct questions about plays, their writers, and their critics' (Gahan, 100). It seems that Shaw's play introduces a long lecture in which it explores and describes some theatrical forms and notions. Then the inner play displays an application of the theoretical introduction. Finally the play gives a kind of conclusion. Thus, there is a sort of dialectical relationship between these forms and the large number of theatrical issues mentioned in both the Induction and the Epilogue. When the four critics, the Count, and his daughter Fanny, who is the author of the inner play, express

their contradictory standpoints, they produce the theoretical lens by which these forms should be seen.

While each style is separately criticised by one or more of the dramatic characters within the Induction and the Epilogue, Shaw's play is an attack on the theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Italy, France, and England, which the Count adores. Aware of her father's preferences, Fanny predicts that her play will upset him, she declares: 'I know that this play will shock him artistically' (Shaw 1987, 122). Such a statement seems to be a warning for the members of the audience who share the Count's taste in theatre. After watching his daughter's play, the Count proves that Fanny's prediction was right as he disappointedly wonders: 'Is this a play? Is this, in any sense of the word, Art? Is it agreeable? Can it conceivably do good to any human being? Is it delicate? Do such people really exist?' (Shaw 1987, 176). In spite of the Count's authority as the producer of his daughter's play, he comments on the performance as a spectator who expresses his own preferences.

The most striking feature of the inner play of *Fanny's First Play* is that although it contains a parody of many theatrical styles around which characters' comments in the Induction and the Epilogue revolve, the inner play parodically borrows its theme from *Romeo and Juliet*. Shaw's first contradiction to his ancestor's play relies on reversing the main dramatic line of the plot. Here, two rich families are in agreement about the marriage of their two teenagers, Robert and Margaret, while the latter refuse this commitment because each of them has another lover. Gahan suggests that the names of the two characters allude to Shakespeare's play. Gahan claims: 'The inner play is obviously a parody of ROmeo and JuliET; perhaps it could have been called RObert and MargarET, with their echoing names' (Gahan, 99). Moreover, by making the two lovers of Robert and Margaret—Dora and Juggins, respectively—working class, it seems that Shaw contradicts the elite context within which the actions of Shakespeare's play take place. The most important alteration to *Romeo and Juliet* is the happy ending of Shaw's inner play, which removes the serious, not to say the tragic, mood and the emotive elements of Shakespeare's play. Such a twist in the overall tone of *Romeo and Juliet* is asserted by the imposing of different theatrical styles within the inner play. On one hand, it is hard to decide whether this 'carnival of forms'—because it is included within the parody of

*Romeo and Juliet*—highlights Shaw's critique of Shakespearian style, or the wide spectrum of these mocked forms deviates the focus of criticism from Shakespeare's theatre to these forms, especially considering that Ibsen, for example, is criticised twice, as is Shakespeare, within the outer play. On the other hand, and regardless of the target[s] of parody, what I am stressing here is that what is parodied within the inner play is highly connected to the discussions on theatrical matters in the frame play.

In a different way from *Fanny's First Play*, both *The Public* and *The Great Wall of China* include a parody of *Romeo and Juliet*. Unlike Shaw's play, whose borrowing from Shakespeare's play is limited to partial resemblances with the latter's plot and names of characters, both Lorca and Frisch implant dialogic passages of *Romeo and Juliet* within their critical metadramas. As with the inner play, which is supposed to be directed by the the Director in *The Public*, both the title of Shakespeare's play and its protagonists are repeatedly mentioned by dramatic characters. In addition, the scenery of the third scene of Lorca's play is the tomb, wherein the last scene of *Romeo and Juliet* takes place. Nevertheless, Lorca loosely cites from the dialogue of the famous farewell scene:

THIRD MAN. Wait, wait, the nightingale's singing now.  
 JULIET (*trembling*). The nightingale! My God the nightingale!  
 BLACK HORSE. Don't let it catch you out here!  
 Grabs her quickly and lays her out in the tomb.  
 JULIET (*falling asleep*). The nightingale ... [...]  
 THIRD MAN. Wait, wait. Now the nightingale's singing.  
 A ship's hooter is heard. (Lorca *The Public*, 88)

Despite the altering of Shakespearian dialogue and the absence of Romeo, the word 'nightingale' in Lorca's play recalls the debate between the two lovers in Act III, Scene III of Shakespeare's play.

While the two lovers in *The Great Wall of China* accurately quote conversations from two scenes of *Romeo and Juliet*,<sup>88</sup> when they recognise other characters' costumes and the scene of the Chinese Wall, they express their surprise by imitating Shakespeare's linguistic style but in an ironic way:

HE: If I but knew where we are now – and when!

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<sup>88</sup> Act III Scene VI and Act VI Scene III.

This gath'ring sets me shuddering. It seems  
 That they opened every clothes-press up –  
 Their garb is motley and of moth balls smells. [...]  
 SHE: What means all this?  
 HE: It means that time, sweet love, has been reversed.  
 (Frisch, 9-10)

Mixing a ridiculed copy of Shakespeare's language with modern everyday words such as 'moth balls' exposes the inappropriateness of this over-eloquent discourse to the trivial situation. Reading this parody in the context of the overall message of theatrical criticism within Frisch's play suggests that *The Great Wall of China* does not criticise the Romanticist rhetoric itself. By mocking *Romeo and Juliet*, Frisch's play seems to insist that neither eminent linguistic style nor tragic love stories are suitable for the kind of theatre which can address the mighty challenges that face the human race in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Although *The Public* does not clearly call for a socially orientated theatre, the play insists on the unsuitability of *Romeo and Juliet* to reflect on contemporary Spanish society. Therefore, Lorca utilises both verbal and visual elements in order to mock Shakespeare's play. From the first moment of its appearance on stage, the image of Juliet, as one of the most attractive heroines in theatre history, is degraded. Although Lorca's stage directions suggest a mixture of realistic accuracy of the scene of the tomb with features of beauty, the play contradicts this by the derogatory portrayal of Juliet: '*The wall opens up, and we see JULIET's tomb in Verona. Realistic decor. Rose bushes and ivy. Moon. JULIET is stretched out on the tomb, wearing a white evening dress. Her pink celluloid breasts are exposed*' (Lorca *The Public*, 77). This visual deformation of Juliet's image as a sign of youthful femininity is asserted verbally when she recalls her nightmares. She remembers, 'there's four of them, four boys who wanted to fix a little clay phallus on me, and paint me a moustache' (Lorca *The Public*, 80). Similarly, although Romeo does not appear, the play verbally deforms the Shakespearian character's image when one of spectators, the Second Man, asks: 'How did Romeo piss, Mister Director? Is it or is it not nice to watch Romeo piss?' (Lorca *The public*, 63). The bizarre representation reaches its limit with the rough language by which the Three White Horses address Juliet. They declare: 'We want to go to bed! [...] Take off your clothes Juliet, show your rump, and we'll whip it with our tails; we want to be reborn!'



(Lorca *The Public*, 82). This vulgar speech seems to profane the religious and social concept of the tomb in general, and the tragic shadows of the two lovers' death within Shakespeare's play in particular, especially with its hint of bestiality.<sup>89</sup>

I claim that the grotesque depiction of Juliet within *The Public* may recall an earlier example of deliberate disfigurement of another artistic icon that belongs to the sixteenth century, when Marcel Duchamp transformed Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in 1919. According to Steven Goldsmith, by drawing a beard and moustache on Mona Lisa's face, Duchamp seems 'to demonstrate that academic art was not sacred' (Goldsmith, 199).<sup>90</sup> If burlesque is the verbal 'kind of parody that ridicules some serious literary work either by treating its solemn subject in an undignified style [...], or by applying its elevated style to a trivial subject' (Baldick, 43), it seems that Lorca and Frisch adopt the opposite forms of burlesque, regarding the mockery of Shakespearian eloquence in order to support the overall message of theatrical criticism of their critical metadramas. Visually, while Frisch's parody mainly depends on the contrast between the Elizabethan and contemporary costumes, Lorca's play takes a further step not only by depriving the Shakespearian play of its mix of tragic and Romantic elements, but also by desecrating its characters and dramatic context.

The parody of *Romeo and Juliet* within the inner play of the *The Public* is highly connected with the dialogue between the Director and the Magician in the framed play, where the latter blames the former for choosing this play to produce. Alongside plays such as Sophocles' *Oedipus*, and Shakespeare's *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* is described as a *classic* play. On one hand, such a categorisation can be understood on the

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<sup>89</sup> Because *The Public* is full of references to eccentric inter-creature erotic relationships that include humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects, most Lorca scholars consider this play a dramatisation of Lorca's homosexuality. For detailed discussions, see McDermid 101 – 41, Delgado 159, and Anderson 143 – 4. Such a personalised reading of *The Public* is partly convincing if I consider, for instance, the Magician's claim: 'If love is pure chance, and Titania Queen of the Fairies falls in love with an ass, then there's nothing special if Gonzalo, by the same process, sits drinking in a cabaret club with a boy dressed in white sitting on his knee' (Lorca *The Public*, 100). However, by reading The Magician's statement on the grounds of Lorca's play's inclusion of theatrical criticism, within which dramatic illusionism is noticeably condemned, I suggest that Lorca's Surrealist play calls for anti-naturalistic theatre, which explains why the Magician bases his argument on an example from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed discussion on Duchamp's intentional ill-treatment of the beauty of Mona Lisa as an aspect of avant-garde art, see Webber 46 – 47, Danto 46 – 8. For reading Duchamp's parody as a meta-painting, see Cook.

grounds that, according to the two men's argument, all these *old* plays are irrelevant to the problems of their own society. On the other hand, The Magician's indirect praise of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contradicts his claim of irrelevance.

Apart from limiting this praise to Lorca's sexual orientation, *The Public* includes several stances of discrepancy regarding its comment on theatrical matters. Moreover, and most importantly, although Lorca's play repeatedly criticises Naturalistic theatre and its bourgeois audience, *The Public* seems to be indecisive regarding the potential alternative form of theatre. It is significant that the only opinion which both the Director and the Magician share is that, it is hard to find a suitable replacement of popular theatre (Lorca *The Public*, 103). In addition to this uncertainty, the two characters' self-contradictory opinions seem to lead critics to give opposite suggestions regarding which one of the two dramatic characters represents Lorca within his play. Such discrepancy affirms the distracting consequences of identifying playwrights' opinions with their characters' comments. This observation is crucial to distinguish the imaginary characters' discussion of literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadrama from playwrights' declarations of their opinions through essays, lectures, books, or interviews.<sup>91</sup>

As the reading of these examples suggests, apart from the way in which parody attacks its target, whether the latter is a style of writing in general, or of a specific playwright, including one or more of his/her plays, the 'subversive intent' of playwrights cannot be achieved without the inclusion of a distorted version of the target of the ridicule. On one hand, such an observation defines one of the most important conditions of parody, which is the role of the audience in realising the original style, writer, or work included.<sup>92</sup> In this respect, dramatic characters' discussions on theatrical matters can help spectators in receiving the scenes of parody, within which the matter of discussion is the target of critique and vice versa, which again, suggests the fundamental connection

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<sup>91</sup> In his introduction to the English translation of *The Public*, Gwynne Edwards argues that the Magician's opinions on theatre, which contradict the Director's, are similar to Lorca's beliefs. However, Edwards later negates this claim by declaring that the Director, not the Magician, represents the playwright. For more details, see Edwards 2000, xxvii, Edwards 2003, 38, and Edwards 2007, 306. Catherine Boyle claims that both characters are Lorca. See Boyle 167.

<sup>92</sup> For detailed discussions on the significance of spectators' recognition of the subject of parody, see Newey 90 – 1, and Hutcheon 1985, 32.

between the discourse of theatrical criticism within the outer play of critical metadrama and the parody within its inner play.

On the other hand, it seems that parody essentially involves intertextuality. That explains why parody is claimed by Kristeva as one of the categories of intertextuality (qtd. in Baldick, 171). Moreover, Hutcheon's observation that parody is 'often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality' (Hutcheon 2002, 89), suggests the ultimate dependence of parody on the inclusion of what it attacks. However, the term 'intertextuality' itself seems to contradict the fact that the target of parody within critical metadramas is not limited to borrowing from specific texts. Put differently, while *Improvisation* includes Brechtian terms and critics' statements, *The Great Wall of China* and *The Public* borrow from Shakespeare's play. In contrast for example, *Six Characters*' parody of melodrama relies on exposing the stylistic features of the theatrical form rather than including a recognisable text of another playwright. Similarly to Pirandello's play, ridiculing the magniloquent styles of the actors Edward Alleyn and Montfleury in *Hamlet* and *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, respectively, is based on the way they perform not the writing style of the words pronounced. With these examples of non-textual target of parody, how can I claim that parody always involves intertextuality?

### **c. Verbal and non-verbal intertextuality: materialising topics of discussions**

To resolve such a seeming discrepancy, it can be useful to realise that most of the studies of intertextuality extend the notion of 'text' beyond the limit of written language to include all visual and audible signs. For instance, as editors of the anthology *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (1990), Judith Still and Michael Worton insist that the word 'text' within the ten studies of intertextuality included in their book 'is used both in the restricted academic sense to mean 'a work of literature' and in the wider sense to mean anything which can be perceived as 'a signifying structure' from *the spectacle of nature to social codes*' (Still, viii). Adopting this 'wider sense' enables many studies to use the term 'intertextuality' in order to describe the inclusion of other works of art within paintings and music, which Graham Allen calls 'intertextuality in the

non-literary arts' (Allen 2011, 174).<sup>93</sup> In this respect, the comments of Fremd on *The Great Wall of China* can be understood, when he argues: 'The masks [...] are rather more obvious and direct quotations, either from history or from literature' (Fremd, 10). Whether these masked characters are originally historical such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Cleopatra, and Columbus, or well-known literary characters like Don Juan, Romeo and Juliet, the presence of each one of these masks within Frisch's play recalls its legacy as an unspoken discourse. Such stock entities of these characters are mainly mocked because Frisch's play gathers them, regardless of their time/place origin.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, exaggerated vocal performance and the excessive use of hands, which are included, and scorned, by Shakespeare and Molière can be considered as inter-texts borrowed from the factual performances of Alleyn and Montfleury respectively. A further example of non-verbal intertextuality in the context of the parody of acting can be found in *Play Without a Title*, when the Actress criticises the real mother's expression of worry about her children's lives. According to the Actress' allegation, the First Female Spectator is not able to be emotive; so the professional Actress offers a practical lesson in embodying her voice and body to affect others:

I'm tired of hearing you shout so badly. I can't stand it. Your voice had a falseness that will never succeed in moving anyone. Not like that, like this: 'My children, my children, my little children!' Did you hear? 'My little children!' And your hands stretched out, and making them tremble as if they were two leaves in a feverish wind. (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 123)

Apart from her inability to recognise the authentic feelings of the mother, she seems obsessed with the false techniques of her superficial acting, which is based on the repetition of words and exaggerated use of hands. Commenting on the Actress' performance in *Play without a Title*, Reed Anderson describes it

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<sup>93</sup> Such an expansion in the notion of 'text' can be seen as a consequence of the increasing interest of criticism in studying the way in which both visual and verbal elements cooperate to create the meaning, whether in life or in art. For a brief comment on the non-verbal intertextuality, see Juvan 129. For an example of investigating intertextuality within paintings, see Steiner.

<sup>94</sup> The degree in which Frisch parodies the stereotyped images of masked characters varies. For instance, while the fictional character of Don Juan rebels against his literary image, the historical figure of Cleopatra is reduced to a sex maniac. Going much further with the playfulness of the Egyptian queen within Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, in Frisch's play, Cleopatra successfully gets the attention of the Chinese Emperor and declares: 'I love men who make history, I love men altogether' (Frisch, 41).

as a 'ridiculously stylised theatrical version of how such a 'scene' should really be played' (Anderson, 158). Reading the phrase 'should really be played' on the grounds of the dominance of melodrama over Spanish theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century, suggests that this scene within Lorca's play is a parody of melodramatic acting.<sup>95</sup>

What distinguishes the scene of the Actress within Lorca's play from the parodical imitation of the non-verbal skills of actors within both *Hamlet* and *L'Impromptu de Versailles* is that the mocked style of melodramatic acting is compared with what is supposed to be real life, in addition to a suggested alternative of theatrical performance. On one hand, within the imaginary realm of Lorca's play the real audience is invited to compare what is supposed to be a real mother's emotions with a theatrical portrayal of these feelings by the Actress. The latter does not only claim her ability to represent reality, but she also dares to assume that her superficial performance is more effective than the real mother's speech. Because the Author highlights the falseness of the Actress, as a performer and as a person, the members of the real audience are encouraged to identify—at least sympathise—with the First Female Spectator as a worried mother. On the other hand, the First Female Spectator's expression of anxiety is the equivalent to Hamlet's advice to the actors in terms of being the suggested way to represent the situation. Put differently, in the context of dramatic illusionism, the expression of the First Female Spectator can be considered a representation of a real mother's panic. Simultaneously, in the anti-illusionist context of the entire play in general and within this scene in particular, the First Female Spectator is an actress, who plays the role of the mother, whose representation of anxiety is the equivalent to Hamlet's advice to the actors as the suggested way to represent the situation: an alternative way to the Actress's melodramatic style. In either case, the latter is parodied as the target of critique.

It is very important to realise that metadramas may utilise intertextuality in order to praise, rather than to criticise, the writer or the style of the included text. For instance, *Paris Impromptu* directly states that it quotes from Molière's play *L'Impromptu de Versailles* where Molière, as a dramatic character urges the actors to appear and start the rehearsal: 'Come gentlemen and ladies, are

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<sup>95</sup> For more information about actors' exaggerated use of voice and gesture in melodrama, see Brooks 2001, 606,

you in jest, delaying thus, and won't you come hither? Plague take the people [...] Oh, What strange animals to be governed are actors!' (Molière, 323). This introductory scene is nearly copied by Giraudoux when Renoir, the leading actor, calls his colleagues: 'Ladies and gentlemen. You must be joking with this delay. How about it? A plague on these actors! [...] Ah, what strange animals these actors are to deal with!' (Giraudoux 1959, 107). Such borrowing from Molière's play includes a parody, but the target of mockery is the actors' lateness, and not Molière's text. The latter is utilised, firstly, as an authoritative reference to support Renoir's opinion of the careless attitude of actors towards rehearsals, and secondly, to suggest that this carelessness is a common feature of most actors in all times. This appreciation of Molière's text is emphasised when Renoir seems to justify quoting from Molière. Renoir wonders: 'When the sound of Molière comes from beyond the grave, don't you have the impression that all the actors in the world are about to appear, that they're coming?' (Giraudoux 1959, 107). Renoir's claim is assured by the appearance of the members of Jouvet's troupe. Similarly, when the Father talks about the eternal life of the fictional characters, he refers to Sancho Panza and Don Abbondio (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 218).<sup>96</sup> Neither Sancho Panza nor Don Abbondio is the main character within the plot of the novel. Therefore, I argue that the Father suggests that any literary character can become immortal because of its constant influence on the readers through different eras, regardless of the textual space this character occupies within the literary work.

Thus, there are two types of intertextual inclusions within the samples of European metadrama in the first half of the twentieth century: firstly, extracts and quotations or characters from other plays, and secondly, expressions of critical or theoretical opinions on a matter of literary or theatrical criticism. While the second type is usually limited to characters' dialogues during their discussions on theatrical matters within the outer play, the first type of intertextuality can also occur within the imaginary plot of the inner play. Both types of citations are exploited, whether as an authoritative support for a particular opinion or as a parody—a derogatory representation—of a specific style, on which dramatic characters negatively comment. On one hand, it is not

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<sup>96</sup> The first character is the squire in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1602) and the second is the priest in the Italian novel: *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*), written by Alessandro Manzoni and published in 1842. Both characters are appreciatively explored by Pirandello in his article *On Humour*. For a detailed discussion on the influence of the two novels on Pirandello, see Druker.

always possible, even for the writers themselves, to define the intentionality of borrowing from other texts. On the other hand, the purposefulness of critical metadrama suggests that these borrowed parts are thoughtfully chosen to support the critical metadrama's point of view on the theatrical matters raised by its characters. Marko Juvan argues: 'The differentiation between general or latent and particular or intentional intertextuality [...] is certainly an indication of the concept's adaptation to "straight" literary criticism' (Juvan, 131). In this respect, any inter-text included within a critical metadrama supports dramatic characters' discussions of theatrical matters in one of two ways. Firstly, the borrowed text can resemble a positive model that contradicts the defect on which these characters comment. Secondly, when the inter-text becomes the material/target of parody, which is the most common type of intertextuality within critical metadrama, the mocked aspects are exactly what dramatic characters criticise through their outer-play discussions.

In either case, the inter-text functions as an evidence of the critical metadrama's discourse of theatrical criticism. For instance, including fragments of Molière's refined and witty language within *Paris Impromptu* indirectly supports the troupe's defence of what critics blame Giraudoux's theatre for. More explicitly, Giraudoux's play connects this intertextuality with its discussion of the so-called literary theatre, when Boverio, one of the actors claims:

As for the actor . . . the only thing that keeps him going in bad parts—the kind of part in which, night after night, he has to repeat a lot of vulgar inanities—is the hope that one day he will play a great part—a role in which the language itself will give back to him his full stature as an actor. Acting would be a futile waste of breath unless the actor could occasionally breathe the air of Shakespeare, Racine or Moliere. (Giraudoux 1959, 118)

This statement seems to be a testimony given by an actor to rebut critics' claims that the highly linguistic theatre, to which Giraudoux's plays belong, is partially able to be read as literature rather than being performed. Basing the appeal of Molière's plays to actors on his language, explains why Renoir's reciting from *L'Impromptu de Versailles* attracts the members of the troupe at the beginning of the play.

Finally, it is important to realise that, as with the play-within-the-play, both intertextuality and parody can occur within any metadrama, regardless of being a *critical* metadrama. For instance, despite the Captain's reference to Ibsen's play within *The Father*, Strindberg's play is not a critical metadrama. I found one of the most compelling examples of utilising intertextuality without any theatrical criticism in the Italian playwright Mario Fratti's *The Cage* (1961). Cristiano, who chooses to isolate himself by living in a cage, is so obsessed with the works of Chekhov that he literally repeats long parts of the Russian author's stories and plays. Apart from the metaphorical link between the delusion of some of Chekhov's characters and the protagonist's unrealistic view of the world, the play does not include any critical comment on the works of Chekhov. Apart from *Improvisation*, *Victims of Duty* and *Salutations*, which are studied in my thesis, some of Ionesco's plays are perfect examples of utilising parody without being critical metadrama. *Jacques or Obedience* (1950), for instance, is dedicated to the mockery of several stylistic methods of melodrama such as bombastic language and exaggerated emotions. The parody is highlighted by the irrelevance of melodramatic aspects to dramatic situations. For instance, the main crisis that dominates the whole dramatic action and concerns all the family members is that the son, Jacques, does not love potatoes in their jackets. Although such a trivial matter, it causes melodramatic reactions as the following dialogue reveals:

JACQUELINE: [*to her* MOTHER] Don't faint just yet! Wait till the end of the play! [...]

JACQUES MOTHER: [*to Jacqueline*] The end of the day?

JACQUELINE: [*to her* MOTHER] No...of the play, of this play... (Ionesco, *Jacques or Obedience*, 139)

When Jacqueline prevents her mother from fainting, the interrupted melodramatic gesture is being mocked. In addition, the theatrical self-reference, by revealing the artificiality of theatrical practice, makes the fainting act look false. However, even with the play's insistence on revealing its theatricality, *Jacques or Obedience* is not a critical metadrama because it does not include any discussion on theatrical matters.

The essential feature that distinguishes critical metadrama from these plays is the inclusion of a discourse of literary criticism, which is materialised in



dramatic characters' discussions or comments on theatrical matters. Thus, within critical metadrama, there is an inseparable relationship between the play-within-the-play, parody, and intertextuality, wherein these techniques crucially support the critical metadrama's overall comment on any theatrical matter. After exploring the ways in which the three techniques of the play-within-the-play, parody and intertextuality co-operate, intersect, and interact with each other and with the textual body of literary and theatrical criticism, the next chapter defines and investigates the variety of the topics of theatrical criticism included within dramatic characters' speeches.

## Chapter Three

### Topics of literary and theatrical criticism within European critical metadramas

This chapter explores the major matters of criticism raised by dramatic characters within the European critical metadrama during the first half of the twentieth century, by focusing on two points. Firstly, many critical metadramas utilise their dramatic characters in order to defend the playwright's own style, especially in reply to his or her critics. However, the rationale of this literary and theatrical criticism within the metadramas of the early decades of the twentieth century is to address the specific challenges that the theatre industry faced. Put differently, the speeches of dramatic characters, which include discussion of theatrical matters, reflect more on the historical circumstances rather than the situation of individual playwrights. Secondly, the literary and theatrical topics of discussion within these speeches usually overlap. For instance, a character's comment on the social role of theatre could lead to a discussion about commercial theatre and the audience's preferences, both of which focus on matters of theatre production and reception.

#### **a. The relationship between theatre and life: a formalist feature becomes a topic of discussion**

Before tracing dramatic characters' comments on the relationship between theatre and life within critical metadramas, it seems important to mention that Abel established his notion of metadrama on the Baroque belief, firstly, in the resemblance between dream and life, and, secondly, in the real world's similarity to the stage. Moreover, the vast majority of metatheatrical studies after Abel insist that when a playwright employs metatheatrical techniques the play indirectly highlights the relationship between theatre and life. For instance, Maurizio Grande claims:

Metatheatrical, like any other meta-artistic practice, calls into play the relationship between stage fiction and reality by neutralizing simulation through a multiplication of the levels of simulation, and by producing a series of splitting and doublings of fiction in the various mountings of the theatre. (Grande, 59)

Grande's use of the expression 'meta-artistic' seems to extend his claim beyond metatheatres to suggest that self-reflexivity of any work of art hints at the connection between art and life.<sup>97</sup> However, while any metadrama is limited to *tacit* allusions to the relationship between theatre and life, critical metadrama takes a further step by including dramatic characters' *verbal* comments on this controversial relationship. To give examples, the Protagonist's speeches in Kaiser's play express his torn identity between his real personality and the characters he plays. In this respect, *The Protagonist* seems to echo the Baroque vision of the resemblances between stage and world. Taking a further step regarding the relationship between life and theatre, the debate between the Father and the Manager in *Six Characters* suggests that dramatic characters are 'truer' than real people, including actors. This superiority of art over life is investigated in a wider scale within *Each in His Own Way* through the comments of the imaginary audience on watching real persons repeat what the playwright of the inner play predicts, which urge these spectators to support writers' right to represent events in the life of real people.

Over the ages, the relationship between life and art has been explored and explained according to the prevailing theories of both humanities and natural sciences. Instances of investigating such a relationship can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, whose philosophers focus on two major points: the origin of art and its purpose. Therefore, comments on these two aspects of the relationship between life and art can be found in the comedies of Aristophanes. For instance, the Poet in *Birds* describes the way in which he involuntarily finds divine inspiration (Aristophanes *Birds*, 193), which accords with Plato's insistence on artists' ultimate submissive attitude towards godly inspiration. Discussions on the social function of theatre can be found in *The Frogs*. In spite of the disagreement between the opinions of Aeschylus and Euripides on several aesthetic matters within the play, both insist on the functional role of playwrights as teachers of their audience (Aristophanes *Frogs*, 350 – 1).<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For claims that works of meta-fiction and meta-painting by their nature draw the attention of the reader and the beholder to the relationship between life and art, see Stewart 78, and Homan 213, respectively.

<sup>98</sup> Unlike the vast majority of translators, Kenneth McLeish translates the titles of Aristophanes' plays without the article 'the'. For detailed discussions on the Greek philosophers' opinions on the origin of artistic work, which includes the artists' craft and their source for inspiration, and the social function of art, see the studies of Benson, Rockmore, Naddaff, Javitch, Butcher, and Else. For a critique of the notion of inspiration and discussions on artists' creativity, see Meyer-Dinkgräfe.

For different reasons, the origin of art and the function of theatre are raised by dramatic characters of European critical metadrama in the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, the claim that the artist is a negative receiver of inspiration is adopted by the Father in *Six Characters*, who argues that the writer is an 'instrument of the creation' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 218). However, it seems that critical metadrama in the twentieth century tends to comment on practitioners' *talent*. On one hand, talent seems similar to inspiration in terms of being the opposite of craft, which is the acquisition of skills by learning. On the other hand, while the Greek notion of inspiration makes it a divine *gift* bestowed on the artist through a *temporary* state of connection with the Muse, talent seems to be a *constant* quality of the intrinsically gifted artist.<sup>99</sup>

In *Tonight We Improvise*, for instance, talent is mentioned in terms of the actor's transmigration of the character, when the Character Actor confesses that he is less talented than the other members of the troupe:

DR HINKFUSS. But your colleagues—  
SAMPOGNETTA (*Quickly.*) Are more gifted than I. I admit the  
fact quite freely. (Pirandello *Tonight*, 69)

The most striking feature of this dialogue is that it suggests that talent, in contrast to acting craft, is an uncontrollable and unchangeable quality, which is unable to be learnt. Similarly, the Artist in *Requiem*, braggingly praises his work by claiming 'Oh, you don't know what just a single stroke means, when it has inspiration to back it up!' (Andreyev, 114). Contrary to his opinion, both the patron and the Manager of the performance agree that the Artist's painting is 'talentless' (Andreyev, 118). It is hard to decide whether the Artist is deluded about his inspirational merit, or whether he uses this claim to deceive others, especially if I consider his comment: 'I am paid a salary—therefore I exist, that's not even philosophy' (Andreyev, 116).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The vast majority of modern studies of aesthetics differentiate between 'talent' and 'inspiration' on the grounds that the former is a prerequisite for the artist to receive the latter. For examples, see Tatarkiewicz 290 – 1, Sharma 31 – 2, and Knox 26 – 30. For more information about the history of the two terms and subtle differences between them, see Townsend.

<sup>100</sup> The Artist's motto is an alteration of the famous statement of the French Philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650): 'I think, therefore I am', which is cited in a large number of references. For example, see Farwell 49.

Underestimating the significance of craft compared to the crucial role of playwrights' unique and natural gift of intuition can be found in *The Beggar*. The Third Critic in Sorge's play criticises the German Naturalist playwright Gerhart Hauptmann because the latter 'is great as a craftsman, but deficient as a seer' (Sorge, 31-2). Moreover, when the First Critic explains to his colleagues the way in which playwrights can acquire an insightful vision of the world, he claims: 'I want to tell you what's the fundamental lack: a heart that gives itself to the point of humility; self-surrender toward the world to the point of foolishness; divine blindness that penetrates profoundly into all secrets—indeed, what's missing is the visionary—!' (Sorge, 30). On one hand, the phrases 'self-surrender' and 'divine blindness' seem to match Platonic description of artists receiving inspiration. On the other hand, such comments can be read on the grounds of Sorge's Expressionist style, which principally contradicts Naturalism and appreciates authors' intuition more, or instead of their *craft*.<sup>101</sup> Thus, not only does Sorge's critical metadrama comment on the old aesthetic matter of inspiration, but *The Beggar* also utilises such a concept in order to raise a topical theatrical matter with two sides: attacking Naturalistic shallow depiction of life and praising the profound representation of the world by Expressionism.<sup>102</sup>

Regarding the function of theatre, although both *Play Without a Title* and *Paris Impromptu* criticise commercial theatre, the plays suggest discrepant functions of theatre. Lorca's play condemns entertainment and insists on the enlightening function of theatre as the Author tells the bourgeois spectators that the play they are going to watch is 'a tiny lesson' (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 108). In a lecture given by Lorca in 1934, it seems that the social function becomes a cornerstone of his concept of theatre. He argues:

[T]he theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the genuine color [sic] of its landscape and of its spirit, with laughter or with tears, has no right to call itself a theatre, but an amusement hall, or a place for doing that dreadful thing known as "killing time". (Lorca 2001, 59)

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<sup>101</sup> Artists' 'self-surrender' to their vision of the world is utilised to describe anti-Naturalistic works of art and literature by many scholars of Expressionism. For examples, see Preston 119 – 20, Lethen 51, Bushart 74, and Selz 148.

<sup>102</sup> For a detailed discussion of Hauptmann's plays as examples of Naturalistic style, see Osborne 1998.

This type of consuming audience, whose goal is 'killing time', is portrayed in the First Male Spectator who sums up his expectation of theatre: 'I haven't come here for moral instruction nor to hear unpleasant things' (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 110). Although the overall message of *Play Without a Title* is biased against purely entertaining theatre, the opposite opinion is defended by the First Male Spectator. This form of debate distinguishes literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadramas from the mono-vocal discourse of dedicated writings of criticism.

In contrast to Lorca's play, *Paris Impromptu* reduces the importance of the message of any performance compared to the significant effect of its linguistic style on its spectators. Juvet claims: 'Sometimes, from a bus, I see an old man and a young girl walking arm in arm in the street. Their step is light, their faces radiant and contemplative' (Giraudoux 1959, 119). Such a stylistic beauty does not address specific problems within the spectators' society. However, according to Juvet, the aesthetic experience of watching linguistically 'well-written' plays enhances the audience's spirit, which in turn enables the members of this audience to become more compatible with, and understanding of their lives.

Basing her reading of *The Mountain Giants* on the director Giorgio Strehler's notes on his direction of the play, Susan Bassnett-McGuire argues that '*The Mountain Giants* is a play about the function of art, about the role it is able to play in a world of sadness and misery' (Bassnett-McGuire 1983, 157). Although such an interpretation of Pirandello's play is possible, dramatic characters' speeches within the play do not comment on, or even mention the function of art. Therefore, I exclude *The Mountain Giants* from the examples of critical metadramas which comment on this topic. It is important to realise that because the vast majority of the scholars of Pirandello categorise *The Mountain Giants* as one of his 'Myth Plays', both its action and characters are symbolically claimed to support different explanations.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *The New Colony* (1928), *Lazarus* (1929), and *The Mountain Giants* are usually distinguished from Pirandello's other plays, including the trilogy, on the grounds that these myth plays are based on a fantasy-like representation, which enables, or demands, critics to read them as an allegory. For examples of such a categorisation, see Bassanese 121 – 35, Bassnett-McGuire 1983, 134 – 62, and Namer 148 – 72.

For instance, while Fiora Bassanese argues: 'Viewed in allegorical terms, the Giants, who never appear onstage, represent modern industrialized society' (Bassanese, 130). Romano Luperini claims: 'It is not difficult to see the giants, who ignore art and dedicate themselves only to commerce and war, as representatives of the [fascist] regime' (Luperini, 120). The most important feature of both interpretations is the consideration of the influence of the historical circumstances of Italy, and perhaps Europe, on Pirandello. More than a decade before Bassanese and Luperini, Olle Hildebrand suggests that symbolic readings of *The Mountain Giants* are 'derived from Pirandello's disappointment with Fascist cultural policy in particular and with the social status of art in the new technological era of the twentieth century in general' (Hildebrand, 132). While such metaphorical readings of critical metadramas elucidate my understanding of dramatic texts, I mainly focus on literary and theatrical matters, on which dramatic characters directly comment.

Comments on the relationship between theatre and life within the twentieth century critical metadramas are not limited to the aesthetic matters of the origin and the function of art. More significantly, one of the most striking aspects that distinguish the twentieth century critical metadrama from their ancestors in previous eras is extending the comments on the relationship between theatre and life to include all performative elements rather than limiting discussions to the work of playwrights. As the previous chapter suggests, by focusing on the binary of the actor and the imaginary character, *The Protagonist* seems to precede *Six Characters*, which is repeatedly mentioned by scholars as the twentieth-century prototypical pioneer of commenting on the relationship between life and theatre in general and between actors and characters in particular.<sup>104</sup> Both relations will become cornerstones of Brechtian theory and practice. Fuchs suggests the essential aspect that differentiates Brecht's vision of the actor-character relationship from Pirandello's point of view. She argues:

In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello drives a wedge between actor and character, as Brecht in a very different way was to do later. [...] But whereas in Brecht's production dramaturgy it is the actor whose consciousness is wider than, and superior to, the character's, in Pirandello's text

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<sup>104</sup> In Bassnett-McGuire 1993, 157, and Lorch 1996, 279 – 80, there are references to Pirandello's admiration of Kaiser's plays. However, I am not claiming that *Six Characters* was influenced by *The Protagonist*, which, although written 1920, was not premiered until 1922.

it is the characters who see more than the actors. (Fuchs 1996, 34)

To take Fuchs's precise comparison between Pirandello and Brecht further, it seems important to affirm that both playwrights, similar to Kaiser, investigate the boundaries between actor and character for more than the revelation of the self-referential nature of any metatheatre, which is suggested by many scholars, including Abel and Grande. However, Brecht seeks to deliver a *political* message, which spectators *indirectly* draw from characters' actions and speeches within the imaginary plot. Critical metadramas, in addition to using parody as an allusive method of critique, introduce *aesthetic* criticism, delivered to the audience directly through integrated discussions. In this respect, while highlighting the *distance* between actor and character is a dramaturgical device for revealing artifice in order to achieve the political function of Brecht's metadramas, both *The Protagonist* and *Six Characters*, turn the relationship between actor and character into a topic of discussion. This, which is similar to all theatrical matters raised within critical metadrama, is hugely related to the imaginary plot. The most striking feature that distinguishes *Six Characters* not only from Brecht's metadramas, but also from *The Protagonist* as a critical metadrama, is that the six imaginary characters are, firstly, aware of their identity as fictional characters. Secondly, the six characters' speeches and actions constantly affirm the awareness of their imaginary identity through the entire play. Such a milestone in depicting dramatic characters seems to have had a huge impact on a large number of playwrights all over the world, including Egyptian dramatists as the last two chapters of my thesis suggest.

The influence of *Six Characters* on succeeding European critical metadramas is illustrated by the character of Ionesco in *Improvisation* who declares: 'I just let my own characters carry me along, I never know exactly where I'm going' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 112). Ionesco's character seems to repeat the words of the Father in *Six Characters*, who argues: 'When the characters are really alive before their author, the latter does nothing but follow them in their action, in their words, in the situations which they suggest to him; and he has to will them the way they will themselves' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 268). Regarding dramatic characters' awareness of their nature as fictitious entities and the relationship between theatre and life, Don Juan, who is



a minor character in *The Great Wall of China*, is a good example of Pirandello's effect. Similar to the Step-Daughter, Don Juan in Frisch's play is an imaginary character who expresses his dissatisfaction with his literary image. In his direct and short speech to the audience, Don Juan declares: 'I come from the hell of literature [...] But what else do Brecht and his Ensemble know about me? [...] Whatever I do or leave undone is misinterpreted and twisted by poets. [...] Where is the land without literature? That's what I'm looking for, ladies and gentlemen' (Frisch, 16). However, unlike the six characters, Don Juan is a legendary protagonist who has a long history. Since he was introduced into popular narrative in seventeenth-century Spain, Don Juan has inspired a large number of works of art, including several plays.<sup>105</sup>

Because of these literary works Don Juan's name has acquired a linguistic presence as an adjective in real life. Whether the real audience of *The Great Wall of China* perceives Don Juan as the irresistible seducer, callous womaniser, or even as the blasphemous killer, Don Juan, as Umberto Eco claims, is one of the fictional characters who 'have become somehow true for the collective imagination because over the course of centuries we have made emotional investments in them' (Eco, 10). Therefore, while the Step-Daughter blames the imagination of an individual author, Don Juan in *The Great Wall of China* seems to rebel against his image in both literature and life, where different cultures may give the imaginary character new traits.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to investigating the boundaries between actors and characters, critical metadrama in the twentieth century sometimes includes discussions on the sources from which actors get inspiration. In *Paris Impromptu*, in a discussion between the actress Madeleine Ozeray and Robineau, the latter admiringly recalls her line 'The little cat is dead', which belongs to Agnès, the heroine of Molière's *The School for Wives*. Then, the

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<sup>105</sup> In 1953 Don Juan appears as a protagonist in Frisch's play *Don Juan oder Die Liebe zur Geometrie* (*Don Juan, or the Love of Geometry*). For a brief record of the representations of Don Juan within Western literature, with focus on Frisch's play, see Gontrum. For detailed discussions on Don Juan's fictional roots and manifestations within the Spanish culture, see Wright 2007.

<sup>106</sup> In Egypt, for instance, because the name 'Don Juan' was utilised within many Egyptian movies to mean a clever womaniser, this meaning is very common, even amongst people who know nothing about the literary history of the imaginary character. Moreover, the name sometimes is utilised within movies and TV drama or in everyday language as a derogatory and mocking description of an over-sensitive and exaggeratedly emotional male lover. *Don Juan and Men* (2009) is an anthology of eleven stories, whose authors portray Don Juan as a homosexual. The editor suggests that this homosexuality seems to fit Don Juan's intrinsically extreme attitude towards sex. For more details, see Soles.

actress reveals what she calls her 'secret' source of inspiration. Ozeray claims: 'On the days when I'm uninspired, indifferent, I must think of a cat I have known. I take him at the moment when he first refuses his milk, when he staggers painfully toward his sandbox' (Giraudoux 1959, 120). By remembering specific incidents of her own life in order to evoke suitable emotions for the character she plays, the actress seems to hint at Stanislavski's notion of the 'affective memory'. I cannot define whether Giraudoux cites the actress' verbatim words, or whether he invents what she claims about her 'secret' method. In either case, Stanislavski's practice was likely to be known, and appreciated by most theatre practitioners through the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>107</sup>

Even the make-believe scenery is investigated in the context of the relationship between theatre and life. If *Six Characters and Each in His Own Way* suggest that theatre can be more authentic than reality, another example of the superior effect of art, compared to real life, can be found in *Play Without a Title*, when the painted curtains on the dimly lit empty stage scare the Servant:

SERVANT. Would you be so good as to tell the employees to turn on the light? [...] It's just that I'm afraid. [...]  
 AUTHOR. Put the light on! It's nothing. You'll see. Some gauze and some painted curtains.  
 SERVANT. Yes, yes, but they seem to be real. (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 113)

As a worker in the theatre, the Servant does not need the Author's affirmation about the theatricality of these painted shapes. However, his awareness of its fakeness does not prevent his panic. Therefore, I disagree with Reed Anderson's interpretation that '[t]he Servant exemplifies the naïve spectator who may be entirely taken in by the false reality of the stage' (Anderson, 156), especially considering the brutal nature of the Servant on which Lorca's text insists. Just before declaring his fear of the painted scene, the Servant recalls two occasions of sharing with his drunken friends the amusement of torturing a child, a cat, and a turkey. Not only is the Servant neither ashamed nor regretful, but he also keeps laughing while he braggingly remembers his disgusting deed (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 112). In this respect, Lorca's play most probably

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<sup>107</sup> For a detailed explanation of Stanislavski's concept of the 'affective memory', see Gordon 47–8, Trask 588, Merlin 158, and Roach 215 – 7. For discussions on the Russian director's influence on modern acting practice, see Weston 78–9, Counsell 43, and Leach 6 – 52.

insists on the magic power of art, as ‘painted curtains’ are not only able to trigger feelings of fear in the audience during a performance, but they also frighten a worker in the theatre, whose personality is too tough to be easily scared. Such an insistence conforms to, and supports the Author’s belief that theatre is able to change its spectators by confronting them with their society’s problems.

Finally, both the prosperity of dramatic characters’ comments on the relationship between life and theatre and the complexity of the borders between the two sides of this relationship, can be considered a result of the state of uncertainty about the real world during the early decades of the twentieth century. Schlueter argues that ‘the philosophical concerns of the twentieth century [...] are centred on the increasingly difficult-to-define relationship between reality and illusion’ (Schlueter, 5). This difficulty consequently affected the way in which reality is represented by theatre. Bert Cardullo argues:

A common denominator among most avant-garde movements, in particular those which sprang up between 1910 and 1930, was skepticism about earlier modes of perception—skepticism, that is, about the possibility of articulating meaning through the logic of language or the language of logic. Realism, together with its more complex descendant, Naturalism, had been based on the assumption that material or positivistic reality can be discovered and articulated through the systematic application of the scientific method of objective or observable phenomena. (Cardullo 2001, 20)

As a common feature of avant-garde plays, such ‘skepticism’ vents itself through one or both of two ways: the anti-illusionist form—Brecht’s metadramas are examples—and/or drawing a dreamlike image of the world—as it is represented by Surrealism. Critical metadrama goes further towards raising doubts on both ‘earlier modes of perception’ and representation. Through dramatic characters’ speeches, critical metadramas, firstly comment on the life-theatre confusion, as my thesis has explored so far. Secondly, within these speeches, dramatic characters literally criticise the nineteenth-century modes of representation, including Naturalism, the genre within which dramatic illusionism reaches its peak.

### **b. Commenting on genre(s): the struggle of the avant-garde**

Considering the reformative function of critical metadrama, it is understandable that the discussion on theatrical matters within these plays include a critique of dominant forms of theatre. Such a reformative purpose is usually merged with playwrights' defence, or promotion, of their own style of writing. Georg Lukács explains: 'it is not surprising that most critical analyses by the writer-critics deal with problems of genre. [...] The theory of genres provides the sphere of objectivity and of objective criteria for individual works and for the individual creative process of each writer (Lukács, 210). As Lukács' claim suggests, comments on genre is what enables the writers to integrate both personal and objective goals of the literary criticism within their works. That explains, for instance, why *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, which is described as a defensive attack on critics, includes a description of comedy. Similarly, *Paris Impromptu* comments on the eloquence of classics, while *Improvisation* criticises Epic drama.

As the historical circumstances suggest, critical metadramas in the first half of the twentieth century were accompanied, and influenced, by several rebellious calls against the Aristotelian drama and the dominance of dramatic texts over visual elements of performance in general. In particular, oppositions to both Naturalism and melodrama, which were inherited from the late nineteenth century, shaped the ideas of a large number of theatre reformers, including directors as well as playwrights. Apart from melodrama, which is mainly attacked by parody within the examples of critical metadramas studied in my thesis, Naturalism is one of the most repeated targets of attack within dramatic characters' speeches of theatrical criticism.

If the critique of Naturalism and melodrama has led to the establishment of several revolutionary movements and doctrines such as Expressionism, Futurism, and Surrealism, why do playwrights of critical metadrama, whose works represent such radical movements, continue to attack the twentieth-century forms? The answer to this question relies on the popularity of Naturalistic and melodramatic *evolved* styles, which seemed to shape the mainstream practice of European theatre and cinema, compared to experimental, not to say the fringe theatre, to which critical metadramas belong. Put differently, apart from the differences between Naturalism and melodrama, the common feature of both is their continuous presence within the European

theatre industry during the first half of the twentieth century, which the critical metadramas studied in my thesis seek to reform.

In 1968, Lee Baxandall claimed that 'Naturalism is far from dead. In America, Europe, and Russia, the virtually unsurpassed mode of dramatic expression, strenuously and yet unfortunately, is still Naturalism' (Baxandall, 92). Although Baxandall uses the word 'Naturalism' with a capital letter, I understand it in a wider context as a *realistic, traditional* Aristotelian drama, whose structure depends on a linear logic-based narrative, rather than the strict methodology of representing a 'slice of life'. I prefer to use Richard Schechner's term 'realism-naturalism' to describe the aspects of Aristotelian-like theatre, which, according to Schechner is one of the trends that have shaped the avant-garde performances in the American theatre since the 1960s (Schechner, 897 – 8).<sup>108</sup>

Clair Warden, who considers that non-linearity is one of the most significant attributes of both American and British avant-garde theatre, claims that 'a new mode appeared that seemed to connect naturalism with the episodic' (Warden, 49). In this respect, while the rigid aesthetics of copying life gave way to new experimental representation, introduced by Expressionism and Surrealism for example, the aspects of 'realism-naturalism', to use Schechner's expression, survived by absorbing some features of these new movements, which paradoxically emerged to contradict Naturalism. However, and apart from *naturalist* performances borrowing from anti-*Naturalistic* doctrines, I claim that while the latter revolt against representing a copy of the world, the inclusion of aspects of 'realism-naturalism' cannot be avoided. To elucidate my claim I will utilise Ivan Goll's description of Surrealism, which, he argues, 'is the most forceful negation of realism. Surface reality is stripped away to reveal the Truth of Being' (Goll, 38). Not only does this alleged 'Truth of Being' represent 'reality', albeit in an anti-realistic way, but fragments of the torn shallow 'reality' are also included. Moreover, without such an inclusion, the 'Truth of Being' cannot be realised. To give an example from a critical metadrama, both the verbal and visual grotesque elements that define the character of Juliet in *The*

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<sup>108</sup> Linking between Realism and Naturalism on the grounds of their common feature of being based on possibility, causality, and logic, can be found in Styan 2002. In Brockett 1991, 146–72, the expression 'realist-naturalist' is utilised to describe nineteenth-century theatre, which is based/reflects on the belief in human ability to comprehend the world, especially through science. In contrast, a sceptical approach to conceive the world is claimed to dominate theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century.

*Public* can only be recognised through the comparison with her stereotyped image. In this respect, I understand Martin Esslin's claim:

Yet the Expressionism of the 1920's [sic], Brecht's epic theatre of the Thirties and Forties, the Theatre of the Absurd of the Fifties and Sixties were still essentially both continuations of and reactions against Naturalism (or at least against its latterday exponents, who still dominate the more conservative sector of our theatre: Broadway, the London West End, and the Paris Boulevard, not to speak of Moscow). (Esslin 1968, 67)

I agree with William Demastes' claim that Esslin utilises 'the term "Naturalism" as a synonym for realism' (Demastes, 5). In this respect, the most striking feature of Esslin's argument is his suggestion that popular forms of theatre at the middle of the twentieth century include, in a way, traces of what Schechner calls 'realism-naturalism'. Esslin's claim can be understood in the context of his pioneer study *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), within which he claims a wide spectrum of dramatic illusionist texts such as, for example, Chekhov's and Greek plays, as ancestors of the Theatre of the Absurd.<sup>109</sup>

It is vital to insist that, regardless of any degree of combination between 'realism-naturalism' and the twentieth-century avant-garde forms of theatre, the latter are based on completely discrepant philosophical and artistic principles to the doctrine of Naturalism. Richard Lehan, who considers that Symbolism was the turning point towards modernism (Lehan, 1), argues:

While modernism and realism/naturalism as literary movements overlapped, they were informed by opposing ideas of reality, and the transition from realism/naturalism to modernism effected a radical change [...] in narrative point of view from one in which characters are seen from the outside to one in which consciousness and memory dominate the telling. (Lehan, 207)

By considering such discrepancy, Esslin's phrase: 'continuations of and reactions against' can be understood on the grounds that aspects of dramatic illusionism are still *included* within, but *challenged* by, the early twentieth-century theatre. In this respect, just like Brecht's plays, critical metadrama of

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<sup>109</sup> For information about Esslin's argument and both supporting and opposing comments on it, see Esslin 1972, Cornwell 43 – 64 and Constantinidis 151–3.

Kaiser, Pirandello, and Ionesco, for example, mix features of 'realism-naturalism' with contradictory metatheatrical techniques. Critical metadramas in particular take a step further by including a verbal critique of the theories and practice of Naturalism as a theatrical doctrine.

The most significant critique of Naturalism highlights its curbing of artistic imagination by seeking to duplicate real life literally, which contradicts the figurative power of theatre that enables it to represent every aspect of life without mirroring it. Véra, the actress in *Paris Impromptu*, insists on this essence when she argues that 'theatre is childishly simple. It's merely being real in the unreal' (Giraudoux 1959, 109). By giving such a decisive statement, the actress seems to sum up her colleagues' mocking attack on Naturalism as the following discussion suggests:

ADAM: And as for their realism and their proletarianism—why, we might be beginning all over again with the Théâtre Libre!  
 DASTÉ: That was something—the Théâtre Libre! They said it was five o'clock and, behold!—a real clock on the wall rang five strokes. The freedom of a clock! It isn't quite that!  
 RAYMONE: If the clock strikes a hundred and two, then it begins to be theatre! (Giraudoux 1959, 109)

On one hand, the troupe scorns the director André Antoine, the founder of the Théâtre Libre in 1887. Antoine famously said: 'Every afternoon at five o'clock when my work was done at the gas company I went my rounds calling on men of letters, asking them what plays they could give me' (qtd. in McCormick 1996, 83). On the other hand, Raymone's figurative and conditional sentence seems to exclude Naturalistic plays from being theatre because of their dramatic action's strict commitment to real time.<sup>110</sup>

Adam's reference to 'proletarianism' in the context of the critique of Naturalism seems puzzling because the vast majority of theatre studies link Naturalist drama with the bourgeois audience, or as Philip Beitchman describes: the 'middle class or above' (Beitchman, 21). In particular, the audience of Théâtre Libre belonged to 'the well-to-do middle class from whom the commercial theatre drew its chief support' (Sutton, 151). Such confusion can be cleared by considering that, after leaving Théâtre Libre in 1894, Antoine

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<sup>110</sup> The sitting of Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* includes a clock on the wall of the house of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, which strikes seventeen. Whether Ionesco is influenced by Giraudoux, the disorder of time is one of the common anti-Naturalistic features of the Theatre of the Absurd.

established the Théâtre Antoine (1897–1906), where the director ‘systematically revised his Théâtre Libre productions, determined to make the new work that had appeared in the independent theatre available to the general public at prices affordable by the lower middle and working classes’ (Chothia 2009, 113). Apart from reducing admission fees, the most important point in Chothia’s comment is that Antoine had to make changes to his plays, which were previously performed to bourgeois spectators at the Théâtre Libre, in order to suit the taste of the proletarian class.<sup>111</sup>

I underline the practice of Antoine in order to claim that mentioning ‘proletarianism’ in a negative way by the actor within *Paris Impromptu* does not mean that Giraudoux’s play is against the working-class. In contrast, both Jovet and the members of his troupe, including Adam, defend the proletariat by accusing critics for inventing the notorious image of working-class bad taste:

ROBINEAU: Unfortunately, the public likes light entertainment.  
 JOUVET: Now, you’re talking just as the critics do! (Giraudoux 1959, 117)

Moreover, as Jovet repeatedly affirms, it is practitioners and even the French government who are to be blamed for the popularity of commercial theatre with its poor language. In addition, taking into consideration Jovet’s insistence on the aesthetic function of theatre rather than delivering a specific message to its audience, I suggest that the word ‘proletarianism’ can be seen as an attack on political theatre, especially because of its boom in the 1920s with the cooperation between Piscator and Brecht and the latter’s increasing influence in European theatre during the 1930s.

In either case, Giraudoux’s play obviously criticises the popularity of Naturalistic drama, of which Antoine is an icon and a pioneer, because of its linguistic poverty. When Émile Zola argues that ‘the greatest and most useful lessons will be taught by depicting life as it is, and not by repeating generalities nor by speeches of bravado which are spoken merely to please our ears’ (Zola, 13), he insists on the life-like language in the Naturalistic play. Boverio, one of

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<sup>111</sup> For a brief record of André Antoine and the effect of the Théâtre Libre on both French and European theatres, see Chothia 2005 and McCormick 1996, 68–86. For references to the bond between the bourgeoisie and Naturalist fiction and theatre in general, see Moriarty 39, Bordo 88–9, and Pavis 1998, 37. For connecting the Théâtre Libre with the bourgeois audience, see Barker 587.



the members of Jouvet's troupe, seems to contradict Zola's point of view. The actor claims: 'The moment you write a play in which you maintain a standard in word and style, [...] you hear at once that you are not a man of the theatre but a writer of literature' (Giraudoux 1959, 118). As Andrew Kennedy argues: 'It is not news that naturalism has imposed a severe limitation on the resources of the word in the theatre' (Kennedy, 2). What *Paris Impromptu* achieves is mixing the critique of Naturalistic language with defending Giraudoux's linguistic style. However, the criticism of Naturalism within the play is not limited to the twentieth-century genre's everyday language.

The scenery is one of the most characteristic methods of re-producing a 'slice of life' on stage by Naturalistic directors. All the actors in Giraudoux's play establish their opposition to this feature of Naturalism in their confidence that the scenery has only a marginal role in the performance, compared to the vital task of acting, Castel argues: 'Scenery should merely be a base—like a gun emplacement. Then, fire away!' (Giraudoux 1959, 108). Castel's claim seems to denounce exaggerated interest by Naturalistic directors, especially Antoine, in creating detailed and precise replica of what is supposed to be the *factual* scene. However, reducing the function of the setting to be a background to dramatic action was one of the aspects for which Naturalism has been challenged by revolutionary directors and theorists since the first decades of the twentieth century. Examples of these directors include Piscator, Artaud, and Meyerhold. Even Brecht's plays, which shape a prominent example of anti-Naturalistic theatre, effectively utilise the minimal presence of scenic elements to cooperate with the dramatic action.<sup>112</sup>

In terms of commenting on the scenery, the following dialogue suggests that the actors in *Tonight We Improvise* take a further step beyond the troupe in *Paris Impromptu* by claiming the needlessness of the setting:

THE LEADING ACTRESS. And no scenery? [...]

THE LEADING ACTOR. Yes, [...] it is no longer the scenery that counts in the theatre.

THE CHARACTER ACTRESS. We don't need scenery. [...] It is enough that you *feel* [sic] yourself there, child, inside your

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<sup>112</sup> As I claim in the first chapter, directors' experiments to face the crisis of theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century are the performative equivalent to playwrights' adoption of metatheatrical techniques in general, and the inclusion of theatrical criticism within their critical metadramas in particular.

jail. It will seem to be there. Everyone will see it, just as if it really were. (Pirandello *Tonight*, 77)

Considering the fact that there was no scenery in the performances of Shakespeare's plays, as part of the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre, I suppose that the Leading Actor's claim that the scenery is 'no longer' an important part of performance hints at the near past: the nineteenth-century theatre.<sup>113</sup>

In addition, when the Leading Character claims that her colleague's ability to 'feel' will lead the latter and the audience to 'see' the nonexistent scenery, it seems that *Tonight We Improvise* reflects on the increasing trend of several European directors such as Stanislavski, Copeau, and Jouvet for focusing on the inner skills of actors in contrast to the gesture-based acting style of melodrama, especially by leading actors and actresses. Insisting on the discrepancy between Stanislavski's system and acting within commercial theatre altogether, John Gielgud claims that 'Stanislavsky's method is not practical for the commercial theatre. [...] One can hardly imagine Stanislavsky being bothered to produce romantic or comic melodramas' (Gielgud, 244). In this respect, the Character Actress' comment may indirectly challenge melodramatic acting, especially considering that the inner play of *Tonight We Improvise* is woven with melodramatic narrative, which is intentionally interrupted and mocked, as the previous chapter suggests.<sup>114</sup>

Pirandello's merging of dramatic characters' negative comments on Naturalism and melodrama can be traced back to 1921 when the Manager in *Six Characters* rejects the demands of both the Father and his Step-Daughter for ultimate precision in depicting the scenery according to the *factual* room in which they met. The following conversation is a perfect example of such a debate:

THE MANAGER [*to* PROPERTY MAN]. Just have a look, and see if there isn't a sofa or divan in the wardrobe ...  
PROPERTY MAN. There's the green one.

<sup>113</sup> The lack of scenery in the Elizabethan Theatre in general and the plays of Shakespeare's in particular is mentioned in Whitney 46, Ackroyd 335, MacIntyre 4, and Bryson 74. For detailed information, see Hilton, wherein the Elizabethan 'bare stage' is claimed to be the reason for Shakespeare's utilisation of characters' speeches to define and describe the place of dramatic action.

<sup>114</sup> For detailed discussions on the consideration of psychological aspects in actors' training and characterisation by Stanislavski, Copeau, and Jouvet, see Gordon.

THE STEP-DAUGHTER. No no! Green won't do. It was yellow, ornamented with flowers—very large! and most comfortable!

PROPERTY MAN. There isn't one like that.

THE MANAGER. It doesn't matter. Use the one we've got.

THE STEP-DAUGHTER. Doesn't matter? It's most important!

(Pirandello *Six Characters*, 240)

In contrast to the Step-Daughter's insistence on Naturalistic scenery, the Manager underestimates the exactness of the colour of the setting piece, not only due to economical and practical factors, but also, and most importantly, because he is not eager to copy their lives, especially in a rehearsal. Considering that the Manager believes in, and seeks to create 'dramatic illusion of reality' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 263), as he clearly declares, suggests that he is specifically against Naturalism as the most exaggerated form of illusionist drama.

Both practical and artistic reasons can explain why the Manager contradicts the imaginary characters' insistence on precise representation by moving between many places, in which the incidents of their story took place. Believing in the condensed nature of theatre, the Manager asserts that, to turn the story into a play, 'the difficulty lies in this fact: to set out just so much as is necessary for the stage' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 258 – 9), which justifies his neglect of what the imaginary characters see as indispensable situations, actions, and speeches. For instance, while the Manager decides to combine several situations to be presented in the scenery of the garden, the Step-Daughter argues that there must be several indoor scenes. The Manager decisively declares:

THE MANAGER. We can't change scenes three or four times in one act.

THE LEADING MAN. They used to once. (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 263)

I claim that the Leading Man's negative reference to 'changing scenes' expands the criticism within Pirandello's play beyond attacking Naturalism to condemn melodrama, especially by considering the significant role which spectacles have played in the performances of melodrama since the early decades of the nineteenth century. Bruce McConachie insists on the mighty impact of replacing

candles by gas in lighting and the scientific improvement of machinery on increasing the ability of melodrama to make its sceneries more dynamic with a large number of spectacular effects, including visual materialisation of moving trains, submerging ships, and racing horses on stage (McConachie 'Theatres for Knowledge', 249).<sup>115</sup> In this respect, it can be argued that all the claims of reducing the importance of the scenery mentioned by the dramatic characters of *Paris Impromptu*, *Six Characters*, and *Tonight We Improvise* are a critique of both Naturalism and melodrama. Such concomitance can be seen as a result of the integration between aspects of the two genres in a kind of hybrid(s) as the following argument investigates.

While the history of melodrama as a genre goes back to the eighteenth century, melodramatic forms continued to be popular during the early decades of the twentieth century. Such popularity can be explained partly by the support of the leaders of the 1917 Russian Revolution, who found in melodrama's simplistic and sympathetic dichotomy of good/working class and evil/bourgeois characters a suitable form to achieve their goal of using theatre as a method of propaganda against Capitalism. In this respect it seems that the reasons for such a boom in the performances of melodrama are identical to the circumstances that motivated the birth of melodrama by the end of the eighteenth century. Gerould argues:

Melodrama flourished in Russia after 1917, just as it had in France after 1789. It addressed the same kind of new public and it identified many of the same enemies: priests, aristocrats, profiteers and former rulers. It adopted the same Manichean view of the world, voiced the same need for heroes and villains, and preached the same simplistic moral lessons. (Gerould 1994, 191)

Consequently, the appeal of melodrama to the working-class spectators remarkably increased during the 1920s and 1930s. Simultaneously, melodrama was appreciated not only by an increasing number of leftist critics, but also by Russian Formalism. In 1926, three studies of melodrama were written by Sergei Balukhatyi, Boris Tomashevsky, and Adrian Piotrovsky. Whether these studies were motivated by such popularity, which paradoxically contradicts the formalist

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<sup>115</sup> For the essential part of spectacles in all sorts of melodramas, see Grimsted 76 – 98, and Carli.

belief in purposeless literature, the three critics focus on the common features of melodrama as a stereotyped form.<sup>116</sup>

When it was politically exploited by the Russian Revolution, melodramas had already attracted the twentieth-century bourgeois audience. McConachie explains:

Along with variety and revue entertainment, popular audiences in the industrialized world enjoyed genres of theatre long successful with urban audiences. By 1914, the theatre capitals of the West – preeminently London, Paris, New York, and Berlin, but also Milan, Vienna, Moscow, and Madrid – featured several theatres devoted to melodramas and comedies for cross-class, popular audiences. (McConachie 'Popular Entertainments', 334)

On one hand, as preference for Naturalistic drama is usually related to the newly-shaped bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth century; melodrama's appeal to this reformed class during the early decades of the twentieth-century can be partly explained by the noticeable decrease in the number of strict Naturalistic performances. In this respect, apart from indirect references in melodramatic plots to the conflict between social classes, the exaggerated sentimentality of melodrama shaped one of the most popular alternative methods of entertainment to Naturalistic drama for the middle class.<sup>117</sup>

On the other hand, it seems that melodrama's ability to attract the bourgeois audience alongside working class spectators can be traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century, decades before the establishment of Naturalism. According to McConachie, 'melodramas assist the new bourgeoisie in forging a social morality that would benefit their class in the 1850s. Arguably, this kind of melodrama was [...] antithetical to working-class interests' (McConachie 'Theatres for Knowledge', 269). That explains why Patrice Pavis accuses the nineteenth-century melodrama of being distracted from its original function. Pavis claims:

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<sup>116</sup> For references to the effect of the Russian revolution on the prosperity of politically exploited melodrama to promote communist vision in European theatres and left-wing critics' praise of the performances of melodrama, see Russell 34, Louis 2005, 150, and Louis 2002, 95. For a translation and comment on the three formalist studies of melodrama, see Gerould 1991.

<sup>117</sup> Another alternative was the so-called revue, whose performances combine a variety of dance, songs and short comic acts. For more information about the prosperity of the genre of the revue during the early decades of the twentieth century, see McConachie 'Popular Entertainments, 1850-1920', 334 and Fendrich 1.

The melodramatic genre, betraying the class to which it would appear to be addressed (the people), seals the newly-established bourgeois order by universalising conflicts and values and by promoting a process of “social catharsis” in the spectator that discourages any kind of reflection and criticism. (Pavis 1998, 208 – 9)

Despite melodrama’s ability to address ‘cross-class’ spectators, it seems more flexible than Naturalism in terms of melodramatic aspects mingling with some of the vanguard forms. Such an observation can be explained due the fact that the twentieth-century forms are mainly rebellious against Naturalism, whose strict adherence to reality in turn was a revolutionary opposition to melodrama.<sup>118</sup>

In other words, because the dramatic realm of melodrama is based on exaggerated emotions, and morality rather than possibility and causality, it intersects with anti-Naturalistic forms of representation. Gerould claims that during the 1920s, ‘a temporary fusion of melodrama and avant-garde experimentalism [...] produced lively intellectual debate and theorising about the genre by first-rate talents in the Soviet performing arts’ (Gerould 1994, 191). What Gerould describes as a ‘debate’ on the embracing of melodramatic aspects by the avant-garde of 1920s seems to concern contemporary criticism in 1999, as Richard Murphy makes links between expressionist drama and melodramatic imagination (Murphy, 142 – 79). Moreover, more recent revolutionary drama such as the Theatre of the Absurd is claimed by James Burke and Paul Nolan to be influenced by the nineteenth-century form, especially in terms of melodramatic characters’ unconvincing motivation (Burke, 9). On one hand, the inclusion of dramatic characters’ discussions of the matter of genre within critical metadramas can be seen, at least partly, as a response to the cultural and critical ‘debate’, described by Gerould. On the other hand, although melodrama is usually described by specific aspects that distinguish it from other literary and artistic genres, one of the most striking features of melodrama is its ability to integrate with different moods of representation. Jan Campbell claims:

The modality of melodrama is of course double, articulating distinctive genres at particular moments, but also providing a practice of oscillation and transformation between genres.

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<sup>118</sup> For examples of describing naturalism as an opposite response to the popularity of melodrama, see Warden 49, Allain 178, Wise xx, Lehan 206 – 34, and Mercer 81.

Melodrama, therefore, sucks up other genres – tragedy, comedy, romance – and re-memorizes or re-articulates them. (Campbell, 201)

By calling melodrama itself ‘genres’, Campbell defines the eclectic nature of melodrama, which in turn enables some of its features to ‘re-articulate’ themselves within other forms or genres. Put differently, while the simplistic conflict between evil and good characters makes melodrama a perfect form for addressing the Marxist political message about the proletariat’s suffering from the bourgeoisie, melodrama’s neglect of, sometimes contradiction to, causality and possibility draws a link with, not to say a resemblance to, the allegedly apolitical Theatre of the Absurd.<sup>119</sup>

When Eric Bentley claims that melodrama is ‘the quintessence of drama’ (Bentley 1964, 216), he seems to suggest that features of melodrama, without the latter’s exaggeration, are possible, or even normal, within all forms of representation. That may explain why several scholars use the term ‘melodrama’ in order to retrospectively describe earlier theatrical phenomena. For instance, because Racine’s plays, within which he rewrites Greek tragedies, replaced the conflict between Gods and kings with a confrontation between human wills, some critics derogatorily described his plays as melodrama. John Lyons argues that ‘Racine in most of his tragedies depicted protagonists who are quite middling, even ‘mediocre’ in the modern sense. [...] We can see why it has been said that Racine turned tragedy into bourgeois melodrama’ (Lyons, 39). In contrast, the surprising, compromising finale of the works of melodrama, whether in literature, theatre, or cinema, is sometimes called: ‘deus ex machina’ by scholars.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, it seems predictable that the occurrence of melodramatic aspects within other forms extends beyond sharing anti-Naturalistic aspects with some of the early twentieth-century *experimental* theatre to the assimilation with nineteenth-century *realistic* moods of representation. McConachie argues: ‘The combination of melodrama and the well-made-play shaped many successful dramas at the end of the nineteenth century. [...] These productions used the

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<sup>119</sup> Both Kaplan 90 and Forsyth 39 claim that melodramatic aspects are intrinsic components of most realistic literature.

<sup>120</sup> For examples of linking the appearance of heroic characters or the happy ending of melodramas with the Greek ‘deus ex machina’, mainly in the plays of Euripides, see Stites 26, Ito 5 – 6, Singer 46.

conventional realism of the era to reinforce their melodramatic messages' (McConachie 'Theatres for Knowledge', 249 – 50). Consequently, the 1910s witnessed the emergence of the so-called 'realist melodrama', within which, as Richard Maltby describes: the formula of melodrama is utilised to address social matters with morally forced endings (Maltby, 221– 2). It seems that 'realist melodrama' was the perfect form for practitioners of both theatre and cinema to attract the heterogeneous mixture of bourgeois and working-class spectators. Chuck Kleinhans argues that 'realist melodrama, a film and theatrical form which has been frequently attacked, [...] remains one of the perennially popular forms used by artists seeking to depict the unrepresented and misrepresented' (Kleinhans, 157). In addition to suggesting that the popularity of realist melodrama continued to the 1990s, the most striking point of Kleinhans's comment refers to the prosperity of realist melodrama within films as well as plays.<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, European critical metadramas mix their critique of Naturalism and melodrama with references to the threat of the cinema, especially with the latter's adoption—not to say exploitation—of popular themes and techniques of theatrical melodramas. Commenting on films' dependence on melodrama, Campbell argues: 'melodrama can then be conceived in terms of early cinematic production as an apparatus that puts into play popular genres for mass, mainstream audiences' (Campbell, 201). Laurence Senelick suggests that the development of adding the soundtrack to films was a turning point in the conflict between theatre and cinema. Senelick declares: 'Before the advent of the talkies, the cinema had not been serious competition for the live theatre' (Senelick, xvii – xviii).<sup>122</sup> Senelick's claim can be understood on the grounds that the transition from silent to talking films has increased the latter's ability to utilise emotive aspects of melodramatic speeches, especially with the combination of music and sound effects. Both Andreyev and Pirandello, who supported silent films, were against using words in the cinema.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Similar to the notion of 'realist melodrama' suggested by Maltby and Kleinhans, the term 'naturalist melodrama' describes a group of Italian films in the period between the 1930s and 1950s in Kovács 87.

<sup>122</sup> For information about the establishment of the commercial cinema industry in France, Germany and Italy before the First World War, see Hake 14 – 16.

<sup>123</sup> Andreyev, who died in 1919, several years before sound was added to films, insisted that words must be the difference between stage and cinema. See Beumers 17, and Taylor 21. In 1929, Pirandello wrote two articles within which he insists on the virtue of silent films and



In addition, the insistence on the verbal nature of theatre as a/the major method of expression by the Russian and Italian playwrights can be seen as a contradiction to the then increasing calls for the foregrounding of visual elements of performance at the expense of dramatic texts. These calls, which reached their peak with Artaud's suggestion of plays without verbal language, were initially raised by several European stage directors in order to reform theatre by defining its theatricality. One of these reformers is Andreyev's compatriot, Meyerhold. Cardullo declares: 'In *On the Theatre*, a collection of his critical writings that appeared in 1913, Meyerhold defends theatricality and stylization, the puppet and the masks, and the elevation of form over content' (Cardullo 2013, 65). In this respect, while the mimic inner play within *Requiem* (1916) represents a system of production regulated by a private, selfish and authoritarian patron, this wordless play-within-the-play can be also conceived as an insistence on the significant role of 'words' in theatre, whether compared to silent films or against directors' calls for marginalising such a role.

The cinema's borrowing from theatre started with the 'silent moving photographs', according to Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, who assert that 'by the turn of the century some significant theatrical stars had appeared before the camera to perform fragments of their stage successes, and many early fiction films drew their plots from well-known plays' (Brewster, 5 – 6). With themes and stars of the melodrama, it is understandable that acting in silent movies relied on overinflated gestures. David Mayer explains:

There exists among some historians of silent film the conviction that Victorian and Edwardian stage performances were "melodramatic" (melodrama here used as a pejorative term to describe drama that was overblown in its emotions and ideas, but, in particular, in acting that was excessively gestural, emotionally exaggerated, and in a word, "stagy"). (Mayer, 22)

Because the mainstream of talking movies continued in utilising melodramatic substances, such allegedly 'stagy', gestural acting was accompanied by overstated vocal representation. In *Play Without a Title the Actress'* pointless attempt to teach a real mother how to express her worries about her children is

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discusses growing debate on the negative consequences of talking movies for theatre. For information about Pirandello's articles, see Caesar 258 – 60, and Ceallacháin 34 – 5.

a perfect example of gestural-vocal exaggeration. While commenting on acting may reflect on Lorca's experience as a director, it seems important to read the play's critique of the Actress' style as a response to the dominance of melodramas in Spain. Moreover, contradicting superficial and stereotyped acting was part of most directors' suggestions to facetheatre crisis during the early decades of the twentieth century. Put differently, and apart from the technical aspects that differentiate films from plays, what Mayer calls 'stagy' was the overriding type of acting within popular theatre in the nineteenth century, against which calls for reforming theatre were raised, including theatrical criticism within critical metadramas.

The question I ask is: if films imitated the already popular mainstream theatre, why did the cinema attracted theatregoers? Or, as Ben Singer wonders: 'Why did cheap melodrama give way to movies?' (Singer, 167). While I claim that the public's curiosity about the new art can partly answer the question, Ben Singer gives a more profound explanation, which is based on the noticeably low price of cinema tickets compared to the theatre. Singer declares: 'Without question, economic factors were crucial in melodrama's shift from stage to screen, particularly in light of the relative poverty of melodrama's primary audience' (Singer, 167). In other words, the cinema was able to offer an alternative to popular theatre with remarkably cheaper tickets.

At the beginning of *Paris Impromptu*, for example, when the leading actor of the troupe asks about one of the absent actresses, one of her colleagues replies: 'She's at the movies' (Giraudoux 1959, 107). It is hard to decide whether this actress prefers being 'at the movies' to attending the rehearsal because, as a spectator, she finds films too attractive a form of entertainment to resist, or, as an actress, she considers the cinema a potential career with more fame and financial outcome than theatre. However, considering that dramatic characters repeatedly comment on the audience's abandonment of theatre, I argue that the play indirectly hints at the commercial flourishing of films that grabbed the attention of theatre spectators as one of the features of the crisis that faced the art of theatre in the time of Giraudoux, as the following conversation suggests:

JOUVET: How were the matinees in the other theatres, Marthe? Show me the box-office receipts.

MARTHE: (*handing him a paper*) Just as bad as ours, even though it was raining! (Giraudoux 1959, 112)

Put differently, while *Paris Impromptu* criticises the popularity of boulevard theatre, the play also alludes to the harmful effect of the cinema on theatre.

An obvious example of addressing the increasing threat of the cinema as a more popular and profitable rival to theatre can be found in *The Mountain Giants*. Throughout the text, the characters of the members of the troupe complain about the failure of their play, which led the Count, their patron to lose his fortune. In contrast, it seems that films are booming:

COUNT: Isn't there a theatre?

COTRONE: Full of mice. It's kept locked. Even if it wasn't nobody would go.

QUAQUEO: There are plans to redevelop it.

COTRONE: That's right ... into a stadium, fights and things ...

MARA-MARA: No, it's going to be a cinema.

COTRONE: That's right, chases and things. (Pirandello 1993, 38)

On one hand, as the conversation among the members of the travelling troupe suggests, it seems that the increasing prosperity of films led to the conversion of theatres into picture houses for movies. As Singer explains, 'Movies were a better deal than stage drama not only for spectators but for theatre managers and producers, as well. They could realise greater profits with movies, even with the much lower ticket prices' (Singer, 168). On the other hand, Cortone's derogatory description of films as 'chases and things' can be understood on the grounds of the various ramifications of melodrama, which shaped the mainstream film industry during the first half of the twentieth century. Steve Neale argues that:

[T]he contemporary term used to describe nearly all the films subsequently labeled as *noirs*, whether they were detective films, gangster films, gothic thrillers or psychological horror films, has also figured prominently in accounts of genre in the cinema. That term was melodrama. (Neale 2000, 166)

In addition to these types of films mentioned by Neale, a large number of names are utilised by scholars in order to define subtle differences amongst variations of what Pirandello's character seems to describe as 'chases and things'. Just

like Neal's, the vast majority of cinema studies link these sub-categories of film noir with one or more of the aspects of melodrama.<sup>124</sup>

According to most of these studies, melodramatic features are woven with *realist* representation and usually draw on social problems, which Richard Armstrong describes as the 'synthesis of melodrama and realism' (Armstrong, 40). Thus, I suggest that the criticism of the aspects of melodrama within critical metadramas includes, at least indirectly, an attack on the cinema and, to a large extent, vice versa.

A perfect example of such two-fold critique, of melodrama in plays and films, can be found in *Victims of Duty*. In the discussion about theatre with his wife, Choubert argues that: 'Drama's always been realistic' (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 269). According to Choubert, the common feature of all these 'realistic' plays is that 'there's always been a detective about. Every play's an investigation brought to a successful conclusion. There's a riddle, and it's solved in the final scene' (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 269). Thus, the entire history of theatre, according to Choubert, is a variation of detective drama. To prove such a claim, he explains:

CHOUBERT: I was thinking of the Miracle play about the woman Our Lady saved from being burned alive [...] If you forget that bit of divine intervention, which really has nothing to do with it, what's left is a newspaper story about a woman who has her son-in-law murdered by a couple of stray killers for reasons that are unmentioned [...] A naturalistic drama, fit for the theatre of Antoine...

MADELEINE: What about the classics?

CHOUBERT: Refined detective drama. Just like naturalism. (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 269-70)

It is not clear whether the word 'classics' means Greek tragedies or the seventeenth-century new classic in France. In either case, Choubert argues that there is no essential difference between classics, medieval religious drama,

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<sup>124</sup> Although the term 'film noir' was coined in the 1940s to describe both European and American films that belong to the types mentioned by Neale, several studies trace this sort of cinema back to the 1910s. For example, see Spicer 2002, 8 – 10, and Mercer 6. In Durgnat 139, the 'thriller movie' is described as 'pure melodrama'. For using the term 'social melodrama' in describing examples of 'film noirs', see Spicer 2010, 184, and Naremore 103. In Rabinowitz 231, there is a claim about 'linking domestic melodrama' to 'hard-boiled proletarian culture' by film noir. In Abecassis 92, 'realist melodrama' in the French cinema during the 1930s is argued to be foreshadowing for the American film noir. For a claim that a large number of contemporary television shows adopt this form of realist melodrama, see McConachie 2008, 179.

or—as he mentions Antoine—the nineteenth-century Naturalistic plays, because all of them belong to the same conventional sort of detective drama. On one hand, Choubert’s claim can be read on the grounds that several scholars trace the origin of detective plots back to the Greek tragedies. For instance, John Scaggs argues:

The story of *Oedipus the King*, as set down by Sophocles and first performed in about 430 BC, draws together all of the central characteristics and formal elements of the detective story, including a mystery surrounding a murder, a closed circle of suspects, and the gradual uncovering of a hidden past. (Scaggs, 9)

On the other hand, when Nadya Aisenberg argues: ‘The element of surprise is integral to both tragedy and detective fiction’ (Aisenberg, 26), she seems to define one of the reasons for scholars’ claims that the detective plots, whether in literature or films, are variations of melodrama, within which surprise is an essential component.<sup>125</sup>

In this respect, I claim that by Choubert’s critique of detective drama, he does not only attack traditional theatrical forms, including the classics, the middle-age drama and Naturalism, but he also condemns realist melodrama as a popular form of films. I base my claim on the textual evidence with which Choubert begins his discussion on theatre, by addressing his wife: ‘You’re often going to the cinema; you must be very fond of the theatre’ (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 269). Moreover, commenting on her husband’s radical claims about theatre, Madeleine advises Choubert: ‘You ought to get an expert opinion on the subject. [...] Oh, there’s bound to be someone, among the cinema enthusiasts’ (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 270).

During his attempts to handle the initial signs of the Detective’s aggression, Choubert suddenly suggests: ‘I’m sure you accept the principle that art of drama should be revolutionary’ (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 275). The Detective ignores this comment to begin his tough investigation and he will not reveal his contradictory point of view until the last third of the play. The Detective declares:

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<sup>125</sup> Claims of finding roots of crime fiction within both Greek and Elizabethan tragedies can be found in Miskimmin. Tracing melodramatic aspects with realistic representation of detective films can be found in Kuhn 101 – 2, and Mulvey 19 – 28.

[A]s for me I remain Aristotelically [sic] logical, true to myself, faithful to my duty and full of respect for my bosses...I don't believe in the absurd, everything hangs together, everything can be comprehended in time...thanks to the achievements of human thought and science. (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 309)

The Detective's subservient attitude to the strict hierarchical arrangements, which rule and organise the relationship between the members of society is the equivalent to his belief in the Aristotelian theatre with its linear structure, causality and logic. Nicolas, who shares Choubert's admiration of radical theatre, decides to challenge the Detective's power. Just before killing the Detective, Nicolas declares what seems to be the new theatre's manifesto:

As for plot and motivation, let's not mention them. We ought to ignore them completely, at least in their old form, which was too clumsy, too obvious ... too phoney, like anything that's too obvious ... No more drama, no more tragedy: the tragic's turning comic, the comic is tragic, and life's getting more cheerful. (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 309)

Thus, while the critical discourse within *Victims of Duty* generally supports the theatre of the absurd, the play constructs a metaphor that depicts the revolutionary emergence of the new drama, to which Ionesco's plays belong, against the dominance of all sorts of traditional, Aristotelian, and illusionist representation, whether in plays or films.

It can be concluded that, commenting on genre within critical metadramas reflects on what Brockett and Findlay call 'The struggle against commercialism', endured by the experimental, 'out of the way theatres', which had to compete with the 'escapist entertainment' offered by the mainstream plays and films between the World Wars (Brockett 1991, 260 – 1). Apart from the role of practitioners in promoting the dominance of entertaining theatre and cinema, the two crucial factors for such prosperity are related to the processes of production and reception, which explains why both the audience and the patronage system are amongst the topics of dramatic characters' discussions within critical metadrama.

### C. Commenting on patronage systems: financial problems of production

Most avant-garde movements of theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century are concerned with artistic values rather than commercial goals. However, the dominance of popular forms of entertainment over both theatre and the cinema seemed to restrain the ability of experimental theatre, to which critical metadramas belong, to compete with commercial theatre. In their introduction to *Against Theatre: creative destructions on the modernist stage* (2007), Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner explain the reformative function of modernist drama by broadening the historical context to include political and economic conditions of theatrical production. They declare:

[W]e want to indicate how modernist theatre responds to, represents and critiques the forces unleashed by rapid industrialization and the capitalist mode of production. And yet a critique, even destruction, of certain types of theatre is, this book will show, a productive force within modernism and a force that led to the most successful reforms of modern theatre and drama. (Ackerman, 1)

The argument of Ackerman and Puchner considers contextual aspects of theatre as an industry as well as an art. Such a consideration is very significant because it focuses on the prevailing type of production, of which capitalists assume the role of the patron. However, private sponsorship can be traced back to the beginning of theatre practice.<sup>126</sup>

The nature of the patron is defined according to historical circumstances, including overriding political and social powers along with the social image of art in general and theatre in particular within societies. Sally Banes argues:

In Europe, the model [of patronage] may vary from one country to another according to whether state support for the arts is centralised or decentralized. But in general, from the Renaissance to the present, both church and state (whether royal, democratic, or totalitarian) have sponsored the arts financially. (Banes, 220)

Banes' observation suggests that patronage continues to be a phenomenon that still exists in European theatre by the turn of twenty-first century. Moreover,

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<sup>126</sup> For examples of patrons in both Greek and Roman theatres, see the studies of Beacham, Rehm, and Griffith.

and most importantly, she widens the notion of the patron to include the church and governments.

In *Paris Impromptu*, there is a plea for increasing the role of the state's patronage of theatre when Jouvét reminds Robineau, the government's representative, of the role of Louis XIV as a patron of Molière. Jouvét wonders: 'Did you ever ask yourself what he [Molière] could have done against the three estates, against all-powerful men, against fashion and cabal—he, who was nothing but an outcast and a wanderer, if the State had not been behind him?' (Giraudoux 1959, 127). However, Jouvét's call for governmental help extends beyond supporting more serious theatre to cutting the financial sources of commercial performances. 'Since you have a hundred million francs, use it first of all to chase the money lenders from the temple. You will gain in the end' (Giraudoux 1959, 128). Most probably, the word 'temple' refers to the 'Boulevard du Temple', the place which became the icon of trivial entertainment in France. Edward Turk affirms that until the end of the 1940s, nearly 'fifty plot-based' popular plays were performed every season at the Boulevard du Temple (Turk, 135). Thus, when Jouvét asks Robineau to 'chase the money lenders from the temple', the character of the director seems to urge the French government to intervene by preventing Capitalists from producing commercial plays. Jouvét's desperate demand for the French government's intervention can be understood on the grounds of the boom in commercial entertainment in France during the 1930s. Michaël Abecassis argues: 'In the 1930s, studios improved their equipment and large cinemas were built across the country. In 1931, more than 150 talkies were made. [...] This period also saw the advent of a new genre: the filmed theatre based on boulevard comedies' (Abecassis, 92).<sup>127</sup>

In contrast to *Paris Impromptu*, no other European critical metadrama studied in my thesis openly supports governmental sponsorship of theatre. However, private patronage within most of these plays seems to be invalid, harmful, or even fatal for both the art of theatre and its practitioners. The main defect of all types of sponsors is their tendency for, or even eagerness to, practice an unlimited authority over both the production and practitioners. As the

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<sup>127</sup> In Bradby 2000, 391, the Boulevard is claimed to have continued its success during the 1950s and 1960s. As Giraudoux's play was written in 1937, I focus on the prosperity of the boulevard in the 1930s, which is also supported by McCormick 1993, 15 – 20.



following conversation from *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal: A Farce for Puppets* (1936) suggests, when the Poet intentionally reveals information about the inner play to the audience, the Director uses his authority as a producer to interrupt the Poet's speech:

DIRECTOR: As a writer, you have no right to reveal our secrets.

POET: No, sir.

DIRECTOR: Don't I pay you?

POET: Yes, sir. (Lorca *The Puppet Play*, 57-8)

Similar to *The Public*, The Director in *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal* seems to be a practitioner, who is simultaneously managing an independent or state theatre. Therefore, there is a vague border between his administrative and artistic responsibilities/authorities. In 1960, Ionesco insists on the negative effect of theatre managers on avant-garde performances since the early decades of the twentieth century. Ionesco claims:

A danger in some countries, and still a necessary evil unfortunately, is the manager. [...] A manager who is also a friend of mine once asked me to change everything in my plays and make them comprehensible. I asked him by what right he interfered with matters of dramatic construction which should only concern myself and my director: for it seemed to me that to pay money to produce a play was not sufficient reason to dictate conditions and alter my work. (Ionesco *Tulana Drama Review*, 52)

As Ionesco's comment suggests, deciding artistic matters is an exclusive right of both the playwright and his director, not the manager. I use this example in order to underline that although the Poet's submissive behaviour towards the Director in *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal* may indicate directors' increasing dominance over the performance by the turn of the twentieth century, the Director justifies his interference in an artistic matter by his power as a producer, not due to his artistic practice.

Although most individual patrons within the plays are searchers for their own amusement, or even philanthropists, rather than being profit-seekers, examples of private sponsorship are portrayed negatively. The leading actor and manager of an Elizabethan troupe in *The Protagonist* practices

undiminished control over other actors, whom he arrogantly mocks and threatens to leave unfed (Kaiser, 138). On the contrary, because the performance is exclusively dedicated to satisfy the Duke, whose generous reward represents the only potential income, the Protagonist is very obedient to the changing orders of the Duke, delivered by the latter's Majordomo. First and foremost, these orders define the type of the performance that suits the preferences of the Duke's guests. The Majordomo informs the Protagonist: 'You must abstain from speech, for His Grace's guests from Spain and Germany would not understand your language. You are to perform a mime' (Kaiser, 138). In addition to highlighting the Protagonist's instant responses to the Duke's orders and adjusting the show to fit the taste of the latter's guests, Kaiser's play underscores that the mere reason for such obedience is money. After informing the Protagonist about the Duke's demand for a serious mime instead of comedy, Majordomo declares: 'His Grace would regret a refusal. You would miss an opportunity which might be of service to you' (Kaiser, 142). Apart from the flimsy tone of apology, the speech of the Majordomo insists on the Duke's reward, which demonstrates his authority as a patron. In other words, theatre is reduced to a commodity that amuses no one but the noble producer, while spectators from working and middle classes are excluded.

Quite the opposite to the opportunistic attitude of the Protagonist, the Poet in *The Beggar*, is keen to maintain his freedom. As an emerging talented playwright, the Poet believes that the only way to improve his profession is to watch his plays in live performances. In contrast, the Patron promises him a constant income to keep writing and printing his plays, because, according to the Patron, they are too avant-garde to be successful on stage. Therefore, when the Poet declines the offer, the Patron is upset at what he thinks is an unrealistic decision: the latter blames the former:

You talk heedlessly! You overlook the real advantage of my proposal—your mental growth in undisturbed security. That is what you need. Dramatic performances would actually be harmful to you, because your whole being would be so engrossed in them, there would be no peace left for your work; and your work can flourish only in peace and quiet. (Sorge, 40)

Thus, the Poet eventually follows his artistic belief that watching his dramatic texts in performances is the most effective way to improve his writing, with which I agree, if I may express my opinion. While sacrificing financial safety might suggest that the Poet is an idealist, Sorge's play does not portray the Patron as a villain; he just cannot share the Poet's opinion.

The most negative image of a patron within the group of European critical metadramas studied in my thesis is His Highness in *Requiem*. The inscrutable and masked patron chooses Herr Manager to conduct the production process and to be the only person who contacts him directly. This privilege enables Herr Manager to control the Director, who, in turn, is being flattered by the Artist. In this ascending hierarchy of power, practitioners are only concerned with the patron's satisfaction, regardless of artistic values. One of the patron's most rigid orders was to prevent the audience from attending the performance because he is 'afraid of the noise and the rowdiness that the crowd always brings with it' (Andreyev, 114). If the Protagonist in Kaiser's play blames the 'crowd' for their allegedly low taste, His Highness in *Requiem* accuses them of misbehaving in theatre; two aspects of the audience's inferior image suggested by an arrogant practitioner and a bizarre patron.

Gradually, Andreyev's play becomes dreamlike with nightmarish ambiance, wherein the actors/characters of the inner mime, who consecutively appear on stage for few seconds, look like ghosts. As the stage directions describe:

*A young man, with an energetic expression on his ardent, emaciated face that seems as though it has been consumed by fire. Shackled by corpse-like immobility, like all the rest, he is bursting with latent motion. His clothes are torn, and on his chest and face there is dried blood. [...] One after the other there pass across the stage dozens of absolutely identical human beings with gray faces devoid of expression, so alike as to be ludicrous. (Andreyev, 121 – 2)*

Eventually, The Manager suggests that His Highness is 'like the stranger who came to Mozart, ordered him to write a Requiem and never appeared again, but the Requiem kept running through Mozart's head ... to the very end. Weren't you the unknown visitor who called on Mozart?' (Andreyev, 123). In addition to the Manager's feeling that he is dying after the performance, this metaphysical

interpretation is supported by His Highness's appearance, as he always wears a black cloak and mask. It is striking that the second half of the text refers to His Highness as the 'Man in the Mask'. Moreover, apart from its title, *Requiem* contains thirty derivatives and synonyms of the word 'death', of which only five are included in the stage directions.

However, despite seeing His Highness as a sign of death, or even death itself disguised, Andreyev's play directly highlights its message regarding the matter of patronage when the tyrant patron reminds the Manager: 'I can distinctly hear my gold clinking in your pocket. Or haven't I paid you everything I owe you? Tell me, and you will receive payment in full' (Andreyev, 122). In this respect, the metaphysical reading of Andreyev's play can be considered in the context of the statements of both the Artist and His Highness about the role of money in production and on the grounds that although the Manager is not convinced of the patron's thoughts, he accepts the latter's 'gold'. Thus, *Requiem* seems to suggest that the private patron exploits practitioners' need, or greed, for money in order to seduce them to participate in producing a dead performance; both theatre and practitioners end up dead by losing freedom, creativity, and the audience.

Another variation of the private patron, for noncommercial purposes, is represented by the character of the Count in both *Fanny's First Play* and *The Mountain Giants*. In Shaw's play, Fanny, the daughter of The Count asks her father to produce her debut play as her birthday gift. The Count in Pirandello's *The Mountain Giants* gives the financial support to the troupe in which his wife is the leading actress. While neither patron intervenes in artistic matters, after watching the one-night show of his daughter's play, Fanny's father harshly criticises it. In contrast, the Count in Pirandello's play suffers from a series of unsuccessful performances by the travelling troupe, which have completely exhausted his wealth. However, he declares: 'Those who disparage the play disparage my wife and render as nothing her efforts and her genius. I have lost a fortune and I have lost nothing if she is happy and fulfilled in the beauty and the greatness of the work she undertakes' (Pirandello 1993, 35-6). Compared to his counterpart in Shaw's play, the opinion of the Count in *The Mountain Giants* on the troupe's play seems highly influenced by his admiration of his wife.

The main element that distinguishes *Fanny's First Play* not only from *The Mountain Giants*, but also from most critical metadramas that include a character

of a patron, is that Shaw's play does not focus on the effect of private sponsorship whether on the art of theatre in general or on practitioners in particular. Put differently, there is no textual evidence within *Fanny's First Play* that suggests reading the Count's patronage in the context of the difficulties of production, which faced experimental theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century.

In contrast, the Count's financial support for the troupe is repeatedly mentioned through dramatic characters' speeches within *The Mountain Giants*, with a mixture of appreciation and apology for the repeated failures of their play, which led to the Count's loss of wealth. Therefore, the Count's patronage is related to characters' complaints about the bad taste of spectators, who favour cinema over theatre. The most striking aspect that links Pirandello's inclusion of the matter of patronage within *The Mountain Giants* to historical circumstances is the inner play from which short parts are rehearsed and performed by the members of the troupe.

While dramatic characters declare that this inner play is written by a dead poet, its title is similar to Pirandello's 1934 play: *The Tale of the Changeling Prince* (*La favola del figlio cambiato*). Moreover, when one of the actors argues that there is 'nothing in it [the inner play] for either Herr Hitler or il Duce [Mussolini] to object to' (Pirandello 1993, 90), *The Mountain Giants* refers to factual incidents regarding the banning of *The Tale of the Changeling Prince* by the fascist regimes in both Germany and Italy for racist reasons. Commenting on the premiere of *The Tale of the Changeling Prince* in Germany, John Rey claims:

Hitler himself attended the performance, but the play caused a scandal. [...] That a black-haired, dark-complexioned, monstrous idiot should be substituted for a handsome, blond Aryan was a stunning refutation of Nazi racist theories. [...] The play failed in Rome also, with Mussolini present, and it was attacked in the *Osservatore Romano*. (Rey, 417)

I highlight the dominance of the dictatorships of both Mussolini and Hitler in order to suggest that the rise of fascism established further limits against playwrights' freedom in general and the avant-garde in particular because of the latter's neglect of these regimes' attempts to exploit theatre in order to promote specific political thoughts. While the relationship between Pirandello and

Mussolini is interpreted in different ways by a large number of studies, it is irrelevant to my thesis whether Pirandello was obliged to support the fascist regime temporarily or if it was the playwright's choice. What I limit my focus to is what most scholars declare about Pirandello's eagerness to get Mussolini's financial support for establishing state theatre. Put differently, I suggest that both negative references to fascism and the failure of private sponsorship in Pirandello's play function as a critical response to the difficulties of producing avant-garde performances rather than a representation of Pirandello's personal struggle.<sup>128</sup>

Dramatic characters of *The Mountain Giants* do not call for governmental patronage for theatre, which Jouvet in *Paris Impromptu* literally asks for. Nevertheless, by portraying the Count, as an inexperienced private patron, Pirandello's play seems to highlight the difficulties that faced experimental performances in Italy, especially with the increasing popularity of films. Although the Count in *The Mountain Giants* does not seek profits, he needs the audience's money in order to guarantee the continuity of the troupe's project. In this respect, spectators can be considered as the *actual* patron of commercial theatre. Such an assumption is adopted by Suzanne Westfall as she declares:

By Shakespeare's time, theatre was rapidly becoming commodified, and patronage began to shift more solidly from the upper strata of society to include the general public, although the public had, to a certain extent, been patrons since the first touring actor was received in an innyard. [...] By the end of the sixteenth century, [...] companies such as Shakespeare's clearly had two patrons – the King *and* the paying public. (Westfall, 45)

What distinguishes the early decades of the twentieth century from Shakespeare's time is the gap between popular and experimental theatre. Put differently, while the mainstream comedy and realist melodrama—in both plays and films—had the capitalists and 'the paying public' as patrons, the avant-garde theatre seemed in need of the support of the modern state, more significantly, for challenging popular theatre whether by criticising its traditional forms or by the critique of its spectators. Thus, discussions of both financial and

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<sup>128</sup> For information about Pirandello's attempts to convince the Italian dictator of playing the role of the patron of an Italian state theatre, see Frassica 53 – 73, and Caesar 187.

artistic matters within most critical metadramas are usually woven in with comments on the audience.

#### **d. Commenting on the audience: aspects of reception**

Reflections on the indirect role of the audience in sponsoring theatre production can be found in the following conversation within *Play Without a Title*, as a member of the bourgeois spectators assumes that paying the fees of attendance gives him the right to intervene in the Author's speech:

AUTHOR. Don't interrupt me.

FIRST MALE SPECTATOR. I've got a right to. I've paid for my seat. [...] The only law in the theatre is the spectator's judgement. (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 108-9)

Therefore, the Author decides to end the bourgeois 'control' by replacing the middle-class audience by workers. Until this moment, the Author was a representative of the absent Poet, who is the playwright of the unperformed inner play. By taking the decision of allowing the workers in, the Author practices a managerial authority. Relying on a more practical cause than his employer, or manager, the Prompter refuses workers as an alternative to the middle-class spectators for financial reasons:

PROMPTER. [...] What's to become of finance for the theatre?

AUTHOR (*furious*). What do you mean by finance?

PROMPTER. It's a mystery I believe in and every sensible person respects.

AUTHOR. To hell with finance! (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 117)

For the Prompter, who seemingly mocks the Author for his idealistic thought, theatre has to fulfil the bourgeois audience's demands for the sake of commercial goals. Therefore, the Prompter dares to say that neglecting the financial factor is irrational.

The Prompter's opinion seemingly conforms to the fact that, since the early decades of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of the audience of commercial theatre in different European countries belong to both higher and lower middle classes. In the 1960s, several decades after Lorca's play, Jean-

Paul Sartre refers to the financial dominance of the middle-class, as a payer of tickets, over theatre. Sartre claims: 'The bourgeoisie has been in control of the theatre for about 150 years now. [...] The bourgeoisie controls the theatre by the price of tickets which rose steadily in order to make the theatre a profit-making enterprise' (Sartre, 131). Thus, the Author's decision of dismissing bourgeois spectators seems too daring to be taken by a manager, even of a non-commercial theatre. In other words, the Author challenges what seems to be the most convincing indicator of administrative success: to gain income by attracting bourgeois spectators.

In order to underscore the standpoint of the Author in *Play Without a Title*, I use Ionesco's dispute with the manager, who claimed that 'he represented the public' (Ionesco *Tulana Drama Review*, 52). As a manager, the Author in Lorca's play takes the side of the absent Poet, against the dominance of the middle-class entertaining theatre. Put differently, if Ionesco declares that playwrights and directors of experimental plays 'had to wage war against the public and upon [...] the manager' (Ionesco *Tulana Drama Review*, 52) who supports the audience's preferences, *Play Without a Title* portrays a more positive, not to say utopian, case, wherein the manager/the Author relies on his belief in the social role of theatre.

Warning the Author of the financial harm of replacing the bourgeoisie by the workers, the Actress takes a different approach from the Prompter. Based on an unjustified supercilious assumption, she condemns the working class whose members, according to her, are not refined enough to attend theatre. The Actress claims:

ACTRESS. No, they shan't come in here. They'll break the royal dishes, the imitation books, the moon of fragile glass. They'll spill the wonderful potions preserved across the centuries, and they'll destroy the rain machine.

AUTHOR. Let them wreck it all! (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 117)

Some of these items mentioned by the Actress belong to the building decoration, while others are part of the scenery on stage. Therefore, they can be seen as a symbol of dramatic illusionism in general or a sign of melodrama's spectacles, which was the dominant form of theatre in 1930s Spain. In either case, the most striking feature of the Author's reply is that, instead of opposing



the Actress' allegation about the working class' uncivilised behaviour, he expresses his carelessness about the destruction of all things. Put differently, whether the Author agrees with the Actress' negative opinion on the working class, he is ready to sacrifice the luxurious, but shallow appearance for the sake of achieving his goal of theatre.

It is important to realise that the Author's initial intention was to convince, or even to force, the middle-class audience to change their preferences of entertaining theatre. As the Author's attempt fails, the play suggests that both the bourgeoisie's adherence to realistic representation and their bad behaviour are indivisible. For instance, the First Male Spectator's interruption of the Author is caused by their two discrepant visions of theatre:

AUTHOR. But how can one bring the smell of the sea to the auditorium or flood the stalls with stars?  
 FIRST MALE SPECTATOR (*from the stalls*). By taking the roof off. (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 108)

By 'bring[ing] the smell of the sea to the auditorium or flood[ing] the stalls with stars', the Author calls for more poetic theatre than popular theatres. The First Male Spectator's failure to realise the figurative meaning of the Author's speech may hint at the former's familiarity with the life-like, plain language of more realistic forms of entertaining theatre, on which the Author repeatedly gives negative comments throughout the play.

Similarly, during the interlude of the inner play of *The Public*, which is a parody of *Romeo and Juliet*, three members of the audience visit the Director's room in order to ask him about what they have just seen:

FIRST MAN. [...] Do you believe they were really in love?  
 DIRECTOR. Good heavens! I don't get inside ...  
 FIRST MAN. Enough! That's enough! You've incriminated yourself. [...]  
 SECOND MAN. [...] What went on, Mister Director ... when there was nothing going on? (Lorca *The Public*, 63)

The most striking aspect of the spectators' questions is that they reflect type of reception that completely depends on the play leaving no narrative gaps to be filled by the spectator. Put differently, the Director's non-melodramatic and non-

realistic version of Shakespeare's play does not satisfy spectators' need for over-detailed depiction of both characters' feelings and actions.<sup>129</sup>

However, although *The Public* criticises the imaginary spectators' taste in theatre, the play does not attack the bourgeoisie as a social class, especially when compared to *Play Without a Title*. The negative image of the middle-class audience in the latter extends beyond the First Male Spectator's repeated interventions in the performance. When the imaginary realm of the play links or rather compares, the workers' insurgence outside the theatre and the bourgeois audience's search for entertainment, the Second Male Spectator and his wife express their worries about their children, who are left alone at their house. Although the Stagehand has just volunteered to bring the children, despite the danger of constant bombing in the city, the Second Male Spectator reveals his intention to cause trouble for the working man:

SECOND MALE SPECTATOR. Who is this man?

WOODCUTTER. A stagehand!

SECOND MALE SPECTATOR. What's his name?

WOODCUTTER. His companions call him Mad Bakunin.<sup>130</sup>

SECOND FEMALE SPECTATOR. We've got to help him. I'd give him everything I own. Why do you ask his name?

SECOND MALE SPECTATOR. In order to ... (*Aside.*) to denounce him later. (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 121)

Whether the Spectators' evil intention is spurred by his wife's pledge to reward the Stagehand or incited by the latter's name, the negative image of the bourgeoisie extends beyond their bad behaviour as spectators to include immorality. In this respect, when *Play Without a Title* criticises the imaginary bourgeois spectators for their preferences and arrogance, the members of the real audience are more likely to be encouraged, not to say forced, to relate themselves to the discussion.

Apart from spectators' interventions in the Author's speech, what is supposed to be a prologue ends up occupying the bulk of Lorca's play. In this respect, I argue that *Play Without a Title* seems to develop a feature of some of

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<sup>129</sup> For more information about the episodic structure of both the narrative, or rather the non-narrative, plots and characters as an aspect of the avant-garde plays and films, see Warden 37, and Verrone 96, respectively.

<sup>130</sup> Most probably, the nickname of the Stagehand refers to the Russian anarchist Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, 1814-1876, who had an influential role as anti-bourgeoisie activist in several European countries during the last third of the nineteenth century. For information about Bakunin, see Leier.

his previous plays, wherein a dramatic character of a playwright directly speaks to the real audience in a short prologue. For instance, in the prologue to *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal*, the poet instructs the real audience as he says: ‘Men and women, listen. Child, shut up, will you! I want there to be perfect silence... [...] The older girls will need to close their fans, the younger ones will need their little handkerchiefs of lace to listen to and observe’ (Lorca *The Puppet Play*, 67). This announcement can be seen as the ancestor of the pre-show plea for turning off mobile phones in the twenty-first century. However, I argue that the Poet’s aggressive tone suggests that he seeks to criticise, or at least to underline, the bad behaviour of bourgeois spectators in general.<sup>131</sup>

The following speech from the Dramatist’s prologue to *The Shoemaker’s Wonderful Wife: A Violent Farce in Two Acts* (1931) seems to be less blunt than the Poet’s. The Dramatist declares:

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen ... (*pause.*) Or rather, ladies and gentlemen, which is not to say the writer doesn’t think you are distinguished. [...] But the word contains the tiniest hint of fear, a kind of plea for the audience to be kind to the actors’ performance and the writer’s brilliance. (Lorca *The Shoemaker’s*, 3)

By blaming, or rather mocking, playwrights’ prologues within which they implore the middle-class audience in order to gain its support, the Dramatist indirectly challenges what is supposed to be the audience’s authority. This authority seems to suppose that spectators’ opinion is the ‘only law in the theatre’, if I use the words of the First Male Spectator in *Play Without a Title*. However, the message of the Dramatist’s lines is irrelevant to the imaginary realm of the plot. Put differently, the Dramatist seems to address the real audience as representative of all bourgeois theatergoers who are usually blandished by playwrights’ prologues. Neither *The Shoemaker’s Wonderful Wife* nor *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal* is a critical metadrama. What I claim here is that the prologues to both plays are similar to the Director’s prologue in Guillaume Apollinaire’s *The Breasts of Tiresias*. They are examples of avant-garde playwrights’ imposition of their theoretical critical thoughts into the threshold of

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<sup>131</sup> In addition to hinting at the bourgeoisie by mentioning girls’ fans and lace handkerchiefs, it seems that the Poet focuses his blame on female spectators for making noise, especially by considering that observing children—if they are allowed to attend theatre—used to be a maternal responsibility.

their prologues; a transitional phase from dedicated writing of criticism to the inclusion of discussions on theatrical criticism within the speeches of dramatic characters of critical metadramas.<sup>132</sup>

In addition to its inclusion of dramatic characters of bourgeois spectators, there is a crucial aspect that distinguishes *Play Without a Title*, and even *The Public*, from *The Shoemaker's Wonderful Wife* or *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal*. The critique of the audience within critical metadrama usually integrates dramatic characters' statements not only with other characters' opinions in a discussion, but also with the imaginary plot of the play. Whether dramatic characters within these plays *temporally* turn into an audience of an inner play, or they *permanently* represent spectators through the entire play, the critique of spectators within critical metadrama usually revolves around two main points, which usually intersect: the audience's preferences and its behaviour.<sup>133</sup>

Both matters are usually linked to the obstacles against the avant-garde theatre and the audience's social class. For example, while Choubert prepares to perform the inner play of *Victims of Duty*, Madeleine assumes the role of a spectator by asking the Detective:

Shall we find our seats and sit down? [...] Are they good seats? Are they the best? Can we see everything? And hear everything? Have you any opera-glasses? [...] I'm glad you booked the tickets. [...] Must I remove my hat? Oh no, I don't think so, do you? It's not in anyone's way. I'm not so tall as all that. (Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 290 – 1)

In addition to underscoring the transformation of both Madeleine and the Detective into spectators of Choubert's performance, Madeleine's over-interest in the location of her seat, the need for 'opera-glasses', and her obsession with her hat seems to be a parody of a typical ostentatious middle-class spectator. Similar noisy behaviour can be found in *Tonight We Improvise*, when the

<sup>132</sup> By describing these examples as a phase transition, I do not suggest any historical evolution because examples of critical metadrama—as the first chapter explores—can be traced back to *Aristophanes*. In addition, playwrights' imposition of comments on both their works in general and on matters of criticism within prologues to their plays can be found, for instance, in a large number of the eighteenth century English plays. For detailed information, see Kinservik 157 – 8, and Smith 1979, 15. The Director's prologue, which Apollinaire added in 1917, to *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1903) calls for Surrealist Drama. For more information about Apollinaire's play and its prologue, see Gassner 78 and Pronko 7 – 9.

<sup>133</sup> I use the word temporally to insist on the transmission of dramatic characters into spectators of the inner play, regardless of the time the outer and the inner plays take.

characters of the inner play, Mommina, her middle-class family, and the latter's officer friends, go to watch an opera.

Not only do Mommina and her company arrive near the finale of the first act, they make a noisy entrance to the auditorium. Moreover, both their loud complaints of the hot weather and arguments for seats irritate other members of the audience. Consequently, the latter express their annoyance loudly: 'Silence! Is this any way to enter a theatre? [...] Sssshhhhh—quiet. Quiet [...] It's simply indecent. [...] Isn't there anyone here to make them be still? [...] Shut up, you. It's simply shocking. Throw them out!' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 35 – 137). In contrast to these angry reactions, the Detective seems more tolerant of Madeleine, who goes further in her annoying behaviour. During Choubert's nonrealistic one-man show, his wife keeps asking loud questions about what the character played by her husband in the inner play says or does. Madeleine's interruption reaches its peak with her noisy and pedantic comments and orders to Choubert:

MADELEINE: [*Still louder to Choubert*] Louder! [...] [*to Detective*] He's not normal. He must be ill. He ought to keep his feet on the ground.

DETECTIVE: [*to Madeleine*] He can't, he's underground.  
(Ionesco *Victims of Duty*, 291)

As *Victims of Duty* mentions several times, Madeleine, who is fond of films, supports logic-based and Aristotelian theatre. Therefore, I claim that her comment that Choubert, or the character he performs, 'ought to keep his feet on the ground', whether in a literal or idiomatic sense, suggests Madeleine's reluctance, and perhaps inability, to comprehend non-realistic performances. Thus, if *Paris Impromptu* defends the audience in general, *Victims of Duty* is more similar to *Tonight We Improvise*, *The Public* and *Play Without a Title*, with consideration of the latter's aggressive tone, in terms of focusing the critique of spectators on the bourgeoisie.

In *The Mountain Giants* Pirandello takes a further step by blaming both social classes for the difficulties that challenge the avant-garde theatre. The play draws one of the most negative images of spectators within all the examples of critical metadrama. Firstly, the members of the troupe express contradictory opinions on the social classes. Cromo prefers the middle-class spectators claiming: 'The Giganti family may not fully understand our work but

they will listen and they will receive us with courtesy because they have pretensions' (Pirandello 1993, 87). In contrast, Lumachi believes in the lower-class spectators, who are: 'Not very intellectual [...] but good honest hard working flock who like a bit of fun. [...] I would say ... that these people are the salt of the earth' (Pirandello 1993, 86 – 7). Whether these opinions are based on factual experiences or ideological bias, the conclusion of both arguments supposes that neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class is intellectual enough to watch a play written in poetry.

Eventually, although the middle-class business people pay for the tickets, they do not attend the performance. Instead, they send the workers to watch it. The lower-class audience shows every sign of vulgarity and savagery towards the performers. Attacked onstage, Isle is humiliated, hit and abused before she dies. The sordidness of this brutal behaviour is magnified by both the actress' noble purpose of achieving the dead poet's dream of performing his play and the artistic dedication, which is shown by the entire company before the performance.

Commenting on spectators' reception within European critical metadramas, though, is not limited to criticism. The common feature of most critical metadramas is the insistence on the essential role of the audience in theatre practice. For instance, recalling one of his previous plays, which did not attract audience, Jouvét declares:

By a mysterious and horrible alchemy this place which is transfigured by success becomes, more real than reality in the cold light of failure. Stucco is nothing but stucco; canvas merely canvas. The people that play the parts are merely people playing parts. The whole place is drained of its life blood, and the red curtain has become white. (Giraudoux 1959, 122)

In addition to describing the miserable state of the theatre without spectators, the most significant point of Jouvét's comment is that he considers the absence of the audience as failure, an exclusive responsibility of the practitioners, including himself as the director.

In *Fanny's First Play*, Shaw refers to the huge effect of spectators' feedback on actors. Although the audience of the inner play consists of seven people only, the actors are disappointed because they do not have the chance

of getting appreciation after the performance. Savoyard, who assumes the role of the manager, asks the Count: 'Would you mind coming to say a word of congratulation to the company? Theyre [sic] rather upset at having had no curtain call (Shaw 1987, 182). Recognising the mighty effect of the audience's presence on performers can be found in *Requiem*. As the sponsor of the inner play, His Highness decides to be the only spectator, not only because he does not seek any profit, but also due to what he calls the 'noise' of the 'crowd'. The Manager, who cannot contradict His Highness' orders, is aware of the importance of the audience for actors. Therefore, the Manager commissions the Artist to manufacture puppets to replace the audience. The stage directions describe the image of these false spectators of the inner play:

*There are no spectators in the small theatre. Puppets take their place, flat wooden figures, cut out of thin planks by a carpenter and painted by a painter. In two flat rows, sitting on imaginary chairs, they surround the small stage in a semicircle, they watch relentlessly with painted eyes, they do not move, they do not breathe, they keep totally quiet.*  
(Andreyev, 113)

I argue that the real audience of *Requiem* is less likely to take the allegation about the bad behaviour of theatre-goers seriously, because it comes from a character who is represented as a villain. The same can be supposed about the real spectators of *The Protagonist*, who will listen to Kaiser's character accusing the audience of having 'stupid lust for entertainment'. Put differently, in both plays, the real spectators are condemned by the villainous character.

In addition to commenting on spectators on the grounds of both artistic and financial aspects of theatre production and its function, critical metadramas usually link the audience's response to theatre and the critics' opinions on theatre in general and on specific performances, styles, or playwrights in particular. Such a role of critics is shaped by a combination between two functions of criticism: interpretation and evaluation. Therefore, critics, including academics and reviewers, are usually mentioned, mostly in a negative way, by dramatic characters of critical metadrama.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Scholars usually distinguish reviewers from academics according to several criteria, including their qualification, depth of analysis, and style of writing. For examples, see Barton 2012, 414 – 17, Wagner 2010, Herren, and Shellard. However, in my thesis, I follow the

### e. The critique of criticism

Commenting on critics' influence on the audience is part of critical metadramas' questioning, or even denying, the exaggeratedly increasing authority of critics in general. The vital factor in boosting the significance of theatre reviews is the unprecedented boom in publishing newspapers and magazines during the early decades of the twentieth century. Michael Eckardt argues: 'Compared to today, where print and electronic media compete and the critic's influence is weakened, newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s played a far greater role in guiding and educating the audience' (Eckardt, 23). Apart from Eckardt's controversial claim regarding the decrease of critics' impact on contemporary spectators, he highlights the major role of critical reviews in shaping the reader's opinion on theatre. Referring to the insistence of both Clement Scott and William Archer on praising or attacking specific playwrights or styles within their articles, Dominic Shellard argues that 'British newspapers at the beginning of the [twentieth] century gave their critics enough space to launch personal crusades' (Shellard, 183). As the word 'crusade' suggests, critics' insistence on condemning or praising specific playwrights or performances probably encourages readers to adopt, or even to identify with, the critic's standpoint.

Blaming spectators for allowing critics to mediate between any performance and its audience can be found in *Each in His Own Way* when during the interlude of the inner play, a group of spectators rushes towards the critics and begs them to explain what they have just watched together. Spectators plead: 'But you critics—you understand the dra-ama! [sic] Pray enlighten us. What's it all mean?' (Pirandello *Each in His Own Way*, 317). A consideration of simplicity of the inner play's plot suggests that the critical metadrama mocks the audience's eagerness to know critics' opinions. The effect of critics' opinions on spectators is claimed as a fact by Robineau in *Paris Impromptu* as he declares: 'like most people my opinions on the theatre are largely influenced by the dramatic critics' (Giraudoux 1959, 114). Even Castel, the actress in Jouvet's troupe, believes that the audience needs the help of critics. She argues: 'If the public doesn't understand, let the critics explain! That might be a useful function for them to perform' (Giraudoux 1959, 119). The most

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comments on the practice of criticism within critical metadramas, which usually ignore such a distinction.



striking feature of Castel's claim is the suggestion that one reason for spectators' increasing dependence on critics might be rely on the fact that most experimental plays intrinsically challenge the audience's habits of receiving popular theatre. In other words, the revolutionary aesthetic aspects of the avant-garde movements during the early decades of the twentieth century can explain the audience's search for critics' explanations in order to understand theatre products of these movements. Such claims seem to irritate Jouvet, who contradicts his actress by arguing:

JOUVET: To understand? The word doesn't exist in the theatre [...]

RENOIR: With this word "understand," M. Robineau, a few half-literate men have spoiled the public. [...] Those who want to understand in the theatre, don't understand the theatre. [...]

BOGAR: Jouvet means that the theatre is not an algebraic formula but a show; not arithmetic but magic. It should appeal to the imagination and the senses, not the intellect. (Giraudoux 1959, 119)

The opinions of Jouvet and the two actors can be conceived on the grounds of their belief that a play must be appreciated for its aesthetic features only. In addition, the three practitioners seem to suggest that the myth that theatre needs to be explained is created by critics in order to affirm their role as interpreters. Moreover, as 'half-literate', these critics are not qualified to undertake the role they are eager to play.

The harmful circumstances of critics' increasing influence on the reception of theatre can be found in *The Mountain Giants*. Although the troupe's play *The Tale of the Changeling Prince* struggles from the bad taste of both bourgeois and working-class spectators, the following conversation from Pirandello's play hints at the responsibility of critics for failure of the inner play. The members of the troupe recall:

CUCCORULLO: It was banned in Berlin.

CROMO: After the chancellor had seen it and enjoyed it. He was persuaded afterwards by malicious untruth, I suppose - critics.

CUCCORULLO: It was hissed in Rome.

CROMO: The same applies. (Pirandello 1993, 89-90)

Similar to critics' disparaging evaluation of *The Tale of the Changeling Prince*, it is hard to decide whether the audience's reluctance to watch the play was

based on racist or artistic elements. In either case, *The Mountain Giants* suggests that the negative criticism of the inner play had catastrophic circumstances. In addition to convincing the fascist regime in Germany to ban the play, big theatres in Italy refused to host the performance. With the troupe's insistence on touring the performance, the Count became less able to maintain the financial requirements of the production, even with the reduction in the number of performers and the scenery, which in turn affected the quality of the performance.

Such influence of critics' opinions on the fate of performances may explain why the Father is worried about the critics' response to the performance of the six characters' story, while it is still at the early stage of preparation. Therefore, the Manager expresses his anger at the overestimating of critics' opinions. The Manager declares: 'Heavens! The man's starting to think about the critics now! Let them say what they like. It's up to us to put on the play if we can' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 245). Similarly, the subservient behaviour of Ionesco—the character of a playwright—towards the three critics in *Improvisation* can be seen as a result of the imaginary playwright's belief in the significance of their evaluation of his work.

In addition to attacking critics' authoritative effect on both spectators and practitioners, examples of critical metadrama studied in this thesis criticise both academics and reviewers for five alleged deficiencies, which are arrogance, ignorance, envy, peremptoriness, and partiality. It seems to be a very cruel judgment, especially considering that these defects are claimed to taint both critics' practice and personality. However, this negative image of critics within critical metadramas reflects on a large number of negative statements given by authors of all times. To give examples, in the nineteenth century, the British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge expressed his doubts about critics' intentions as he claimed: 'The crying sin of modern criticism is that it is overloaded with personality. If an author commits an error, there is no wish to set him right for the sake of truth, but for the sake of triumph—that the reviewer may show how much wiser, or how much abler he is than the writer' (Coleridge, 4). Bernard Shaw goes further by debasing dramatic critics' competence by claiming that they lack qualities, which enable them to do their job. Shaw argues: 'I think very few people know how troublesome dramatic critics are. It is not that they are

morally worse than other people; but they know nothing. Or, rather, it is a good deal worse than that: they know everything wrong' (Shaw 1992, 175).<sup>135</sup>

This kind of generalisation that tones Shaw's ferocious attack on critics is turned to a more deliberate examination of them in his play *Fanny's First Play*. Shaw's play depicts four types of critics. As Trotter describes himself, he seems an ostentatious academic who strictly believes in Aristotle to the extent that he considers all other forms that deviate from Aristotelian's notion of tragedy are not plays at all. Trotter argues that 'the definition of a play has been settled exactly and scientifically for two thousand two hundred and sixty years' (Shaw 1987, 123). In contrast, Gilbert Gunn exaggeratedly praises modern trends of theatre. However, he usually fails to realise aspects of this modernity. Therefore, he is classified by Savoyard, the manager of Fanny's play, as one of those critics who 'go for the newest things and swear theyre [sic] old-fashioned' (Shaw 1987, 116). The third critic, Vaughan lacks a sense of humour, which affects his critical judgments. According to the manager: 'A comedy scene makes him sore all over: he goes away black and blue, and pitches into the play for all he's worth' (Shaw 1987, 117). Finally, Flawner Bannal, Savoyard explains, 'represents the British playgoer. When he likes a thing, you may take your oath there are a hundred thousand people in London thatll [sic] like it if they can only be got to know about it. [...] Bannal may not ride the literary high horse like Trotter and the rest; but I'd take his opinion before any other in London. He's the man in the street; and thats [sic] what you want (Shaw 1987, 118). The most important point of the critics' discrepant traits is that they affect their opinions on the inner play they watch.

This rigid adherence to specific types of theatre is portrayed in a more mocking way in *Improvisation*, where critics establish their preference of Brechtian techniques over novelty. Dealing with theatre as a field of fashion, Bart I claims: 'They've asked me to take the job on and produce it [a play] according to the latest dramatic theories' (Ionesco, *Improvisation*, 111). According to such a bizarre criterion for judgment, the classics are no longer valuable:

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<sup>135</sup> For examples of statements of practitioners of all sorts of arts and literature, which mock critics, see Brandreth 73 – 6.

IONESCO: I was made to read the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides...  
 BART I: Outdated, outdated, all that! It's dead... of no value at all. (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 120)

Similarly, Shakespeare, who is claimed by Bart III a Russian or a Polish playwright, is worthless for two reasons: Shakespeare is dead and a foreigner. In contrast, although Brecht is not a French playwright, they adore him because his theatre is the current mode (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 120).

Taking a further step beyond Shaw's play, the critics in *Improvisation* dogmatically persist in enforcing their rules, which, they claim, any writer has to obey. Bart II explains: 'Authors aren't here to think, they're here to write what they're told' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 118). Therefore, Peter Ronge sums up the subject matter of Ionesco's play as: 'Theatre critics attempt to influence an author to abandon his own concepts of the theatre and to accept others, perverted ones' (Ronge, 120). Apart from Ronge's hints at the three critics' exaggeratedly weird vision of theatre, the most important point of his statement is highlighting critics' eagerness to force the imaginary Ionesco to believe in their opinions.

Because two of the critics in *Improvisation* allegedly represent Barthes and Dort, who, to different extents, are academic specialists in Brecht, Donald Watson claims that 'it is understandable that academic critics, who *choose* [sic] to devote time and thought to the authors they study, tend to take up writers with whom they feel in sympathy' (Watson, 116). Although it is possible to accept that some academics may deviate from the supposed objectivity of academic research towards a kind of subjective loyalty to their subject of study, I argue that *Improvisation* does not differentiate between the two academics and Gauthier, the reviewer who is claimed to be the real critic represented in Ionesco's play. The British playwright David Hare attacks what can be called the inaccessible discourse of academics. Hare declares: 'Academicism in the theatre, of which we have an increasing amount, seems to me a far greater threat to its survival than commercialism. (Commercialism at least is in some sort of crude contact with its audience; academicism speaks only to itself)' (Hare, 108). Despite Hare's polemic, not to say, simplistic judgment about academic jargon, the three critics in *Improvisation* use the same type of complicated and pedantic language. Moreover, at the finale of Ionesco's play,

Bart I declares: 'To be or not to be a doctor, you know, it's the same thing' (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 151). Thus it seems that the play suggests that the negative image of the critics within the play can represent both academics and reviewers. *Improvisation* is dedicated to condemn all bad aspects of critics, including the insistence that their opinions must be the law, which practitioners must not breach.

Critics' rigidly loyal defence of a specific playwright or style is highlighted in *Paris Impromptu*, when Jouvét blames two of his contemporaneous critics for their over-venerating of the works of French classic playwrights. He declares: 'Electra is ready to give herself to André Bellessort and Georges Le Cardonnel, but they will not permit it. They are jealous for Racine, critical for Molière's sake, scornful because of Alfred de Musset' (Giraudoux 1959, 116). Jouvét's claim suggests that while these critics praise the re-writing of Greek classics by the seventeenth-century French playwrights, the same critics are against any contemporary play that dares to deal with such themes. In this respect, it seems that critics' adherence to respect Brecht in *Improvisation* or to protect Racine and Molière in Giraudoux's play is similar to the four critics' single-mindedness in *Fanny's First Play*. They are more attached to their opinions than their belief in what they defend. Put differently, these critical metadramas suggest that the essential reason for critics' insistence on turning their thoughts into rules is the remarkable overrating of their knowledge.

In *Genius and Culture*, Boccioni portrays the extreme vanity of the Critic, who proudly declares:

Let's realise the differences. I am not a man, I am a critic. I am a man of culture. The artist is a man, a slave, a baby, therefore, he makes mistakes. I don't see myself as being like him. In him nature is chaos. The critic and history are between nature and the artist. (Boccioni, 226)

Predictably, critics' feeling of superiority over practitioners is more likely to increase when they compare themselves to the audience. Although spectators' respect of critics' opinions can be claimed as one of the most important justifications for the latter's practice, critics within critical metadramas expand their arrogance to accuse both practitioners and spectators of ignorance. The First Critic in *The Beggar* condemns both practitioners and the audience of a

successful play, which he claims ‘an unqualified success. But all mediocrity is unequivocally successful’ (Sorge, 29). It is important to realise that although many characters of practitioners within critical metadramas criticise the prosperity of popular theatre, they usually contextualise their comments in a kind of analysis to such a success. In contrast, the critic in Sorge’s play does not mention, or perhaps does not realise, the reasons for the play’s appeal to the audience except for hinting at the latter’s bad taste that prefers practitioners’ ‘mediocrity’.

Critics’ arrogance is underscored within the scornful image of the fictional spectators, who politely chase critics to overhear their opinion on the inner performance of *Each in His Own Way*. Describing their reaction to spectators’ interest, Pirandello’s stage directions state that ‘*the Critics either crawl into their shells or walk away*’ (Pirandello *Each in His Own Way*, 313). Even when one of the spectators manages to ask the critics a question, ‘*they maintain a stolid silence (they have to, you see, to live up to a reputation for “reserve” and “balance”). Gradually, however, they drift together to get a line on each other’s “dope”*’ (Pirandello *Each in His Own*, 313). This mixture of pretension and arrogance is worsened by critics’ dishonesty. As Pirandello describes: ‘*It is quite possible that here in the lobby some of the Critics will say very sharp things about the comedy and its author, though they will have only praise for both in the articles they write for their papers the next day*’ (Pirandello *Each in His Own Way*, 313). The most striking feature of such a claim is that it is included within the stage direction. In other words, while the real audience can hear these critics’ attack on the inner play, none of the real spectators will read what these imaginary characters might write about the play in their reviews.

Whether Pirandello addresses the readers of his play rather than the audience of its live performance, the playwright utilises stage directions of *Tonight We Improvise* in the same way in order to attack critics. The following passage describes the critics, who are supposed to be part of the imaginary audience. The text reads:

*One sees in their faces [...] a certain irritation, since they have neither read in the announcements nor otherwise been able to learn the name of the author who tonight has given the actors and their director whatever scenario they are using. Lacking*

*any clue to remind them of judgments they have already made. (Pirandello Tonight, 7)*

Not only is the real audience unable to know the reason for this ‘irritation’, but the members of the real spectators also cannot recognise these supposed critics, which the play itself does not distinguish from the other members of the imaginary audience.

The significance of this comment though is that accusing critics of being too lazy, or perhaps too scared, to give a judgment on a new play about which they know nothing, is similar to Bannal’s complaint in *Fanny’s First Play*. The critic declares: ‘You dont [sic] expect me to know what to say about a play when I dont [sic] know who the author is, do you? [...] If it’s by a good author, it’s a good play, naturally. That stands to reason’ (Shaw 1987, 177 – 8). In addition, this strange logic hints at critics’ non-objective measures, which might cast doubt on their judgments. When Marie, the servant in *Improvisation*, throws out the three critics, the imaginary Ionesco blames her because, as he claims: ‘They’ll tear me to pieces in their columns’ (Ionesco *Improvisation*, 147). Similarly, arrogance, ignorance, and dishonesty shape Jouvét’s humorous depiction of critics’ behaviour in theatre:

The evening is over. The play is a success; the audience, deeply moved, wanders slowly— dreaming of the experience it has just enjoyed. Then, suddenly, there is a jostling, a pushing, a mad dash for the exit. Fifty harassed writers, bored, gouty, without opinions, without taste, quarrelsome, vindictive— make way towards the doors. It is criticism making its exit. (Giraudoux 1959, 116)

Considering that Jouvét describes a well-received performance, whose audience is satisfied, suggests that critics are ‘vindictive’ because they are envious of the success of the play.

Accusing the resentful attitude of critics seems to be one of the most repeated allegations of practitioners, who use it to explain critics’ aggressive responses to successful playwrights or plays. For instance, commenting on critics’ attack on John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, Hare claims: ‘Since it was John’s great fortune to enjoy the most celebrated theatrical début of the twentieth century, so his misfortune has been consequently to attract some of its laziest and worse-aimed critical animus’ (Hare, 34). But what sort of rivalry

may involve both playwrights and critics, which sours the latter's envy? Coleridge claims: 'Reviewers are usually people who would have been poets, historians, biographers, &c, if they could: they have tried their talents at one or at the other, and have failed; therefore, they turn critics' (Coleridge, 4-5). Coleridge's explanation has been adopted by a large number of writers and artists who suppose that critics' hinting at their ability to practice theatre is mainly based on their belief in their superior knowledge, which exceeds what practitioners themselves know about their profession. The following dialogue between the Critic and the Woman in *Genius and Culture* highlights the irrelevance between theoretical background and practice:

THE CRITIC: (*Strutting.*) For centuries, the critic has told the artist how to make a work of art.... Since ethics and aesthetics are functions of the spirit ...

THE WOMAN: But you, you've never made any?

THE CRITIC: (*Nonplussed.*) Me? ... Not me!

THE WOMAN: (*Laughing with malice.*) Well, then, you know how to do it, but you don't do it. You are neutral. How boring you must be in bed! (Boccioni, 225)

Eventually, the Woman's metaphorical comparison between the Artist and the Critic, which is strengthened by her obvious inclination to the former, leads the latter to murder the Artist and then hypocritically declare: 'toward 1915, a marvellous artist blossomed' (Boccioni, 226). The most significant point of the Critic's statement, which seems to be a tribute to his victim, is that it includes what the Artist desperately needed: an encouraging recognition.

As the reading of these examples of critical metadramas suggests, comments on critics usually include references to factual incidents that reflect on playwrights' confrontations with reviewers and academics. However, playwrights' self-referential critiques of specific critics are mingled with what these critical metadramas suggest as problems of the practices of criticism; these have been repeatedly claimed by a large number of artists in general and theatre practitioners in particular even before the twentieth century. Furthermore, as a whole, comments on criticism within critical metadramas are usually woven with discussions on different theatrical matters. Put differently, despite playwright's subjective purpose, comments on criticism can be seen as part of the reformative purpose of critical metadrama. Even with the least



mentioned topics of discussion within critical metadramas the reformative function enables playwrights to address what seems to concern not only all playwrights but also other theatre practitioners. I choose two examples of these marginally mentioned topics to explore in the following discussion.

#### **f. Notorious images of (female) actors**

While critical metadramas such as *Paris impromptu* and *Tonight We Improvise* include occasional references to both male and female actors as lazy and narrow-minded seekers of attention, both plays clearly insist on the essential and irreplaceable role of acting in performance, which seems to reflect playwrights' appreciation of such a role.<sup>136</sup> However, the most significant point of commenting on acting within critical metadramas is the response to the social negative image of the practitioners of the acting profession in general and female actors in particular. In *Play Without a Title*, while the Author condemns the Actress' declaration of love as deceitful, he seems to accuse all actors for exploiting their professional ability to pretend in order to fool others in real life. It is hard to decide whether the Actress borrows speeches from her previous roles on stage to flirt with the Author because she does not trust her own words to express her true love, or, as the Author is convinced, she deceptively declares fake emotions. He mocks her: 'You lie. If the body you have were yours, I'd whip you to see if you spoke the truth' (Lorca *Play Without a Title*, 115). However, the exaggerated style of the Actress' acting justifies the Author's doubts.

In *Requiem*, the Manager, who is also an actor, wonders: 'who would ever believe an actor?' (Andreyev, 125). Although the Manager does not accept the bad reputation of actors, he also does not challenge it as if it was an undisputed social fact. Similarly, in *The Protagonist*, the Host, who is the owner of the inn where the members of the troupe will stay and perform, insists on getting the whole sum of the hall's rent in advance:

HOST. You'll understand my distrust of players. Your costumes aren't worth a farthing, you must pay for the hall straight away.

PROTAGONIST. What's your price?

HOST. Four shillings a day.

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<sup>136</sup> Praise of acting profession can be found in Giraudoux 2001, and Pirandello 1992.

PROTAGONIST *gives him money.* (Kaiser, 134)

Regardless of the Protagonist's opinion of his profession, he does not show any objection to the Host when the latter accuses all 'players' of being fraudsters. This bad image explains the Host's final line in Kaiser's play as he shouts: 'Damned scoundrels—to prison!' (Kaiser, 144). Although the Protagonist, as a killer, is the only person who is supposed to be blamed and imprisoned, the Host uses the plural word 'scoundrels', which reflects his condemnation of the entire group of actors.

In addition, because the action of Kaiser's play takes place in the Elizabethan era, the Host expresses his surprise at seeing the Sister, who he thinks a female actor. He asks:

HOST. Since when in England are women allowed to—  
 PROTAGONIST. Never and nowhere, thank God. It would mean the ruin of the art of acting and turn the theatre into a brothel. The church would find it a reason for depriving us of the last grain of respect our talent compels. And rightly so. [...] My sister is on the road because I am. (Kaiser, 134)

It is possible that the Protagonist exaggerates in predicting very negative consequences from using female actors in order to distinguish the Sister's image by contrast, or perhaps the Protagonist expresses his own beliefs, which fit his time. In either case, this dialogue reflects on a more general inferior image of all women in male-centric societies. Even after the female actors have become part of theatrical practice, seeing women as just sexual objects seems to continue. In Sorge's *The Beggar*, when the Sixth Listener asks the critics about the play they have just watched, he makes some sexual hints at the actress who played the leading role. The Sixth Listener wonders: 'Was Miss Gudrun well built? Did she have her decent climax, hah? Did she go down nicely at the end?!' (Sorge, 29). I argue that these sexual allusions, which rely on the intentional confusion between the female actor as a dramatic character and as a woman, extends beyond the disparagement of her career to indicate the inferior status of women in European society during the early decades of the twentieth century.

However, referring to the bad image of female actors within critical metadramas is not limited to male dramatic characters. Within the inner play of

*Each in His Own Way*, as a worried mother whose son starts to meet with the actress Delia Morello, Donna Livia describes the female actor: ‘She’s an actress, isn’t she? [...] Oh, they’re all beautiful—those actresses! I suppose Doro met her in some theatre. [...] But here two men have gone and killed themselves on her account!’ (Pirandello *Each in His Own Way*, 287-8). Seeing female actors as a mixture of beauty and evil seems to be discussed later within the inner play when the actress herself explains her retributive behaviour with those men who reduce her humanity to a sexual object. Delia Moreno declares:

I punish them in the things they really desire. Those desires disgust me, but first I do my best to fan them, make them worse in order to get my revenge...and that revenge I get by giving myself away, suddenly, capriciously, to the person whom they would have least expected to win me! (Pirandello *Each in His Own Way*, 304)

Thus, Delia Moreno admits her intentional encouragement of men’s sexual longing for her in order to punish them. However, and despite any ethical judgment of the actress’ deeds, she seems to be a victim of the bad image of female actors; who, in a male-dominated society cannot defend herself but by using her own social weakness: femininity.

The most striking feature of Delia Moreno’s confession is that it reveals her active, not to say aggressive, reaction to the social condemnation of female actors. In order to realise the boldness of Pirandello’s character I compare her speech with Clarice, the character of an actress in Gilbert’s *Comedy and Tragedy*. Expressing the agony of her social low status as a female performer during the Victorian era, Clarice describes:

I am an actress—by law proscribed, by the Church excommunicated! While I live women gather their skirts about them as I pass; when I die I am to be buried, as dogs are buried, in unholy ground. . . . In the mean time, I am the recognized prey of the spoiler—the traditional property of him who will best pay me: an actress, with a body, God help her! but [sic] without a soul: unrecognized by the State, abjured by the Church, and utterly despised of all! (qtd. in Newey, 94)

As Claire's servile tone suggests, she can do nothing to change the bad way in which people deal with female actors, which is supported, if not initiated, by both the law and the religious power.

In contrast to Claire, and more challenging to her society than Delia Moreno, Ilse in *The Mountain Giants* prefers to be called an actress rather than the Count's wife. She insists: 'Countess? I'm an actress. There are some need reminding that this is an honourable calling' (Pirandello 1993, 28). However, although Ilse is proud of being an actor, she is aware that society does not share her point of view. Therefore, Ilse considers her marriage to the Count as a degradation of his social status. She declares: 'It's what I am ... what we are ... it's my blood, I am born to it. (*To the Count*) You are not, but we've dragged you down with us, have we not?' (Pirandello 1993, 21). On one hand, Ilse's speech seems to hint at the inferior image of acting, and perhaps the theatre profession in general, not only female actors. On the other hand, she indirectly refers to the Count's loss of his money because of sponsoring the troupe, which he considers a sacrifice to their love. In this respect I argue that *The Mountain Giants* seems to echo the cursed fate of Delia Moreno's lovers in *Each in His Own Way*. I support my claim by taking into consideration that the poet who wrote the inner play to be performed by Ilse, similar to Delia Moreno's fiancé, killed himself because of his desperate love for the actress. What distinguishes Ilse from her counterpart in *Each in His Own Way* is that, firstly, Ilse regrets encouraging the poet's love, although she claims that she had good intentions. Ilse claims 'Did I say no he wouldn't finish it [his play] and that would be grave' (Pirandello 1993, 33). Secondly, to overcome her feeling of guilt, she convinces her husband to produce, and to keep sponsoring the performances of the dead poet's play, regardless of its continuous failure, which seems to be a transmission of the curse to another lover.

Thus, although these examples of the twentieth-century critical metadramas highlight the unfair social condemnation of actors in general and female performers in particular, characters of actors within these examples are not introduced in a melodramatic tone as pure innocent victims. They have their mistakes, or even sins, that make them responsible, at least partly, for their agony.

### **g. Conflicts between directors and playwrights**

Dissimilar to the long history of the playwright's profession, which nearly equals the history of theatre itself, the appearance of the director as a separate job with specific duties started in the last third of the nineteenth century with Georg II the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen.<sup>137</sup> Since then a dispute about the authority over the performance has caused a confrontation between a large number of playwrights and directors of their plays. Within most of these incidents, playwrights expressed their disappointment, and sometimes anger, because of the directors' imposition of their points of view, which dramatists considered irrelevant to, and disrespectful of, their dramatic texts. For instance, in 1889 Strindberg claims that the most harmful thing that can happen to a play is to be produced by an 'ignorant director' (Strindberg 2001, 17). One of the most obvious signs of the seriousness of this conflict is the playwrights' manifesto, which was released at the end of the Budapest Playwrights' Conference in December 1980, wherein dramatists from different nationalities declare that their plays are '*often misinterpreted, altered, even mutilated in pursuit of an external artistic vision, or ephemeral fads*' (qtd. in Trussler, 9).

With a large number of critics and academics investigating the relationship, and sometimes the discrepancy, between dramatic text and live performance, such a binary increasingly regulates the bulk of theatre criticism of the twentieth century. Some theorists support playwrights' claim that directors must base their interpretations of plays on aspects within dramatic texts, which they choose to direct in the first place. In contrast, other scholars defend directors' right to utilise dramatic text, similar to other visual elements of the live performance, in order to achieve their visions. In the 1960s, the long belief in writers' ultimate authority over their texts was shaken by Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and Barthes' claim of the 'death of the author'. Simultaneously, the notion of the *auteur*, which emerged in the mid 1950s to describe film directors who write the dialogues of their movies, was borrowed to name theatre directors, whose role include rewriting the texts they produced, especially

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<sup>137</sup> For elaborate investigations of the theatrical legacy of Georg II, see Barton 2012, 117–8, Osborne 1988, and Zelenak. For information about the influence of the theatre of Georg II on Antoine, Stanislavski, and Reinhardt, see Jannarone 136.

classics. Later the practice of the auteur extended to include adapting narrative works, merging a group of texts, and conducting collective writing.<sup>138</sup>

Although the growing presence of auteur directors since the 1960s is out of the time span in which my thesis studies critical metadramas, I refer to such a phenomenon in order to insist that its roots can be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century. With calls for elevating visual elements of performance rather than its verbal language, suggested by theorists and practitioners such as Craig, Artaud, and Reinhardt, playwrights found themselves in a new era: the theatre of directors. That explains why Avra Sidiropoulou affirms Artaud's 'astounding impact on later generations of auteurs' (Sidiropoulou, 33), and Kimberly Jannarone argues that Artaud 'paved the way for what we would now call "auteur" directing' (Jannarone, 228). Similarly, commenting on Craig and Reinhardt, David Kuhns argues that 'the two directors [...] were master-controllers of their productions; both were auteurs' (Kuhns, 66). The most striking feature of Kuhns's comment is his focusing on both directors' authority over the performance as the main aspect of being 'auteurs'.

Similar to McConachie's claim about the effect of enhancing machinery in the second half of the nineteenth century on the improvement of the scenery of melodramas, Jennifer Lorch argues that the noticeable development in manufacturing lighting equipment by German industry during the 1920s 'brought with it new roles in the theatre: the age of the director, European-wide, had its centre in Berlin' (Lorch 1996, 268). Indeed, in both cases, technology was significant in helping directors to materialise their aspirations on stage. Nevertheless, the need to create spectacles on the stage of melodrama and modern theatre was initiated by theatre-related, commercial and artistic reasons, respectively. These theatrical motives, though, were not limited to directors. Since the late decades of the nineteenth century, stage directions have increasingly indicated playwrights' interest in, sometimes eagerness to underscore the importance of visual elements.

However, it seems that the early twentieth-century directors were not impressed by the expanse of stage directions, especially with detailed

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<sup>138</sup> For contradictory opinions on the distinction between the dramatic text and performance regarding the conflict between playwrights and directors, see Pavis 2008, 117, Page 1, McCullough 1998, 2, Berger 39, and Friel 55. For information about the origin of the notion of the auteur in the cinema, see Staples. For explanations of the auteur director in theatre, see Sidiropoulou 1–32, Zelenak 108, and Brustein 2. In Doctorow 8, the notion of the auteur in cinema is linked with the actor-manager in the sixteenth century.

description that extends beyond scenery and lighting to include characters' psychological traits and acting instructions. Commenting on such a stretch of stage directions, Puchner claims that

[M]odern drama more generally realised itself as reading drama, primarily through the integration of stage directions into the primary dramatic text. This change in the function of stage directions is one consequence of the history of printed drama, and one that only materialized fully in the later nineteenth century. (Puchner 2002, 21)

Puchner's claim can explain Pirandello's inclusion of more readable than staged comments on critics within the stage directions of *Each in His Own Way* and *Tonight We Improvise*. However, I do not claim that the marginal occurrence of such *literary* comments within Pirandello suggests that they are written to be read rather than performed. On one hand, I understand Puchner's argument on the grounds that the boom in 'printed drama' has enabled dramatic texts to be accessible to a larger number of readers, without losing the rationale of being put on stage.<sup>139</sup>

On the other hand, similar to the improvement of using machines and developing the systems of lighting, 'print drama' was a method of achieving playwrights' essential purpose of extending their stage directions, which affirmed their authority over the dramatic text. Moreover, these stage directions highlight the performative qualities of the written text against the increasing dominance of directors. Therefore, I completely agree with Puchner's more recent claim:

It was this conception of the dramatic text as a set of instructions that prompted the widespread campaign against drama at the turn of the century by Craig, Artaud, and others. [...] Seeking to carve out a space of creative control, they dismissed the dramatic text and the playwright and instead devised forms of spectacle unhinged from drama, which meant that directors and actors, devising their productions collectively, took over the function of the playwright. (Puchner 2011, 294)

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<sup>139</sup> A similar thing can be said about the inclusion of comments, which describe what the real audience cannot watch or hear, within the stage directions of many twentieth-century dramatic texts. For example, within the introductory stage directions of *The Bald Soprano*, Ionesco mockingly and excessively repeats the adjective 'English' to describe even the strikes of the wall clock.

Thus, perhaps for the first time in theatre history, playwrights of the early decades of the twentieth century had to engage in debate about the limits in which directors could alter their dramatic texts, which themselves were meant to be a revolutionary reaction against the nineteenth century popular theatre. Lorch claims:

[T]he function of the stage director was a major talking point in Berlin's cultural circles in the twenties. [...] The argument concerning theatre direction and the role of the director was focused on the concepts of 'production' and 'reproduction': was it the director's task to reproduce what the writer had written, or was it to produce a work of art inspired by the writer's text? (Lorch 1996, 269)

In addition to extended stage directions within their plays in general, playwrights of critical metadrama responded to the increasing control of directors in various ways. For instance, in *The Great Wall of China*, when the Modern Man introduces dramatic characters to the audiences, he mentions that changes were made to one of the characters, but, according to the Modern Man 'after consultation with the author' (Frisch, 3). Such a notice suggests that what Lorch describes as a concern of the 1920s seems to continue through the following decades, and perhaps is still a matter of dispute at the moment.<sup>140</sup>

*The Public* and *The Protagonist* represent two different types of the auteur. While the Director in Lorca's play rewrites his own version of *Romeo and Juliet*, the two mimes in Kaiser's play are entirely invented by the leading actor-manager. Put differently, I claim that both critical metadramas respond to the increasing authority of directors in their time in different ways: If Lorca chooses a surrealistic mood, Kaiser returns to the Elizabethan era. However, neither *The Public* nor *The Protagonist* includes direct comments on the tension between playwrights and directors. In contrast, I focus on *Six Characters* and *Tonight We Improvise*, not only because both the Manager and Dr. Hinkfuss are obvious examples of the auteur director, but also due to the inclusion of dramatic characters' comments on the directors-playwrights dispute within the two plays. Furthermore, and most importantly, similar comments are included

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<sup>140</sup> Famous examples of the dispute between playwrights and directors include Ionesco's declaration of his dissatisfaction with Joseph Anthony's direction of *Rhinoceros* in 1961, Pinter's harsh comments on the Italian production of *Old Times* by Visconti in 1973, and Beckett's attempt to prevent JoAnne Akalaitis' performance of *Endgame* in 1984. For information about the three incidents, see Wallach 236–7, Puppa 380, and Gontarski 433–4, respectively.



within examples of Egyptian critical metadramas, which indicates the influence of European metadrama in general and Pirandello's in particular, as the two following chapters explore.

Insisting on the gap between the written text and the live performance, in Dr. Hinkfuss' prolonged speech to the real audience, the director claims that any playwright 'is responsible for the work to readers, of course, and to book reviewers, but neither can, nor should be, to theatre goers and to drama critics, who pass judgment sitting in a theatre. [...] For in the theatre the work of the writer no longer exists!' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 11). The reason for such an exclusion of playwrights is revealed when Dr. Hinkfuss braggingly informs spectators about his role in the play they are going to watch, which includes adjusting the text to the subject of his own scenic creation (Pirandello *Tonight*, 11-12). Not only does Dr. Hinkfuss assume the right to alter the dramatic text and the capability for doing so, but he also makes these changes in the text in order to fit the spectacular scenery he imagined in advance.

As Pirandello's play reveals, all the changes Dr. Hinkfuss makes to the text of the inner play revolve around two points: highlighting melodramatic effect on the members of the audience and using the scenery to impress them. In terms of evoking spectators' sympathy, the director changes two scenes: the death of Mommina's father and the heroine's own death at the finale of the inner play. For instance, instead of dying 'of a stroke', Mommina's father in Dr. Hinkfuss version is stabbed by a knife. In addition, the director writes an emotive speech, wherein the bleeding man expresses his last thoughts to the members of his family. Amused by his inventions, Dr. Hinkfuss proudly declares: 'A great scene it is, ladies and gentlemen, for all the consequences it brings. I made it up myself. It isn't in the story at all and, moreover, I'm sure the author would never have put it in' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 70 –1), which suggests that Dr. Hinkfuss does not only assume the role of a playwright, but the director also believes in his superiority over the author.

In terms of Dr. Hinkfuss' obsession with creating spectacular scenic effects regardless of their relation to the inner play, the Character Actor describes Dr. Hinkfuss' style of directing by claiming that 'all the scenes of the play could be made for the eyes alone' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 76). During the interlude of the inner play, the real audience watches Dr. Hinkfuss' failure in portraying a spectacular outdoor scene of an airfield. Stage directions describe:

*Everything on the ground is small, to give the impression of infinite space bounded only by star-strewn sky; in back, the white buildings [...] with their small lit windows, here and there scattered about the field two or three airplanes, all very small. One hears the roar of an airplane out of sight, flying in the tranquil night. (Pirandello Tonight, 47)*

However, the director keeps annoying the members of his troupe by his insistence on making needlessly spectacular scenes. Therefore, the actors, who are already irritated because they have no dramatic text to guide them through the improvised performance, rebel against Dr. Hinkfuss and force him to leave the stage. Because of Dr. Hinkfuss' exaggerated interest in visual elements of the performance, many scholars claim that Pirandello's character represents Reinhardt, who directed *Six Characters*.<sup>141</sup>

However, and apart from any potential resemblance between real directors and Dr. Hinkfuss, I argue that *Tonight We Improvise* criticises the trend for favouring all visual aspects of the performance at the expense of dramatic text. On one hand, such a tendency can be traced back to the nineteenth-century huge and dynamic scenery of melodramas, which, as a dramatic genre, is the target of parody within Pirandello's play. That explains the caricatured depiction of Dr. Hinkfuss as '*one of those unfortunate creatures whose fate it is to be a tiny man hardly five feet tall. He compensates for this, in his way, with a great bushy head of hair*' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 9). On the other hand, aware of the debate on the increasing authority of directors during the early decades of the twentieth century, Pirandello seems to utilise *Tonight We Improvise* in order to attack directors' pointless modifying of dramatic texts, which is the reason for Dr. Hinkfuss' insistence on preventing the author from attending the performance. Therefore, even when the members of the troupe accept Dr. Hinkfuss' return providing that they can only perform a written text, the director insists: 'The author, no. Written parts, yes' (Pirandello *Tonight*, 97). Such a message can be found in *Six Characters*, even before Pirandello's co-

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<sup>141</sup> Hinkfuss is suggested to be a depiction of both Pirandello's admiration of Reinhardt's artistic qualities and contradiction to the director's underestimation of dramatic texts in Bassnett-McGuire 1983, 64–5, and Bloom 'Plot Summary of *Tonight We Improvise*', 118. For a claim that the director in *Tonight We Improvise* is a negative representation of Reinhardt and/or Piscator, see Bentley 1986, 99. For information about Reinhardt's fame for his theatrical spectacle, see Andrucki 1127, Letwin 140, and Esslin 1977, 11–12. In Valency 195, Hinkfuss is claimed as the 'mouthpiece' of Pirandello himself. These different claims support my insistence on the invalidity of identifying dramatic characters' comments on theatre within critical metadramas with specific factual practitioners, including the playwrights of these plays.

operation with Reinhardt, when the Manager highlights the conflict between directors and playwrights by referring to the latter as if they are outsiders, who would interrupt rehearsals. The Manager declares: 'I never could stand rehearsing with the author present. He's never satisfied!' (Pirandello *Six Characters*, 257). Thus, similar to all the topics of dramatic characters' discussion on literary and theatrical matters, which remarkably intersect, the tension between playwrights and directors seem to be motivated by historical circumstances, including specific features of the state of European theatre during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The most striking aspect of most of these topics of discussion is that although several playwrights comment on same matters, which reflect on similar historical circumstances, the overall message of dramatic characters' comments on these matters within each critical metadrama varies from others. Put differently, Most European critical metadramas during the first half of the twentieth century address, and seek to reform, similar defects of theatre practice. However, each play portrays this problem from a different angle and, consequently, suggests a specific solution.

## Chapter Four

### Socio-political and economic contexts of Egyptian theatre: the birth of critical metadrama

Similar to the European critical metadrama in the first half of the Twentieth Century, the trend for Egyptian critical metatheatrical plays in the 1960s was a result of both sociopolitical and artistic historical circumstances. However, the overlapping between these historical contexts seems to be more complicated in Egypt for two reasons. Firstly, the dominance of an authoritarian political system over cultural activities, including theatre, after a period of occupation was crucial in shaping the state of theatre in such a postcolonial era.<sup>142</sup> Secondly, from its birth, Egyptian theatre was always dependent on European theatre, which means that aspects of the latter, including its practice of metatheatre, were highly influential on the former. Therefore, the circumstances in which Egyptian metadramas that include literary and theatrical criticism flourished since the 1960s cannot be defined without exploring the beginnings of modern Egyptian theatre since 1870s. This beginning remarkably reveals the influence of European theatre in the seventeenth century, namely of Molière's *Impromptu of Versailles*.

#### **Egypt's Molière: Ya'qub Sannua (1839-1912)**<sup>143</sup>

As the first Egyptian playwright, Sannua is considered the father of the Egyptian theatre. However, his significant role in the history of Arabic theatre in general and Egyptian theatre in particular extends to include his contribution as a director and an actor. The most striking feature of his plays is that they were written in colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Consequently, the audience of Sannua's theatre included the illiterate as well as intellectuals, which increased the popularity of his theatre. In addition, Sannua utilised his plays as a means of the critique of contemporary social and political defects. Jacob Landau describes Sannua as 'the creator of the politico-satirical theatre [...] [and] the innovator of its language' (Landau, 66). In investigating Sannua's legacy, it seems to be helpful to realise that the engagement between his Western and Egyptian

<sup>142</sup> The British occupation of Egypt lasted between 1882 and 1954.

<sup>143</sup> As I have mentioned in the first chapter, some scholars write Sannua's name in different forms such as Sanua, Sannú, Sannu', or Sanu'.

cultural backgrounds enabled him to reflect on Egyptian society within the European form of theatre.

Sannua was a son of a Jewish family. His father was Italian while his mother was Egyptian. This richness of his cultural sources was the key to his character, Irene Gendzier argues: 'Sanua combined within his own life an appreciation and recognition of Western values and, simultaneously, a respect and love for his own tradition, that of nineteenth-century Egypt' (Gendzier, 17). Western influences on his thoughts were not limited to his father. Mustapha Badawi claims that Sannua was sent to study in Italy at the age of thirteen, for three years (Badawi 1985, 132). In Italy, Sannua 'studied political science, international law, the natural sciences, and even the arts of music and the dance' (Gendzier, 18-9). This kind of education seemed to raise Sannua's awareness of British intervention in Egypt even before the occupation. Matti Moosa claims that, after Sannua's return from Italy, he worked as a freelance tutor of the elite's children, for a while. Later, he was employed at the Polytechnic School, and from there he went onto play an important role in the Egyptian patriotic movement (Moosa 1974, 402-3). Gendzier describes such a patriotic role:

In 1863 Sanua became professor at the Polytechnic Institute of Cairo where we learn that he had many of 'Urābī's future officers<sup>144</sup> as students. Sanua took advantage of his early position as instructor to organize meetings with Egyptian youth in which he developed his ideas on nationalism and the liberation of Egypt. (Gendzier, 19)

The most prominent feature of Sannua's political activity was that his connection with Western cultural life did not prevent him from upholding his nationalist beliefs, and this will be a common feature of Egyptian playwrights in the second decade of the twentieth century as we shall see. It seems that Sannua wanted to disseminate his ideas on a larger scale. So, he started his theatrical career and practiced Journalism, becoming equally famous in both areas.

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<sup>144</sup> Ahmed Urabi or Orabi was the leader of Egyptian officers' uprising against Khedive Tawfiq, the successor of Ismail, who they saw as a puppet of both Britain and France. Gradually, the officers' revolt was supported by the vast majority of Egyptian people and turned to what is known in the Egyptian history as Orabi's Revolution in 1882. The revolution was defeated by the British army, which started its occupation of Egypt.

Sannua's interest in theatre started when he was studying in Italy. Landau claims that the Egyptian playwright 'had already written some Italian plays, three of which were produced in Genoa and elsewhere' (Landau, 66). However, in Egypt, he started as an amateur actor with the European troops which performed Italian and French plays to a mixture of Westerners and Egyptian elite spectators. In his *Memoires*, Sannua recalls this experience as an actor as an inspiration for establishing his own theatre in Cairo. Moosa explains:

In 1870 the city was swarming with Europeans, particularly French and Italians. Two troupes, one French and one Italian, entertained the European community by presenting dramas in both languages on an open-air stage at the beautiful Azbakiyya park [sic]. Sanû' says he took part in all the plays performed there, because he deeply loved these two languages and the works of their great dramatists, whom he had studied. (Moosa 1974, 404)

The significance of this period is that it increased Sannua's knowledge about both French and Italian theatre. In addition, he realised his passion for offering theatre for Egyptian people in the Arabic language, especially with his belief in the effective role of theatre in developing and elevating his people. Initially, he was enthusiastic about attracting the ordinary people to this magic world of theatre, which he saw as a sign of civilised society. Later, he realised that theatre is able to raise its audience's awareness of social and political matters.

As Muhammad Yusuf Najm states, in 1870, after a profound study of the works of Goldoni, Molière, and Sheridan in their original languages, Sannua wrote a one act play in the colloquial language. This play included some common popular songs. He founded a troupe of actors, drawn from his students, and succeeded in getting the support of Khedive Ismail to perform at Azbakiyya Park (Najm, 80-1).<sup>145</sup> The most important point of Najm's observation is the help that Khedive Ismail offered to Sannua as a kind of a patronage, which was part of the Khedive's support for theatre in general. On one hand, Ismail's era burdened Egypt with debts for the first time in its history, especially with the lavish celebration of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. On the other hand, theatre was always included in the Khedive's vision of modernisation. Kamal al-Deen Hussein argues that Ismail used part of the

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<sup>145</sup> All Arabic texts quoted and cited in this chapter, whether they are parts of plays or critical writings, are translated into English by me with the exception of Idris's play *Al-Farafir*.

foreign loans to build the Comedy Theatre in the Azbakiyya Park and the Opera House in 1868 (Hussein, 57). It was Ismail who praised Sannua by calling him 'Molière Misr'.<sup>146</sup> Whether this title was to celebrate Sannua as a pioneer of Egyptian theatre or because he translated Molière's *The Miser* and *Tartuffe*, the influence of the French dramatist on Sannua was very obvious.

The performance of Sannua's first play was the announcement of the birth of the modern Egyptian theatre, and it was received with great enthusiasm. Moosa argues:

The audience was enormous; probably more than 3,000 people, both Egyptians and Europeans, including the Khedive's retinue and members of the foreign diplomatic corps, came to watch this novelty - an operetta in the Arabic language. The hall was packed with spectators, most of whom remained standing. (Moosa 1974, 405)

Such a positive reception seemed to motivate Sannua to develop his theatre. As Badawi argues, Sannua soon formed a professional troupe and attached two females to be the first who brought actresses on stage in the Arabic world<sup>147</sup> (Badawi 1985, 133-4). Sannua's theatre successfully continued producing plays for two years until his relationship with the Khedive was ruined. Farouk Abdel Wahab claims that 'of thirty-two plays that Sanu' reportedly wrote, only seven complete texts and one fragment have so far been published (Abdel Wahab 1974, 19).

Although the influence of Molière and Goldoni is detected in Sannua's plays to the extent that Ken Whittingham describes Sannua's plays as 'loosely modelled' (Whittingham, 13) on the French forebears, the vast majority of studies insist that Sannua's late plays moved towards social and political criticism. For instance, Jacques Berque claims he 'had already begun to advance from strict adaptation to social criticism when one day, ... [he] attacked polygamy'<sup>148</sup> (Berque, 346). Further examples of social critique can be found in *Bursit Masr (Egyptian Stock Exchange)* in which Sannua condemns the superficial imitation of Western behaviour. Political criticism of the Egyptian government can be found in *al-Watan wa al-Huriyya (The Country and*

<sup>146</sup> This title means Egypt's Molière or the Egyptian Molière.

<sup>147</sup> Here, Badawi's claim contradicts both Landau and Barbour, who separately argue that the Syrian director Al-Qurdahi was the first to give female parts to actresses.

<sup>148</sup> Berque refers to Sannua's *Al-Dorratan (The Two Rival Wives)*.

*Freedom*). Sannua's insistence on such political satires was the reason for the end of his theatrical career. Moreover, and most importantly, Sannua's plays were proven to be an inspiration to amateur writers who discovered the potential of political satire. In *L'Égypte Satirique* (1886) Paul de Baignières argues that 'the Khedive became very angry because al-Azhar's scholars started to imitate Sannua by writing and performing plays' (ctd. in Najm, 91). Consequently, Khedive Ismail banned Sannua from performing and closed his theatre in 1872. It seems that the Khedive could not tolerate sponsored playwright's criticism and he wanted the theatre to be a mere entertainment.

In his *Memoires*, Sannua blames British panjandrums whose slandering, according to Sannua, was the reason for provoking the Khedive's anger against the playwright. Commenting on Sannua's claims, Moosa argues:

[T]he British dignitaries, he [Sannua] says, became piqued when the chief character made a derogatory remark against John Bull. Consequently they intrigued against him both directly and indirectly through their agents at the Royal Palace, and convinced the Khedive that the plays presented by Abu Nazzara<sup>149</sup> implied criticism of his government and policies, and constituted an imminent danger to his rule and to the nation's destiny. [...] Sanû' was a consistent agitator against British rule in Egypt and rarely if ever missed an opportunity to rail at the British policies in his country. (Moosa 1974, 406-7)

Not only was the first Egyptian playwright aware of the influence of British consultants on the Khedive, Ismail's support was crucial in protecting Sannua from the agitated reactionaries, who considered theatre unethical. However, it seems that neither the Khedive nor his British advisors were able to deter Sannua's mission of social and political reform because the latter continued his political critique of their policies through journalism.

Eventually, Sannua was exiled to France in 1878, where he wrote *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* (1912), which can be considered the first Egyptian critical metadrama. Although the play was finished in the same year Sannua died, some studies claim that he started to write it before leaving Egypt, when his conflict with the Khedive was on its peak.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> 'Abu Nazzara' is the classical Arabic form of 'Abu Naddara', Sannua's pseudonym as a journalist.

<sup>150</sup> For more information, see Badawi 143.



### The roots of critical metadrama in Arabic theatre

It is important to note that the first inclusion of literary criticism within an Arabic play occurs in *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* (1851).<sup>151</sup> The play was written by the Lebanese playwright and director Marun al-Naqqash (1817-1855), who is called the father of Arabic theatre. Samaan, the protagonist of the play, is a rewriting of Alceste in Molière's *Les Misanthrope*. In addition, many features of the French playwrights' plays can be found in *al-Saleet al-Hasoud*. Landau confirms that al-Naqqash's play is an adaptation of *Tartuffe* (Landau, 59), while Moosa finds many traces of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and *Les Précieuses ridicules* in *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* (Moosa 1997, 30).

Although *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* was al-Naqqash's last play, it was the first to be performed in a formal theatre. His first two plays *al-Bakhil* (1847) and *Abu al-Hasan al-Moghaffal* (1849)<sup>152</sup> were introduced at al-Naqqash's private home in Beirut. Referring to *al-Bakhil*, Lenin El-Ramly comments that the first Arabic play was based on Molière's *The Miser*, written and directed by the rich merchant at his house, where the audience was a group of selectively invited guests (El-Ramly, 166). Al-Naqqash's eagerness to copy the European form of theatre extends beyond the composition of the plays to some components of the structure of the stage. David Urquhart, a British traveler who watched *al-Bakhil*, describes al-Naqqash's keenness to imitate every single detail in the design of European stage even without a real need for it. Urquhart argues that al-Naqqash 'had seen in Europe footlights and a prompter's box, and fancied it an essential point of theatricals to stick them on where they were not required' (qtd. in Le Gassick, 174-5).

In both *al-Bakhil* and *al-Saleet al-Hasoud*, it seems that al-Naqqash established a specific formula, which was be adopted by many of his successors in Arabic theatre, including Sannua. This formula depends on borrowing from the European theatre in a kind of a free adaptation rather than a precise translation. In addition, although his plays are constructed on Molière's plots, the action in al-Naqqash's plays takes place in Lebanon, where the characters represent the inhabitants of Beirut, especially in terms of the local nature of the comic content of their dialogue. When Ewa Machut-Mendecka claims that al-Naqqash's 'heroes spoke the Lebanese dialect, and they also

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<sup>151</sup> Literally, *The Envious Snippy*.

<sup>152</sup> Respectively, *The Miser* and *Abu Al-Hasan the Fool*.

sang songs included in the play's text' (Machut-Mendecka, 34), she defines one of the major aspects of the form, which is the inclusion of singing. By making such a formula, al-Naqqash proved his awareness of the Arabic audience's taste.

What distinguishes *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* from all al-Naqqash's other plays is that the playwright utilises his dramatic characters to comment on his own work. As the following dialogue suggests, characters' references to al-Naqqash seem irrelevant to the dramatic situation:

SAM'AAN: This line I have just said is borrowed from Marun al-Naqqash's *Abu al-Hasan al-Moghaffal*.

ISHAAC: Honestly, do you like this play?

SAM'AAN: Frankly, not too much. However, I like *al-Bakhil*, which al-Naqqash performed at his house four years ago. I mean in 1847. (al-Naqqash, 388)

This narrative language suggests that al-Naqqash attempts to use metatheatre as a documentary method of informing the reader/audience about the playwright's effort to perform the first play in Arabic countries. Such a documentary purpose is highlighted when Sam'aan explains his reasons for preferring *al-Bakhil* to *Abu al-Hasan al-Moghaffal*, although the latter is adapted from traditional Arabic narrative, namely the Arabian Nights. Sam'aan argues: 'I like this play [*al-Bakhil*] because it is the first play in Arabic language. It is said, although some may contradict, that this art [theatre] is useful because within its comic form it includes the exposure of defects. Thus, it enhances the sensible and corrects the ignorant' (al-Naqqash, 388-9). Whether this argument seeks to defend theatre in general, comedies, or even al-Naqqash's plays in particular, the play suggests that both entertainment and enlightenment are functions of theatre. The feeling of interrupting the action of the play by this discussion increases because Sam'aan's praise of al-Naqqash's work contradicts the character's image through the rest of the play as a gloomy person whose opinions on people and things are always shockingly blunt.

Sam'aan's most significant comment on theatre within *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* is his doubt of the future of the art of theatre in Lebanon. Al-Naqqash's character claims that 'this new art is unlikely to survive in our country' (al-Naqqash, 388). I argue that such a negative prediction can be understood on the grounds of al-Naqqash's awareness of the social reluctance to accept

theatre in his country, especially with the church's condemnation of practitioners. Landau explains:

The opposition of the orthodox leaders to the Arab theatre [...] accused the artists of laxity in their religious practice, sometimes even of immorality. In a country where religious feeling ran high, the propaganda of the orthodox circles, coupled with the penury of the artists, forced the Arab theatre to look for encouragement and help elsewhere. (Landau, 59)

In this respect, I suggest that the emergence of Arabic theatre had to endure the attack of the men of religion, which partly resembles patristic writings against the rebirth of theatre during the European Middle Ages.<sup>153</sup> However, the effect of 'orthodox leaders' seemed to extend beyond Sam'aan's hint at the hopeless future of Lebanese theatre. Philip Sadgrove claims that 'In his will he [al-Naqqash] instructed that the theatre be turned into a church, bought subsequently by the apostolic delegate' (Sadgrove, 247). Whether al-Naqqash regretted his career or he was convinced that theatre would not be able to challenge religious oppositions, the Lebanese successors of al-Naqqash chose to practice theatre 'elsewhere', which was Egypt. Landau declares that 'during the seventies of the nineteenth century, a sizable number of prominent Syrians connected with the stage emigrated to Egypt' (Landau, 63). It is important to realise that, under the rule of the Turkish Empire, Lebanon was part of Syria until the French mandate after World War I. Therefore, Landau describes Lebanese theatre as Syrian.<sup>154</sup>

Later, in 1860s, Abu Khalil al-Qabbany, the founder of the first Syrian theatre, had to suffer from the attack of conservative Shikhs.<sup>155</sup> Similar to the Lebanese church's opinion on al-Naqqash's theatre, Muslim Shikhs described the plays written, produced, directed and co-performed by al-Qabbany as an anti-religious and unethical practice. Ibrahim al-Kilany argues that one of these

<sup>153</sup> I use the word 'partly' because the mediaeval church's oppositions were based on the pagan origin of theatre as well as the latter's allegedly unethicalness. More information about the Fathers of the Church's attack on theatre can be found in Edwards 2002.

<sup>154</sup> Most Arabic and Western scholars such as Najm, Abdel Wahab and Machut-Mendecka distinguish between Lebanese and Syrian birth of theatre. I adopt the same point of view in order to consider subtle differences between the two countries in terms of socio-political and religious contexts.

<sup>155</sup> The plural of Shikh, which literally means old man. In this context, the word 'Shikhs' idiomatically means Muslim clergymen.

traditionalists, called Said al-Ghabra, specifically traveled to al-Asitana<sup>156</sup> in order to warn Sultan Abd al-Hamid al-Thany about the danger of al-Qabbany's theatre, which, according to Shikh al-Ghabra is the infernal heresy that threatens Muslims' doctrine. Consequently, al-Kilany declares that the Turkish Sultan ordered the local ruler of Syria to close al-Qabbany's theatre, which encouraged his enemies to mock him (ctd. in Najm 68). Wannus (1941- 1997), who is one of the most acclaimed Arabic and Syrian playwrights, disapprovingly wonders:

Why did the Damascene reactionary brutally oppose Abu Khalil [al-Qabbany]? As the rare documentations reveal, such brutality extended to burning his theatre and inciting children to chase and ridicule him by indecent songs. [...] Can reactionism be more vicious in attacking an artist? Indeed, extremist traditionalists may kill. However, preventing the artist from working in his [or her] own country is similar to—sometimes is worse than—murder. (Wannus 'Lemaza', 52)

Written in 1976, it seems that Wannus' article continues his interest in al-Qabbany's legacy, which can be traced back to 1972 when he wrote *Sahra ma'a Abi khalil al-Qabbany*. In his play, Wannus focuses on al-Qabbany's lost battle against one of the Syrian reactionaries. After portraying the destruction of al-Qabbany's theatre, the play ends by the actors telling the audience that 'al-Qabbany did not give up and resumed his career in Egypt, which was the mecca of free artists and thinkers. [...] In Egypt al-Qabbany theatre developed and flourished for more than thirteen years' (Wannus *Sahra*, 671).

On one hand, Both Wannus' article and play, I argue, reflect on his worries of the increasing power of radical Islamists, which reached one of its peaks in Syria during the 1970s.<sup>157</sup> Put differently, it seems that by revisiting history, Wannus was commenting on the recurrence of religiously-masked

<sup>156</sup> The archaic Arabic name of Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>157</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood, from which different radical Islamist groups have generated, was established in Egypt in the 1920s and expanded its presence in different Arabic countries, including Syria. Most Islamist groups played a big role in fighting against British and French occupation in Egypt and Syria, respectively. After independence, the relatively secular, but authoritarian, regimes in both countries harshly faced Islamists' eagerness for power. Consequently, Islamist groups have increasingly gained noticeable popularity on the grounds that they are the major opposition to tyrannical rulers. Such popularity, I argue, explains why the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was elected to take the power after the 2011 January Revolution. The significance of this observation is that Egyptian theatre seems to prepare for engaging in a new battle against the increasing voices of radical Islamists, from which the Salafists bluntly declare their resentment towards all arts in general.

reactionary thoughts in his own time. On the other hand, the immigration of both al-Qabbany and al-Naqqash's troupes to Egypt suggests the crucial role of socio-political circumstances in shaping the early history of Arabic theatre in general and of Egyptian theatre in particular. Whittingham explains: 'Because of severe repression which led many artists and intellectuals to leave Syria and Lebanon at the end of the nineteenth century, all significant development thereafter, until recently, took place in Egypt, which offered marginally better opportunities and freedom' (Whittingham, 14). Although the three countries were part of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt was relatively independent compared to Syria and Lebanon. In addition, Egypt was an open society due to the British and French influence on Khedive Ismail, who was ambitious to look like a modernised ruler. In this respect, all Sam'aan's discourse about theatre within *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* seem to be highly relevant to the difficulties that faced the emergence of theatre as a new art. Such relevance will be more obvious within Sannua's *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*.

### **The first Egyptian critical metadrama**

Although both al-Naqqash and Sannua were influenced by Molière, it is the latter's play that contextualises its content of literary and theatrical criticism in a dramatic situation of a rehearsal. In the footsteps of Molière's play, *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* includes Sannua and the members of his troupe as dramatic characters who comment on different matters of the theatre profession. Put differently, unlike *al-Saleet al-Hasoud*, *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* utilises metatheatrical techniques such as the play-within-a-play and intertextuality in order to display its literary and theatrical discussions.

On one hand, it seems that *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* seeks to celebrate Sannua's two-year theatrical career. For instance, on the list of characters, Sannua describes himself as 'the founder and the lead actor of al-Tiatro al-Arabi<sup>158</sup> in 1870' (Sannua, 195). Through the play, Sannua's character is portrayed as a committed artist who sacrificially did his best in order to achieve a noble goal. On the other hand, as a man of theatre, just like most European playwrights of critical metadrama in the first half of the twentieth century, Sannua's awareness of the problems that face theatre motivated him to discuss them within a play. Although Sannua had a chance to discuss these

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<sup>158</sup> The name of Sannua's troupe, which means The Arabic Theatre Troupe

problems in his articles, he chose to express his opinions within a play in a similar manner to Molière's commentary in *Impromptu of Versailles* and what Giraudoux undertook in *Paris Impromptu*.

Although *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* imitates Molière's play regarding its comments on actors, Najm insists on Sannua's awareness of the unique conditions of Egyptian actors, who, as Sannua explains in his play, 'seek to be employed in a stable job by the state because acting does not offer them enough money' (qtd. in Najm 434). I argue that actors' eagerness to be employed by the government reflects on the Egyptians' common mistrust in private sector because of its instability. Although this belief started to be challenged in the 1970s, a big sector of Egyptian people still believe in the security of governmental jobs at the moment, which can be explained by several factors. The importance of such an aspect is that it shapes one of the most formidable problems that face any reform of contemporary Egyptian theatre as this chapter will explore later.

The most striking feature of the similarity between Molière *Misr wa ma Yokasih* and Molière's metadrama is that Sannua utilises his play in order to reply to one of his critics. Badawi explains:

Şannū' does refer to an attack on his plays by an Italian critic who condemned the playwright's use of colloquial language in his dialogue. The play defends Şannū' on the grounds that drama is meant to be about what people actually say or do in real life, wherein nobody speaks classical Arabic. (Badawi 1985, 144)

Apart from the controversial matter of finding a suitable language to represent characters, the play suggests Sannua's naturalistic point of view, in keeping with the dominant mode of theatre when he wrote his play. As two of Sannua's actors argue:

METRI: Do people use official language in their everyday life?  
 ASTEPHAN: Even sheikhs,<sup>159</sup> scholars and artists never talk with each other in classical Arabic. (Sannua, 200)

However, in contrast to Sannua's argument, *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* was written in rhymed prose, which suggests that he attempted to prove that he is

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<sup>159</sup> Shikhs must be experts in classical Arabic because it is the language of the Quran.

able to write in the way that his critics demanded or perhaps because of the specific nature of the play as a metadrama that might not address his common audience. The most striking feature of mentioning this Italian critic, who continually attacked Sannua's plays, is that *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*, I claim, includes one of the earliest examples of criticism of criticism within an Egyptian play. As two of the troupe's members claims:

ASTEPHAN: This Italian critic who writes in the Italian journal.  
 METRI: He always condemns our plays because he is jealous of James.<sup>160</sup> When we asked this critic to show us his amazing texts, he sent a horrible play at which we laughed like crazy. Then we threw it in his face. (Sannua, 199)

This story recalls Coleridge's claim, which I have cited in the previous chapter, that tough reviewers of literature are failed authors who envy successful writers.

While there are obvious dramaturgical resemblances between *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* and *Impromptu of Versailles*, Sannua's play does not include any direct accusation of either the Khedive or Britain's representatives in Egypt for the ending of Sannua's practice. Instead, he gives a general hint at the hostility of those who were intimidated by his plays' success as one of the economic and social obstacles that challenged theatre as a Western art. Sannua argues: 'Since I have worked in theatre, I lost both my money and health. I only got enemies, who I bore for the sake of offering theatre for my compatriots' (Sannua, 209). Moreover, at the finale of *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*, the actors of Sannua praise Khedive Ismail and refer to his support for the troupe (Sannua, 222). Such an observation can be seen as Sannua's appreciation of the Khedive's patronage. In addition, it seems that the Egyptian playwright is loyal to *Impromptu of Versailles*, within which Molière expresses his respect and gratitude to his supporting king.

As the description of characters reveals, the real members of Sannua's troupe -Metri, Habib, Astephan and Honin- specialized in playing the roles of fellahin, businessmen, popular cavaliers, and Europeans, respectively (Sannua,195). The vast majority of scholars, including Najm and Badawi, suggest that the influence of Sannua's study in Italy accounts for his writing of such stereotyped characters, which resemble the masks of Commedia dell'Arte.

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<sup>160</sup> The first name of Sannua.

However, Ali al-Raa'i argues that 'the stereotyped character of the foreign tourist within Sannua's plays resembles its appearance in the comic acts of al-Mahabbazeen'<sup>161</sup> (al-Raa'i, 56). Al-Mahabbazeen was the name of any group of strolling actors, who produce improvisatory shows, in which, as Ahmed Saqr argues, 'stock characters such as the fellah and the despotic ruler repeatedly appeared' (Saqr, 37).

Considering that the word al-Mahabbazeen is derived from a Mameluke's word meaning prestidigitators,<sup>162</sup> there is also a reference to the fact that al-Mahabbazeen had a long history before the birth of Egyptian theatre in its Western form. Jacob Landau presents several examples of European travellers who wrote about the performances of al-Mahabbazeen, which they attended on different occasions: Belzoni, the Italian traveller, described two plays shown in 1815, after a marriage ceremony, while the Orientalist E. W. Lane portrayed another show which he described as a low farce.<sup>163</sup> An even more interesting example is given by Warner, who visited Egypt in the last third of the nineteenth century. Warner claims that he watched a performance presented on one of the boats of the Nile River (ctd. in Landau, 49-52). These testimonies reveal that there were a large number of troupes presenting al-Mahabbazeen, which suggests that there was a possibility that Sannua watched the shows of al-Mahabbazeen whether before or after his study in Italy. Moreover, it may be useful to consider that al-Mahabbazeen inherited the features of stereotyped characters from khayal al-Del (the shadow play) and Karagöz (glove-puppet performances). Regarding the similarity between the comic acts of al-Mahabbazeen and the shows of khayal al-Del, Hussein claims that the former's stereotyped characters are the human versions of the latter's (Hussein, 128). Although khayal al-Del and Karagöz preceded the appearance of al-Mahabbazeen, the three forms of traditional entertainment coexisted through the second half of the nineteenth century when Sannua was writing and producing his plays, which increases the possibility of the influence of these three traditional forms on Sannua's stereotyped characters.

Landau controversially claims: 'theatrical performances in Arabic show some similarity in their contents to the shadow play only prior to the far-reaching

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<sup>161</sup> Also known as al-Mahabbazateiah.

<sup>162</sup> The Mameluke's rule of Egypt lasted between 1250 and 1517.

<sup>163</sup> For more details about the story lines of these plays see Landau 50-1, Al-Ra'i 50-5, and Saqr 36-41.



impact of the European theatrical influence, approximately at mid-century' (Landau, 49). Although Landau realises similarity between al-Mahabbazeen and the two earlier forms of popular shows: khayal al-Del and Karagöz, he denies the influence of traditional forms of entertainment in a narrative of the European-formed birth of Arabic theatre, including the plays of al-Naqqash and Sannua. Therefore Landau concludes: 'While in some West-European countries the shadow play and the marionette theatre left indelible traces on the modern comedy, this is hardly the case in the Near East' (Landau, 49). It is hard to accept such an imprecise verdict, which can be partly understood on the grounds of the more descriptive than analytical nature of Landau's overview survey of Arabic theatre and cinema during two centuries. By dedicating fewer than two pages to Sannua's contribution to Arabic theatre, it seems impossible for Landau to trace the European or local origins of stereotypical characters within the Egyptian playwright's works, let alone to adequately recognise the presence of such characters in the first place. I suppose that, while Sannua may have been influenced by Commedia dell'Arte's use of stock types as a formal device, the playwright borrowed his specific characters from Egyptian traditional forms of entertainment, especially al-Mahabbazeen. In this respect, al-Raa'i seems more precise when he claims that 'both European and Egyptian popular influences cooperate within the western form of Sannua's plays' (al-Raa'i, 72).

My insistence on drawing the link between al-Mahabbazeen and Sannua's theatre extends beyond the inclusion of the stock characters. More significantly, I claim that the audience's reception of traditional forms of entertainment crucially regulated the relationship between Sannua's spectators and performances. Hussein argues that 'the most important features of these shows [of popular forms of entertainment] are their dependence on the traditions of imitation, improvisation, and responding to the audience's interventions during the performance' (Hussein, 108). Thus, the most striking common aspect of khayal al-Del, Karagöz, and al-Mahabbazeen is this kind of intersection between the performer and spectators, who are perhaps encouraged by these shows' intrinsic challenge of the make believe. Dina Amin argues:

The pre-modern Egyptian dramatic performances were, by and large, unrealistic, almost absurdist, in nature. The

requirements of constructing fantastical plotlines are very different from those needed in the making of imitation of life dramas. Fantasies scramble imagined space and time, logic, and unity of plot. [...] Talking back at the players—through access to the performance arena and the right to demand changes in the storyline—was a way for the audience to control the imagined world and express discontent. (Amin *The Arab Studies Journal*, 81)

Apart from the inadequacy of describing ‘unrealistic’ features as ‘almost absurdist’, Amin precisely defines the non-Aristotelian elements of popular shows: place, time and plot, which are physically manifested by the vagueness—sometimes the lack—of the strict illusionist border between the spaces of actors and spectators. In this sense, the audience’s interventions literally turn it into an active element of the performances of pre-Sannua’s European/Aristotelian form. Consequently, spectators of Sannua’s plays maintained their usual mode of reception, in which they felt free to interrupt the performance with loud comments.

Giving examples of spectators’ interventions in Sannua’s tragic and comic performances, Ibrahim Abdu explains:

A member of the audience would provoke the actor by saying: ‘We will see whether you will let him [the antagonist] steal your girl’. Another spectator might ask the actress: ‘Why do you prefer this arrogant idiot to the rich and respectful young man, who insanely loves you’? Hiding backstage, Sannua was instantly telling his actors suitable replies to the audience’s comments. In some occasions, these conversations would last very long. In addition, it was very rare that a performance ends before spectators ask for Sannua to appear on stage, wherein he says something new, witty and funny. (ctd. in Najm, 85)

Although these incidents hint at Sannua’s capacity to improvise as the most experienced actor of his troupe, none of the texts of these performances can be considered a critical metadrama. Even if actors-spectators’ dialogues included occasional mentions of any dramaturgical matter, I claim that Sannua’s written texts do not appear to have been written with the intention of raising such theatrical matters for critical discussion within the play, or in the interface between actor and audience. Put differently, this type of metatheatricality is confined to the live performance of illusionist texts, which initially sought to be produced in a manner that sustained the fictional world. Therefore, these

incidents have been seen by both Western and Arabic scholars, critics and practitioners, including Sannua himself, as deviations from the prototype of European Aristotelian form. At least, this was that case until 1912 when Sannua wrote the first Egyptian metadrama: *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*.

The political intervention into theatre that banned Sannua's work proved to have very negative effects on Egyptian theatre. Firstly, the first Egyptian playwright stopped writing plays for nearly forty years until he wrote *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*. Secondly, and most importantly, the punishment of Sannua for his critique of the Khedive's regime most probably discouraged potential playwrights and theatre companies. Najm claims that: 'After Sannua, the Arabic theatre stopped for four years. [...] The closing of his theatre was enough to make others reluctant to establish new theatrical troupes' (Najm, 91). It is important to realise that after these 'four years' mentioned by Najm, theatre in Arabic language reappeared in Egypt because of the immigration of Lebanese and Syrian troupes.

With their awareness of the fact that theatre is welcomed by the Egyptian regime as long as plays are confined to entertain without any political critique, both Syrian and Lebanese troupes came to Egypt. However, although both produced apolitical theatre, they performed different types of plays. Whittingham claims:

The two immigrant theatre movements in Egypt created two quite different trends as a result of their different origins. [...] the Syrians were not involved in Egyptian political movements, and consequently their theatrical activities became pure commercial enterprises. The Beiruti movement offered Arabic translations of European "high culture"—Shakespeare, Cornille, Racine, etc. [The Syrian] Qabbani's theatre developed the musical in which the play is only a vehicle for the star singer. (Whittingham, 14)

In addition to adopting al-Naqqash's formula of mixing comedy and singing with loose reductions of European comic plots, these productions turned plays such as Corneille's *Horace* and Racine's *Mithridate* into melodrama by added exaggerated emotive scenes, which seemed to suit Arabic/Egyptian spectators' taste. The common feature of all these performances is the increasing decline of language which cannot be compared to Sannua's witty dialogues.

### **‘Egyptianness’: The emergence of nationalism**

Moving towards Egyptian theatre’s independence from borrowing the themes of Western plays seemed to be an equivalent to the Egyptians’ effort to get their political and military freedom from British occupation. By the end of 1910s a group of Egyptian youths started to write original plays after spending years in European countries. While Muhammad Taimur and Tawfik al-Hakim came back after a period of study in France, the poet Ahmed Shawki was exiled to Spain by Britain between 1914 and 1920 because of his poetry which was seen by the occupation as a sign of hostility. At this moment in Egyptian history, the opposition against the British occupation was reaching one of its peaks, which is known as the 1919 Revolution led by Sa’d Zaghlul. Panayiotis Vatikiotis claims:

[T]he explosion of the native uprising engulfed the whole country and was surprising perhaps to some in its bitterness. Hardship and poverty pushed the fellah to rebellion. Frustrated aspirations and bitter resentment prompted the new class of lay educated Egyptian professionals and administrators, as well as landowners, to lead the lower classes of townsmen and peasants in a national revolt. (Vatikiotis, 176-7)

This revolution crystallised earlier phases of resistance against the British presence in Egypt, led by men such as Mostafa Kamel and Mohamed Farid since the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>164</sup> Coinciding with these waves of nationalistic activities, an enlightening movement was being shaped by intellectuals and scholars who belong to different specialisations, including religious study. The kernel of this movement was the insistence on using critical minds to investigate all aspects of Egyptian society by raising a major question: who are the Egyptians? Many answers were suggested in order to define the complicated identity of Egypt as a mixture of Pharaonic, Arabic, Islamic, African, and even Asian features.

In this respect, all these cultural roots were seen as a kind of richness rather than discrepancy of what was called ‘Egyptianness’ on which Berque comments by claiming:

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<sup>164</sup> The words of the current Egyptian national anthem are based on one of Kamel’s speeches, within which he insists on Egypt’s right to get its freedom.

This slogan was destined to assume great emotional and polemical importance, even up to our own day. *Misriya* was held to define the Egyptian people in relation to their Pharaonic forebears, their Mediterranean neighbours and their Arab kindred. It is not surprising that a literature of this sort should express primarily a sense of distinctiveness. (Berque, 352)

It is important to realise that claiming 'Egyptianness' as an answer to the question of identity during the first decades of the twentieth century was a revival of what Orabi's 1882 Revolution underscored when Egyptian officials denied the Khedive's favouring of their Turkish colleagues who worked in the Egyptian army. Amal Harakah argues:

Flashes of the Egyptian identity have gradually increased since the French Expedition to Egypt (1798-1801). The second flash of this identity occurred by the beginning of the Orabic Revolution when Orabi and his comrades insisted on adding the adjective 'the Egyptian' to their names as a surname. (Harakah, 117)

It is understood that nations usually attempt to define their own identities in times of crisis, especially when a different culture is accompanied by a military subjugation. It is also predictable that some of the descriptions of Egypt's distinctions can be jingoistic. However, just like Sannua, most of these nationalistic reformers studied in Europe and returned to criticise some of what the vast majority of Egyptians saw as unchangeable beliefs. Harakah argues that 'the encounters between Eastern and Western cultures provoked some prominent Egyptian scientists and thinkers to question cultural aspects of Egyptian society by comparing these aspects with those of Western countries' (Harakah, 19). The most significant feature of this critique of Egyptian society is that while most European countries, especially Britain and France, were seen by the vast majority of the Egyptians as a symbol of imperialism, many Egyptian intellectuals praised specific features of Western culture. Qasim Amin (1863 - 1908) is a perfect example of these Egyptian reformers. Because of his aristocratic and wealthy family, Amin was able to encounter both English and French cultures through education in Egypt and at the University of Montpellier. Known as the first advocate of the rights of Egyptian women, Amin wrote *Tahrir al-Mar'aa* (1899) and *al-Mar'aa al-Jadida* (1900), whose titles

respectively mean the *Emancipation of Women* and *The New Woman*. Most of Amin's thoughts were harshly criticised by a large number of Egyptian reactionaries.<sup>165</sup>

As part of such a search for an Egyptian identity and the fight against the occupation, al-Hakim wrote *al-Deif al-Thakil* (1919). The literal translation of the title, *The Unwelcomed Guest*, suggests an apparent comment on the British intervention in Egypt. In 1927, Shawki wrote his verse play: *Masraa' Cleopatra*,<sup>166</sup> within which he portrays Cleopatra as a patriotic queen. In addition, and despite the Roman army's invasion of Egypt, the finale of the play is a prophecy of the future defeat of the Romans. After Cleopatra's suicide, the Great Priest Anubis addresses the Roman army: 'I swear that you did not open Egypt, but you opened a grave for Rome' (Shawki, 117). Because of its classical form of poetry and archaic language, Shawki's play did not appeal to the vast majority of the Egyptian audience, most of which were illiterate. The metaphorical representation of the current situation in Egypt, nevertheless, was too obvious to be missed. Although the text of al-Hakim's play is lost, it can be predicted that its language was more accepted by Egyptian spectators than Shawki's plays. In his later works, al-Hakim managed to strike a compromise between Egyptian dialect and formal Arabic in what he called the third language, which became one of his plays' distinctive features.

If the significance of both *Masraa' Cleopatra* and *al-Deif al-Thakil* is that they retrieve the political role of Egyptian theatre, which was initiated by Sannua five decades earlier, Taimur's plays adopted social criticism. Berque claims:

Taimur's first play, *Al-'usfur fi'l-qafs* (The Caged Sparrow), was [...] first written in classical Arabic and then rewritten in dialect. [...] He wrote a comedy '*Abd al-Sattar Effendi*'.<sup>167</sup> It was a failure, because –according to that pious biographer, his own brother – it 'lacked music and décolleté'. (Berque, 348)

Berque's observation draws our attention to two important points. Firstly, as the playwright's brother<sup>168</sup> suggests, Music and songs as an essential component of

<sup>165</sup> For More Information, see Amin 1992.

<sup>166</sup> Literally, *The Death of Cleopatra*.

<sup>167</sup> Both plays were written in 1918. Effendi is one of the Turkish titles of respect which were valid in Egypt until the 1950s when they were officially prohibited. However, they are still occasionally utilised to show respect.

<sup>168</sup> Mahmoud Taimur was also an author who wrote short stories and plays.

the formula initiated by al-Naqqash and adopted later by Sannua were still attracting Egyptian spectators.<sup>169</sup> Secondly, Taimur rewrote his first play in colloquial language in order to fit the taste of the vast majority of the Egyptian audience, especially regarding plays with social subject matters.

Such an experimental aspect of Taimur's work reflects on the debate amongst Egyptian academics and critics about the level of language, which authors must utilise in literature, including dramatic texts. These critical discussions seemed to be an aspect of the first decades of the twentieth century. Abd al-Monem Ismail claims:

Egyptian scholars and men of letters engaged in never-ending discussions on literary criticism and economic, social and political theories; perhaps for the first time in Egyptian history men like Lutfi es Sayyed and Tâhâ Husain began to consider, and even attack, social defects and to demand social and political reform. This was the starting-point of introspective self-criticism, and later led to a remarkable line of development in contemporary Egyptian literature. (Ismail 1967, 47)

The most important aspect of Ismail's claim is his underlining of the manifestations of reforming thoughts not only as *themes* of literature, but also, and most importantly, as a *means* of developing literature itself, which can be seen later regarding the emergence of metadramas as a result of the search for Egyptian theatre's uniqueness. Moreover, it seems that including literary and theatrical criticism within Egyptian metadramas in the 1960s, as a metatheatrical method of reforming theatre has ancestors within the Egyptian drama other than *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*.

Between 1919 and 1920 Taimur wrote *Mohakamat Moa'lefi al-Rewayat al-Tamthileia*,<sup>170</sup> which is a mixture of narrative and dialogues, where the latter occupy the bulk of the work. This novel/play consisted of a series of imaginary tribunals where Egyptian and Arabic playwrights, directors and actors are the defendants. Although Taimur himself is one of the suspects who are present in the court, *Mohakamat Moa'lefi al-Rewayat al-Tamthileia* ends before he is trialled. The judges are Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, Corneille, and Racine,

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<sup>169</sup> This formula was adopted by many Egyptian troupes, which were established as extensions of Syrian and Lebanese migrant companies.

<sup>170</sup> *The Trial of Playwrights*.

while Edmond Rostand is the prosecutor. While French playwrights are the vast majority of the authority in the Taimur's court, which can be understood on the grounds of the Egyptian playwright's education in France, Shakespeare is the chairman of judges. The following dialogue represents the trial of the playwright and producer Farah Anton:

SHAKESPEARE: What is your name?

ANTON: Farah Anton.

SHAKESPEARE: what is your nationality?

ANTON: Syrian by birth, Egyptian by work, and I spent few years in the US. (Taimur *Mohakamat*, 75)

As this short conversation suggests, because the action takes place in a court, Taimur is able to adopt this documentary approach to inform his reader/audience about Farah. Then the trial takes the form of criticising Farah's work:

ROSTAND: Farah Effendi Anton deformed old vaudevilles by translating it in half-colloquial half-official Arabic. In addition he mixed this language with Syrian jokes and strange words. [...]

RACINE: (*Interrupting after writing a note*). Weird! Extremely weird!

ROSTAND: Yes, respectful judges. Moreover, Farah Effendi distributed very strange flyers that deceive the audience. [...]

CORNILLE: (*Interrupts*) Do you have a copy of these ads? (*After reading on the flyers ROSTAND handed to him*). Aargh! [...]

ROSTAND: Furthermore, because Farah Effendi cannot write half a line of verse, he translated lyrics into an ugly prose. Have you ever known, respectful judges, about an operetta with prose songs?

GOETHE: (*Shouting*). This is too much! This is too much! (Taimur *Mohakamat*, 77-9)

Taimur's work's critique of the quality of Anton's translation and the latter's insistence on including singing within his plays is understandable on the grounds of the Egyptian dramatist's condemnation of adaptation in general and the adoption of the commercial formula in particular. In addition, *Mohakamat Moa'lefi al-Rewayat al-Tamthileia* blames Anton, as a producer, for what seem unethical ways of advertisement that include lies in order to attract spectators.

It is hard to affirm whether Taimur was influenced by *The Frogs*, but the multilingual Egyptian playwright was able to read Aristophanes' play in its



French, German or English translations. In his comment on Taimur's harsh criticism of contemporary Egyptian theatre, Berque surprisingly claims that the Egyptian playwright was 'lamenting the decadence of the theatre, which, in fact, was not yet born, and which he himself was helping to bring to birth' (Berque, 349). It seems that Berque's surprise ignores the reformatory purpose of Taimur's work, in which discussions of theatrical matters are a way to rectify the defects of his country's contemporary theatre. Put differently, regardless of the history of theatre practice, literary and theatrical criticism is the metatheatrical method by which playwrights put the problems of the theatre industry on stage. Here, it can be asked: why did not Taimur write his work in a complete theatrical form? Firstly, as a critic, Taimur published these series of tribunals as articles that take this hybrid narrative-dramatic structure. Secondly, and most importantly, if original imaginary plays were suffering from the audience disinterest, it seems hard for a play whose subject matter is the state of current Egyptian theatre to attract spectators, especially when the popular form of theatre, which they prefer, is fiercely attacked.

Another example of these early attempts to include literary criticism within Egyptian dramatic texts is al-Hakim's *Pygmalion* (1942). However, unlike both Sannua and Taimur, al-Hakim confines his discussion to the aesthetic matter of the relationship between life and art. Even the Goddess Venus seems to envy human artists because they can create eternal works of art. Venus wonders: 'What is the power of art that enables the mortal artist to create immortal creatures?' (al-Hakim, n.d. 36). When Galatea is turned into a human being, she loses her virtue as a flawless and immortal sculpture. Therefore Pygmalion regrets his prayer for Gods to bestow life to his artistic work. Thus, the discussions in *Pygmalion* repeatedly affirm that art is better than life because of its perfection and eternity. Such a claim recalls the Father's argument in *Six Characters*. Therefore, it is understood that Badawi argues: 'Al-Hakim's major contribution to Egyptian Arabic drama [...] is the philosophical dimension he added to it and for which he was partly indebted to the *avant-garde* European dramatists whose work he had come to know in Paris, notably Luigi Pirandello' (Badawi 2003, 223).

With his awareness of the difficulty of attracting the audience of commercial plays to watch these philosophical and aesthetic discussions, al-Hakim claims earlier that he writes his plays for reading rather than being

produced. Whittingham explains: 'Following the failure of his first major play, *The Cave People*, which opened the first National Theatre Company season in 1935, he turned his back on drama as a performed art, and devoted himself to writing plays for a reading public' (Whittingham, 15). Most probably, al-Hakim's claim was just a defensive justification for the audience reluctance to watch his plays. Although these 'plays for a reading public' have been regularly produced by the Egyptian governmental theatre since the middle of 1950s onward, it seems that al-Hakim's claim was turned into a notorious description of a group of his plays to distinguish them from his later plays with social themes. Abdel-Aziz Hammouda argues:

Critics begin either by outright refusal to accept the classification or by a simple attempt to establish the value of his works as dramas of intellect. Even after an active career of fifty years he has never really shaken off his preoccupation with intellectual struggle as the core of his dramatic conflict. (Hammouda 1979, 602)

Hammouda's observation indirectly draws our attention to the harmful consequences of the dominance of commercial theatre in the first half of the twentieth century.

Realising the difficulty of changing Egyptian spectators' preferences is crucial to understanding the significance of the Egyptian theatre since the middle of the 1950s. Roger Allen argues:

For, by the turn of the century one can already see an obvious split in the medium of theatre performance between the essentially comic fare that is expressed in the spoken language of the audience and the more serious, literary intentions of those who aspire to a higher form of art performed in the written language of the cultural heritage of Arabic, a theatrical mode that is accompanied by interludes of music and singing. Of these two it is the comic that has always proved the more popular, a fact that continues to arouse the complaints of the theatre establishment in Egypt. (Allen 2002, 199)

Allen's notice about the prosperity of comedy can explain the commercial success of the star actors Naguib al-Rihani (1889–1949) and Ali al-Kassar

(1887–1957). However, melodramatic plays with the leading actor Yusif Wahbi (1897–1982) were also popular.

Compared to such popularity of comic and melodramatic productions, which were based on adapted European plays, the effect of authentic Egyptian plays on the audience seemed marginal. Metawie argues:

In the 1930s and 1940s, although playwrights such as Shawki, Abaza,<sup>171</sup> al Hakim wrote original drama which was not translated or adapted from any European play, these plays did not change the nature of Egyptian theatre as a totally non-intellectual, commercial enterprise (Metawie, 135).

Nothing can better prove the dominance of both farces and melodramas than the failure of al-Hakim's *Ahl al-Kahf*<sup>172</sup> (1933) to impress an audience. When Badawi claims that 'because the commercial theatre had for long time been providing a regular diet of cheap farces and sensational melodrama, the audience at the large Opera House Theatre, where it [*Ahl al-Kahf*] was shown, failed to appreciate it' (Badawi 2005, 27), he defends al-Hakim's play by blaming spectators' taste.

When Nevill Barbour distinguishes between two different approaches to adapting European plays in Egypt in the period between 1875 and 1933, he defines two distinctive phases. Firstly, old texts such as Shakespeare's and Molière's were amateurishly transformed in order to fit the audience's preferences by adding Arabic songs. Later, modern European plays were adapted by giving them a sense of locality with superficial changes of the place of action and names of characters (Barbour, 991-2). Barbour's claim is not precise because both phases can be found not only within Sannua's plays, but also in al-Naqqash's works since his first play *al-Bakhil*, where 'a sense of locality' can be found adjacent to 'superficial changes of the place of action and names of characters'. The real change that Barbour does not mention is that the common feature of both farces and melodramas, which shaped the mainstream in the Egyptian theatre until the late 1940s, was the troupes' dependence on their leading actors to attract spectators. One of the consequences of this phenomenon was altering dramatic texts in order to extend the roles of these star actors, which usually ignores dramatic possibilities and reason.

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<sup>171</sup> Aziz Abaza.

<sup>172</sup> *The People of the Cave*.

As a result, those who undertook the process of modifying European plays in order to satisfy star actors started to feel that their work was more than adaptation, which led to an ethical problem regarding the breach of the copyrights of European playwrights by Egyptian practitioners. Berque argues:

In the context of the time, adaptation was itself a form of invention, and the prevailing one. On posters, a play's title was almost invariably followed by the discreet reference: 'adapted by...', *muqtabas min*.<sup>173</sup> The time came when one such adapter, 'Abbas Allam, lost patience and replaced the formula by another: *bi-qalam*, 'by the pen of...' which was somewhat of a euphemism. (Berque, 350)

Therefore, this breach of the authorship of original texts is considered by Metawie as one of the major features of Egyptian theatre since the 1919 Revolution. Metawie claims that

[I]t is evident that plagiarism, the star system, entertainment and commercialism, were dominant values in Egypt's pre-1952 theatre. Therefore, it could be said that theatre was isolated, or at least that it did not contribute substantially to the movement to Egyptianize the culture during the period from 1919 to 1952. (Metawie, 137)

However, it seems that Metawie ignores the fact that the popularity of these commercial theatres began to decline by the end of the 1940s. Yusif Idris argues that 'it was not surprising that Yusif Wahbi had cancelled one night of his performances because it was attended by five spectators only' (Idris 1977, 17). This decrease of the attendance can be explained by two factors; firstly, the financial crises that seemed to affect a large sector of the potential audience of this specific type of adapted plays. Secondly, even spectators who could afford the admission fees of theatre were attracted by cinema, especially with an increasingly improving Egyptian movie industry. During these years, both melodramatic and comic scenes included songs as a common feature. Consequently, al-Rihani, al-Kassar, and Wahbi extended their popularity by playing the lead roles in several movies.

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<sup>173</sup> 'Adapted' is not a precise translation of the connotations of the Arabic word 'muqtabas'. The latter means: inspired by, which suggests a less relationship with the original play. Put differently, the writer who describes his/her work as 'muqtabas' indirectly claims a high degree of authorship and creativity as if he/she only has borrowed the main line of the plot in order to create an authentic play.

### **The golden era: 1952-1970**

The years between the late fifties and the end of the sixties are usually described as the most prosperous period of the Egyptian theatre. In addition to professional, well revised, and loyal translations from different foreign languages, the works of a large number of Egyptian playwrights were performed to increasingly enthusiastic audiences. Ken Whittingham affirms:

Between the mid-1950s and 1970 Egyptian theatre and Egyptian dramatic literature had its golden age, playing an active part in the whole process of political and social debate. In that short period well over a hundred plays were written and performed, and a dozen writers emerged as competent dramatists. (Whittingham, 16)

There are two historical causes that account for what seems to be a sudden boom in arts in all cultural activities in general and theatre in particular. Firstly, the political regime after the 1952 Revolution showed a high degree of respect to all arts. The politicians' discourse about the significant role of arts in building Egypt was accompanied by practical measures that helped in promoting theatre. Secondly, with the spread of communist thoughts, many young Egyptian playwrights— including many who belonged to the disadvantaged social classes—assumed the role of the voice of the vast majority of Egyptian people rather than superior intellectuals who attempt to raise the audience's low taste. Both reasons overlapped for foregrounding theatre as a sign of cultural, social, and political change towards the 'new Egypt'.

There are historical cases of the state's support for theatre in Egypt before 1952. Apart from Khedive Ismail's patronage of theatre as a sign of modernisation, the Egyptian government established the national theatre troupe in 1935. Sayed al-Emam argues that this measure was 'to save the members of private companies from unemployment after the bankruptcy of these companies because of the financial crisis' (al-Emam, 17). Badawi suggests a different reason for governmental intervention as he argues that 'the government-financed National Troupe was formed, under the direction of the poet Khalil Mutran, in order to serve the cause of the serious theatre' (Badawi 2005, 27), which partly contradicts the widely repeated claim that recognizing theatre's importance started after the revolution in 1952. However, compared to any

previous support for theatre, the state's backing of theatre post-1952 is unprecedented in many respects.

One of the most remarkable consequences of the revolution in 1952 was the establishment of the General Organization for Theatre, Music and Folk Arts in 1960. As part of the ministry of culture, this organization owned all theatres in which different troupes were assigned to deliver specific types of performances. The National Theatre, for example, was dedicated to grand productions of classics and the heritage of international theatre as well as plays of contemporary Egyptian eminent playwrights. Differently, The Pocket Theatre was responsible for introducing experimental plays and avant-garde trends. In addition, many directors who graduated from artistic institutes were sent to study abroad. The most famous examples are Sa'd Ardash and Karam Mutaweh as both returned from Italy to become very influential on Egyptian theatre, whether by their works as directors or their academic role in teaching at the Academy of Art in Cairo. For instance, Ardash's project to establish a governmental company in order to produce modern Western plays led to the establishment of the Pocket Theatre in 1962.

On the grounds of the socialist regime's responsibility for employing all the graduates of higher education, the members of these troupes are mainly recruited from the alumni of the Higher Institute of Theatre Arts, which became part of the Academy of Arts in the 1960s.<sup>174</sup> In addition to the General Organization for Theatre, which absorbed professional practitioners in Cairo, The General Organization for Culture's Palaces gave the amateurs, all around the country, their chance to practice theatre as a hobby. On one hand, all these measures guaranteed the regime's authority over theatre, which can be seen as part of its general policy of dominating all social and economic aspects of the country. Rami Ginat argues: 'The decrees of July 1961 emphasised state ownership of enterprises and the state's control of all major economic enterprises or properties' (Ginat, 15). On the other hand, the regime enhanced practitioners' conditions financially and improved their social image as significant participants in building the new Egypt.

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<sup>174</sup> It was established in 1930 as The Higher Institute of Acting Arts, which closed after one year to reopen in 1944 with the same name. It got its current name after adding two more departments: the Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism and the Department of Theatrical Décor. In addition to the theoretical study, the educational policy of the Institute relies on the joint practical cooperation among the three departments for producing several performances at the end of each semester.

Hala Nassar argues: 'After the 1952 revolution, a new generation of dramatists dominated the scene, and they were supported by the new regime, which recognized drama as a powerful tool of cultural propaganda' (Nassar, 391). On one hand, a large number of plays were written only to celebrate the revolution, and some playwrights exaggeratedly flattered the political regime. These plays are nearly forgotten and seem impossible to be considered by contemporary directors. On the other hand, reducing this prominent period of Egyptian theatre's history to a method of propaganda is not fair to either the regime or practitioners. Here, it seems important to mention that many playwrights authentically praised and supported the revolution's initial economic and political reform. Gradually, when they realised the regime's breach of individual freedom, these playwrights stopped their praise of the revolution. Some playwrights went further and risked their own security by criticizing, although usually in an indirect way, many aspects of the political system.

### **The search for identity: Egyptian subject matters**

Changing spectators' preferences for the commercial trivial theatre cannot be achieved by propaganda plays, but because the members of the audience saw themselves within the works of a new generation of playwrights, who managed to reflect on their own society. Similar to the 1920s, the 1950s witnessed a condemnation of adapted plays because of their triviality and low artistic quality. In addition, if this type of commercial plays was seen as a sign of the British occupation during the second decade of the twentieth century, after the revolution they became a symbol of a previous era when Western dominance over theatre was the equivalent of Western political and military interventions. What distinguishes the revival of Egyptian theatre's search for its own identity in the 1950s is spectators' participation in it by enthusiastic reception. Whittingham explains:

It should be remembered that there had been no successful dramatic literature prior to the 1950s. So the first step taken by writers such as Nu'man Ashur and Yusif Idris was to sweep away the fantasy of "high culture" theatre and bring everyday life onto the stage. For the first time workers and peasants were depicted with understanding and respect instead of contempt and buffonery [sic]. (Whittingham, 17)

Just like the revolution itself, theatre declared its respect for a big sector of Egyptian people who used to be absent from plays or marginally and shallowly represented. Two of the 1960s playwrights whose plays are still able to attract both directors and spectators in the 2000s commented on such a change of theatre. Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawy claimed that 'the revolution revealed the heroic nature of our ordinary people, who always play a crucial role in shaping the future' (qtd. in Bahgat, web). Sa'd el-Deen Wahba argued: 'In my plays, I portrayed Egyptian peasants has neither laughable nor pitiful. Instead, the characters of peasants within my plays are able to object, rebel, and forgive at the right moment' (qtd. in Bahgat, web). This trend was strongly praised by both audience and critics.

The dramatic texts of emerging playwrights such as Mikhail Roman, Mahmoud Diab, and Ali Salem represented the transformation of Egyptian society. In addition, many Egyptian novelists, including Naguib Mahfouz and Idris started to write plays. Similarly, poets such as Salah abd al-Sabour and abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawy, and journalists such as Lotfy al-kholy and Anis Mansour participated in the increasing prosperity of Egyptian theatre. The Egyptian academic and playwright Hammouda argues that, despite the critical debates about the production of Tawfik al-Hakim's *Yatalie al-Shgara* (*The Tree Climber*), in 1962, the play promptly became the least popular of al-Hakim's repertoire. According to Hammouda, the play is one of the most successful attempts of Arabic drama to adopt the techniques of the theatre of the absurd. Nevertheless, the Egyptian spectators, whose daily life is occupied by searching for basic needs of food, freedom of expression, and democratic rights, are unlikely to be attracted to metaphysic representation (Hammouda 1998, 34-35). It can be said that when theatre changed, spectators' taste followed it.

### **Theatre form against colonialism:**

In the 1950s, two discrepant drives dominated Egyptian society: the calls for retrieving the roots of its own culture and the encouragement of modernisation. Alongside the efforts of building Egypt economically, socially, and militarily, upholding heritage was backed by an increasing sense of nationality resulting from the revolution of 1952, as it ended the British occupation of Egypt. Furthermore, this trend was hugely provoked by the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956, followed by the so-called Tripartite



Aggression when Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt. As a result, an increasing feeling of challenging the West was strengthened by official slogans affirming the need to resist the international imperialism. Commenting on this conflict Nasser claims: 'For the first time in 600 years the country enjoyed full independence without any foreign or English control. [...] The campaign for independence developed into a war of independence' (qtd. in Shemesh, 150). In this postcolonial ambiance, patriotic calls for creating pure Egyptian theatre that represents the Egyptian identity soared.

In general, Egyptian literature and art were demanded by both academics and critics to express this overriding nationalism. Sasson Somekh argues that 'the Suez war not only heralded a new era in Arab politics, one of the intense nationalism and growing radicalization, but also marked a new period in Arabic literature: one of engagement and greater identification with national causes' (Somekh, 172). However, despite the huge change in plays' subject matters, the form of both writing and directing these Egyptian plays with local themes was influenced by the contemporary practice of Western theatre.

This Western influence was a result of a remarkable approach to translating foreign plays, which was accompanied by the return of artists, especially directors, after finishing their studies of theatre in Europe. According to Idris, the three major influences on the technique of Egyptian theatre in the 1950 and the 1960s come from Chekhov, Ibsen, and modern American theatre (Idris 1977, 17-18). Ironically, Idris ignores the influences of Brecht, Pirandello, and the Theatre of the Absurd on Egyptian playwrights in general and on Idris himself in particular. This observation could be understood on the grounds of the fierce socio-political and cultural debates, not to say conflicts, between the advocates of modernity and proponents of traditions.

With the rise of the calls for resisting Western attempts to reoccupy Egypt, theatre was demanded to underscore Egypt's own identity through more than content that commented on topical political and social arguments. Critical writings raised concerns about the form of writing and directing in terms of its patriotic responsibilities. In other words, while Western socialist plays were accepted, the use of Western techniques by Egyptian playwrights started to be seen as a sign of cultural submission to imperialism. Dina Amin argues:

During the 1950s and 1960s, the "identity" and "authentic character" of the Egyptian stage became catchphrases in intellectual debates across all literary genres and performance arts. The anti-colonial struggle for self-determination was articulated in cultural and artistic production as a search for the authentic, independent self and nation that would need neither reference to, nor approval from, the colonial other. (Amin *The Arab Studies*, 91)

Thus, by the middle of the 1960s, the calls for the so-called pure Egyptian theatre focused on the form.

These attempts revolved around the claim that popular forms of entertainment such as the work of al-Samir, al-Hakawaty, and al-Maddah,<sup>175</sup> could be the roots of a modern Egyptian theatre. Similar to khayal al-Del, Karagöz and al-Mahabbazeen, the common feature of al-Samir, al-Hakawaty, and al-Maddah was an anti-illusionist nature as the borders between performers and spectators were removed. By their nature, these semi-theatrical types of entertainment do not hide their artifice or theatricality, which is one of the essential features of metatheatre. Simultaneously, the translation of the texts of playwrights such as Brecht, Pirandello and Ionesco informed Egyptian playwrights about European metadramas in general and critical metatheatre in particular. It seems that metatheatre was the magical solution to combine the anti-illusionist feature of Egyptian quasi-theatrical types and anti-Aristotelian plays of European dramas. Furthermore, influenced by European *critical* metadrama, the call for pure Egyptian theatre extends beyond Egyptian playwrights' utilization of traditional forms within their plays to become one of the topics of literary and theatrical criticism within dramatic texts. I argue that, since the 1960s, Egyptian critical metadramas have manifested different degrees of mixing modern European and traditional Egyptian influences.

It seems useful to remember that the search for an Egyptian theatre's identity in the 1960s was induced and accompanied by prevailing discourses of both politicians and the media, which persistently called for maintaining and highlighting the country's political and cultural independency. Metawie argues that playwrights' attempts to find an authentic Egyptian theatre 'were highly stimulated by Nasser's calls for the end of the Western monopoly of knowledge in art and science and the necessity to embody a genuinely Egyptian character

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<sup>175</sup> These traditional forms of entertainment will be explored in the next chapter through my investigation of the call for pure Egyptian theatre in the 1960s by Idris and al-Hakim.

in works of art and literature' (Metawie, 200). However, today, nearly six decades after these claims, similar discourse about opposing Western theatre's dominance is recycled, whether by theorists or by dramatic characters of critical metadramas. Partly, this observation can be considered a superficial imitation of, or nostalgia for the jingoistic momentum of the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, it seems that the negative image of Western influence that preoccupied Egyptian society in the postcolonial era continued in the succeeding decades. It can be argued that the wide spread of the American culture might be seen as the replacement of the British military occupation, especially when we realise that the concept of the West in the collective mind in Egypt combines the United States and most European countries. In addition, and most importantly, because of their huge interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the vast majority of Egyptians consider the American support for Israel a continuation of the British Empire's role in the establishment of Israel. However, the reasons for the appearance of metatheatrical methods, including literary and theatrical criticism, within Egyptian theatre in the next half of the twentieth century, are not limited to the search for identity. There are more political and economic causes for urging Egyptian playwrights to adopt these methods since the 1960s onward.

### **1970s: the decline of state theatre**

In the 1970s, Egypt witnessed a number of influential events such as the death of Nasser (1970), October War (1973), decisions of economic openness (1974), the uprising against economic crisis (1977), and the peace agreement with Israel (1979). It seems that commenting on the consequences of these political and social happenings took priority over aesthetic matters. However, socio-political and economic circumstances of the 1970s seem to account for the crisis of theatre in the following decades, on which a large number of playwrights comment within their metadramas.

The most striking aspect of al-Sadat's epoch is the neglect of public theatre, especially compared to the governmental patronage of the public theatre in Nasser's presidency. Whittingham confirms the gap between the two eras as he declares 'The number of productions and the quality of texts selected in the state theatres has seriously declined. In the mid-1960s, the National Theatre, the most prestigious of the state theatres, would offer about

twelve major productions a year; in 1975 it presented only one' (Whittingham, 19). While the preparation for the 1973 War against Israel was the regime's excuse for austerity, since the middle of the 1970s the so-called al-infitah al-iktisady (economic openness) has had catastrophic consequences on Egypt in general and on all cultural and artistic activities, including theatre, in particular. Galal Amin explains:

Much of the responsibility for the increase in Egypt's balance of payments deficit must therefore be attributed to the rise in the volume of imports, particularly consumer goods, and to the failure of exports to increase at a comparable rate. [...] But this tells only a small part of the story. Much more important was the failure of both agricultural and manufactured output to meet the increase in domestic demand for essential items. (Amin *Social Problems*, 431)

The consuming economic openness was proven to be a socially destructive policy that led to the decline of the public sector, including theatre, where most practitioners were employed during Nasser's era.

In addition, according to the vast majority of Egyptian social studies, this economic system created a new parvenu class whose demand for theatre was limited to trivial entertainment. 'Economically the "Open Door" policy allowed the decadent, parasitic "lumpen" bourgeoisie to flaunt their obscene affluence before the deserately [sic] poor masses. The style of Sadat [sic] himself reflects the vulgar nature of this nouveau riche' (Lachine, 4). To offer the entertainment demanded by this new social class, it seems that Egyptian theatre relapsed to pre-1952 commercial plays. The new private performances were based on a loose structure of jokes, songs, and dances. Since then the private sector of Egyptian theatre has been considered a notorious phenomenon and has been accused of indulging popular taste.

Apart from the artistic value of productions, most private companies are more effectively conducted and organized than governmental theatres. In 1969, Farouk Abd al-Kader observes:

Last season, several private companies were established. [...] Some of these companies achieved more revenue than any of governmental theatres. [...] However, it is surprising that the latter sought to compete with the commercial theatre by using

its weapons of star actors, sexual discourse, farcical performance, and low comedy. (Abd al-Kader, 191-2)

The most striking point of Abd al-Kader's observation is the fact that the commercial formula of trivial theatre did not revive with the middle of 1970s. Perhaps it witnessed its boom after al-Sadat's economic openness and neglect of public theatre, but the reoccurrence of commercial plays seemed to be a result of the defeat of 1967. A cultural equivalent to the military corruption, which itself was an indication of many unspoken political and social problems.

### **The superficial prosperity: Mubarak's era**

#### **a. The destruction of public theatre**

If the image of Mubarak's presidency is to be drawn by plays in general and metadramas in particular, we can consider his era as a sparkling appearance that hides disasters. In economic terms, for instance, there was a continuous official discourse about increasing prosperity while the vast majority of Egyptian people were suffering from poverty.

While the number of the public sector's performances noticeably increased compared to al-Sadat's time, most of these performances were very poor, whether in terms of their artistic quality or budgets. The theatrical productions of the Governmental Organization for Theatre were challenged by two inseparable aspects: administrative obstacles and corruption.

1988 was a crucial year for the Egyptian art in general and its theatre activities in particular. Firstly, seventeen years after the burning of the Egyptian opera house (1869-1971), a new opera house was opened in Cairo (*Egypt State Information Service, Web*). Secondly, Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre (CIFET) was inaugurated with fierce debates between supporters and opponents. In 2010, its twenty-second session was the last one to be held (*Cultural Development Fund, Web*). Although the festival had popularity among young practitioners and academics, many contradicted it, especially those who work in very bad conditions, including low budgets. The festival's focus on visual performances provoked many of the old practitioners to complain that the cost of hosting foreign companies during any ten-day session of the festival could be utilised to produce a large number of Egyptian plays. Apart from many doubts about financial matters, there were claims that

both the opera house and the festival were serving a remarkably tiny sector of tax payers with irrelevant artistic or financial outcomes.

It is important to realise that although many problems of the public sector's theatre mushroomed during Mubarak's regime, their roots can be traced back to the eras of al-Sadat and Nasser. For instance, as an unprofitable service, the admission prices to these performances were remarkably low, which means that even if spectators filled the auditoria, it was impossible for any play to cover its production's cost. Even the socialist system of the state's recruiting of the graduates of artistic institutes added to the problem of theatre. Because of the remarkably increasing number of employed artists, their salaries consumed a big part of theatres' budget. On the other hand, this waste of money did not mean the welfare of individual practitioners. In contrast, the low rate of fixed salaries of performers in the public troupes is one of the most repeated matters within any discussion of the problems of governmental theatre, especially compared to the continued rising in prices. Regarding the increasing financial burden of salaries on governmental organizations in general, Ragui Assaad explains

When the policy [guaranteeing employment in the public sector] was first instituted in the early 1960's, its impact was relatively limited because of the small numbers of eligible graduates, but, over the long-term, it has had major consequences for the Egyptian labour market and economy. (Assaad, 1)

In governmental theatre, this financial burden is accompanied by a long chain of bureaucratic procedures. Nehad Selaiha explains:

Karam Mutaweh<sup>176</sup> himself, the head of the theatre sector at the Ministry of Culture, admitted that bureaucracy had overrun the theatre organization, eating up four-fifths of its five million budget and putting the proverbial spanner in the works; it had become so stultified, so antiquated, he went on to say, that the only way to deal with it was dismantle it. (Selaiha 2003, 17)

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<sup>176</sup> Karam Mutaweh (1933-1996) was one of the most prominent directors and actors. He worked as the head of the public theatre sector in 1990 for one year before he resigned because of the futile bureaucratic system.

It is very common to watch directors and setting designers, especially youngsters, move from one office to another in order to get documents signed and stamped. This tiresome and time-consuming process is essential to the preparation for their productions. Yet, these practitioners feel lucky because there is a very long queue of other colleagues, who are waiting for a chance, which is unlikely to come.

That leads us to the corruption which rules the choosing of potential projects to be produced. Without any objective criteria, the head of the governmental organization for theatre can exploit his central and ultimate authority to define the productions of all public theatres. One infamous feature of this corruption is the managers' monopoly on productions of their theatres by allocating the bulk of budget to their own plays, which they direct.<sup>177</sup> In the last two decades, some of the reviewers extorted chances to direct or write plays by utilizing their journalistic criticism to threaten the head of the governmental theatre. The Egyptian critic Ahmed Abd al-Razek Abu al-Ela describes this new phenomenon that has increased the illness of Egyptian theatre, he argues:

Now we have a generation of critics who, overnight, discovered that they are playwrights. They convince directors by praising them. Then, their colleagues of reviewers celebrate their feeble texts. [...] In this time of degeneracy, these talentless critics, who suddenly became writers, obstruct the appearance of many real gifted young playwrights. (Abu al-Ela 2007, 12)

In such a chaotic context, it is predictable that youth practitioners struggle to grasp any opportunity to introduce their works. Although, many self-financing troupes were established by both amateur and semi-professional members to produce low-budget, or no-budget performances, they were not accepted to perform at governmental theatres. Selaiha argues that

There was no denying that a substantial body of theatrical talent, however amorphous and submerged, did exist outside the stuffy official establishments and needed an outlet and some form of care and nurturing. The theatrical organization in Egypt, however, in its present condition, is not qualified to give

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<sup>177</sup> It is important to realise that Egyptian theatres have no similar job to the artistic director. Therefore, these managers are supposed to be specifically assigned in order to facilitate the administrative process of production.

such care. Indeed, if these incipient fringe troupes are to realise their potential and bloom into a vigorous alternative theatre, on the western model, the state will have to revise its whole policy vis-a-vis the arts and its anachronistic machinery. (Selaiha 2003, 16-17)

Alternatively, some of these troupes succeeded in gaining an opportunity to perform at foreign culture centres in Egypt. Others managed to perform their plays for only one night at their universities as a students' activity. CIFET offered the meritorious plays of these troupes a slot to be performed for two nights in the period of the festival; a great chance to be watched by Egyptian, Arabic and foreign practitioners. Selaiha declares that 'for some artists the festival is the only chance of public exposure and they work very hard for it all year, paying dearly in terms of cash and time, even though they know they will only get a place on the outer margins' (Selaiha 2003, 15). That explains these troupes' angry reaction to the cancellation of the festival's session in 1990 because of the Gulf War. Since then, it has seemed hard for official organizations to ignore the existence of these troupes.

In 1992, al-Hanager, a new governmental theatre was established in order to embrace the works of those youths. With the absence of censorship, al-Hanager gave these troupes a wide horizon of freedom of expression compared to the rest of the public theatres. Moreover, through regular workshops and talks, the young practitioners had the chance to improve their qualities through first hand encounters with prominent directors including Peter Brook. Selaiha praises the role of this theatre house as she argues 'Over the years, Al-Hanager, under the direction of the indefatigable, enlightened and widely respected theatre academic and critic Huda Wasfi, has built a prestigious international reputation as a forum for new, daring experiments and an active incubator of new talents' (Selaiha 2008, web). On the other hand, throughout seventeen years until the theatre was closed to be refurbished, Wasfi occupied her position with complete control over the process of production.

Nothing can prove the catastrophic state of public theatre more than the General Organization for Culture's Palaces, which were established in Nasser's era. Despite its impressive name, its theatre houses gradually became poorer in terms of equipment and its budget of production, even compared to the big public theatres owned by the General Organization for Theater. By the middle of



the 1980s, as a result of the increasing number of the academic alumni, the big public theatres became unable to recruit them anymore. Gradually, academic artists, especially actors and actresses, sought to participate in the performances of the General Organization for Culture's Palaces where they usually play the major roles. That explains why the comparison between academic and non-academic practitioners is one of the matters raised within the Egyptian critical metadrama.

On 5 September 2005, Egyptian theatre was hit by the most catastrophic event within its history. During a performance at a theatre hall in Beni Suef's Cultural Palace, fifty-eight people were burned to death and tens were dangerously injured. The victims included actors, playwrights, directors, and spectators.<sup>178</sup> Hala Halim comments on the shameful governmental conduct; she observes:

Official responses were initially in keeping with the well-worn pattern of offering up an easy scapegoat. At first, the authorities tagged responsibility for the entire incident on a candle dropped on stage towards the end of the performance. Later, they went on to arrest eight minor officials from Beni Sweif, keeping them in custody on charges of negligence and/or second-degree murder, pending investigation' (Halim, Web).

Yet, several questions have not been answered about this disaster which became an icon of the governmental corruption and willful lack of care. These questions, as Halim concludes from the testimonies of several eye-witnesses', revolve around the following circumstances:

[T]he theatre being packed beyond capacity; a fire that spread from the candle in question to paper used in the décor, turning into a full-fledged conflagration on contact with an air-conditioning cable dangling from the ceiling; the disappearance of all but one of the Beni Sweif Cultural Palace employees present; breaking into a far-off room to get hold of a few fire extinguishers; the hour or so it took the first fire engine to arrive; the wait of about two hours before an ambulance showed up, and so on. (Halim, Web)

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<sup>178</sup> In addition to Nizar Samak, the editor of the anthologies *Masrahiat Misria*, two of the playwrights studied within the next chapter—Mo'men Abdu and Professor Mohsen Misilhi—were victims of this disaster. The latter, who got his PhD in Drama from the University of Kent, was one of my tutors at the Higher Institute of Theatre Arts in Egypt.

It was just after the revolution of 25 January 2011 when the Ministry of Culture declared that the fifth of September, the date of Beni Suef's accident, will be celebrated annually as the day of Egyptian theatre. This decision was a response to the insistence of a new established group called the Egyptian Theatre Practitioners which also calls for:

Considering the murdered of the incident as martyrs with the consequent rights, naming the theatres of the General Organization for Culture's Palaces after the victims' names, completing the medication of some injuries that, after ten years, still need a huge care and financial support, and opening new transparent and independent investigations of the catastrophe. (Shidid, Web)

These unique circumstances had their remarkable influences on the work of playwrights in general and on their raising of critical matters within their dramatic works in particular.

#### **b. The prosperity and fall of commercial theatre**

By the early 1980s, the era of Mubarak witnessed a restoration of Egyptian relationships with Arab countries. As a result, the number of the tourists from the Gulf States soared, which increased the demand for the commercial form of plays. As a touristic attraction, these plays were swiftly prepared by repeating naïve plots where the star actors invented their speeches within a frame of meaningless dances and songs. Because most of these plays depended on sketchy stories, the role of the playwrights was utterly reduced to a writer of jokes. Gradually, with the audience's boredom at the reiteration of a handful of plots, private companies started to utilise translated plays as a container of the same commercial formula of jokes, songs, and dances, including belly dancing. Ibrahim Hamada observes this new trend in the 1980 as he argues that 'The private sector depends on the brutal adaptation of translated plays' (Hamada 1988, 95). The director, playwright, and actor Khaled El-Sawy, who is one of the founders of independent and self-financing troupes in the 1990s, insists on the capitalist nature of producers as he claims:

Throughout the era of both al-Sadat and Mubarak, the theatre industry, with the exception of rare plays, established its prosperity on adopting a specific formula: apolitical plays in

which trite means are utilised in order to produce low entertainment. These trivial summer plays sought to attract tourists from Gulf countries and the Egyptians who work in Arabic countries. Consequently, artists turned into a tamed commodity dominated by greedy producers who lead them and theatre to an abyss. (El-Sawy, web)

It does not mean that the entire private sector adopts this trivial attitude. In contrast, Theatre of Art and Actor's Studio are two private and serious companies owned and conducted by the directors: Galal al-Sharqawy and Mohamed Sobhy respectively. Although al-Sharqawy directed some farcical plays, he is known for his political drama. Mohamed Sobhy cooperated with the playwright Lenin el-Ramly to produce many successful comedies before they artistically separated at the middle of the 1990s. The common feature of the shows of both Theatre of Art and Actor's Studio is that they are as reliant on the star actor to attract the audience as all private theatre. However, while Sobhy, as a director, avoids irrelevant trivia to the plots, al-Sharqawy's directions impose belly dancing and irrelevant jokes into his political plays, where political messages are usually limited to the idealistic protagonists' speeches.<sup>179</sup>

By the end of the 1990s, as a result of many factors such as the successive governments' corruption, and the decline of Arabic tourists' numbers, Egypt faced an economic crisis. Many of the private theatre companies became unable to make profits. Moreover, the mighty increase of Arabic television channels creates an unprecedented prosperity of Egyptian televised series, which were always highly demanded by viewers all over the Arab countries. Simultaneously, a new wave of comic movies revived Egyptian production of cinema after decades of decline against American movies. Martin Banham argues: 'The growing market for Egyptian TV soap operas and frothy films throughout the Arabic-speaking world gave these forms an economic and artistic prominence at the expense of the serious theatre' (Banham, 741). Thus, both TV shows and movies became very strong rivals of theatre in terms of attracting both spectators and actors.

Consequently, private theatre nearly disappeared, especially when most producers moved their investments towards television series and movies. On the other hand, theatres of the public sector, which used to suffer from the

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<sup>179</sup>For more information about the decline of governmental theatres since the late 1970s, see Zaki 34

prosperous commercial theatre, became more vulnerable, able to challenge neither television nor cinema. Some of the public theatres, especially The Comedy Theatre, started to imitate the formula of the private sector on the ground of attracting spectators. Because of their limited budgets, governmental theatres could only convince semi-famous practitioners. Although their salaries burdened the budget of production, they were not able to attract audiences. Thus, the public sector's attempts to copy private productions led to pale copies of commercial theatre whether financially or artistically.

In 2007, two attempts borrowed the pattern of commercial formula. Both ended up receiving harsh criticism from spectators and critics, especially with the constant complaints of youth practitioners who hopelessly wait for years to get a low-budget chance. One of the consequences of the disastrous artistic failure of these two performances was the actor and director Mohamed Sobhy's decision to cancel an agreed project of working on three plays for the governmental theatre; he declares: 'I won't step on the same stages where such a low quality of artists worked' (Sobhy, 4). Although Sobhy's words seem arrogant, they reflected most practitioners' disappointment at these two performances. Commenting on one of these plays, Sayed al-Emam criticises the discrepant policies of governmental theatre: 'It is surprising that the Ministry of Culture supports the concept and aesthetics of experimentation by holding an annual festival while it produces a commercial formula that recalls the shows of the private sector in the summers of Arabic tourism' (al-Emam, 17).

In general, Egyptian super stars of movies and television drama are commissioned by public theatres at the expense of producing other projects which have to be delayed because of the lack of money. However, when the productions of star actors receive critical appreciation, the managers of public theatre survive criticism. They claim that it is better to bring spectators to a big production rather than wasting budgets on a number of unpopular projects, regardless of critics' appreciation. One of these popular performances was *King Lear*, directed by Ahmad Abd al-Halim at the National Theatre in 2002, and successfully re-performed in 2009 at Miami Theatre, Cairo. Then, the leading actor Yehia al-Fakharany<sup>180</sup> declared that 'he is willing to perform the play

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<sup>180</sup> Al-Fakharany is one of the most prominent Egyptian actors whose popular works in cinema, television and theatre are usually praised by critics.

annually for two months according to an agreement with the manager of the National Theatre' ('Al-Fakharany Yahlom', 32). This hope did not become true.

Although these specific socio-political and economic contexts of each era had a crucial influence on including literary and theatrical criticism within Egyptian metadramas, there are common aspects that can be found throughout the second half of the twentieth century. For example, statutory censorship was one of the main challenges that faced Egyptian theatre for decades. Consequently, this problem is repeatedly mentioned by many playwrights within their critical metadrama, which will be explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five

### Critical metadrama in Egypt since 1960s: reforming Egyptian theatre through European form

After individual and scattered examples of plays, namely Sannua's *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* (1912), Taimur's *Mohakamat Moe'lefi al-Rewayat al-Tamthileia* (1920), and al-Hakim's *Pygmalion* (1942), Egyptian critical metadrama revived in the 1960s. This resurgence, I argue, has been motivated by the call for creating pure Egyptian theatre, which allegedly can be achieved by the revival of traditional forms of entertainment. However, most Egyptian metadramas reflect the remarkable influence of European critical metadrama, especially in terms of utilising the theatrical techniques of the play-within-a-play, parody, and intertextuality. Furthermore, there are many traces of the impact of European playwrights, especially Pirandello, Brecht and Ionesco, on a large number of Egyptian critical metadramas. Such an influence can be understood on the grounds of the increasing trend for translating, performing and studying Western plays in general and twentieth-century drama in particular. This trend was accompanied by the return of several Egyptian practitioners and scholars, who studied theatre in European countries. Before exploring specific aspects of European metadrama within Egyptian plays since the 1960s, it seems important to highlight the main channels for this influence.

Since the middle of the 1950s, many Western studies of theatre in general and of European playwrights of the twentieth century in particular became available to Arabic readers. While the translation of Allardyce Nicoll's *World Drama from Aeschylus to Anouilh* (1949) was published in five volumes in the 1950s, Raymond Williams' *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* was translated in 1963. Moreover, Nicoll's *Development of the Theatre* (1948), Craig's *On the Art of the Theatre*, and Sheldon Cheney's *The Theatre: Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting, and Stagecraft* (1949) were respectively translated by Driny Khashaba in 1958, 1960, and 1963.

Simultaneously, *al-Masrah*, a monthly magazine whose name literally means the theatre, played a crucial role in introducing modern and contemporary European theatre to Egyptian practitioners. The first issue was published in January 1964 and included a translation of *Waiting for Godot*.

Explaining how Egyptian playwrights were aware of foreign theatre, Badawi claims:

In the fifties they had heard of, and some of them had seen or read, Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. [...] Brecht became a dominant presence, for ideological no less than for artistic reason: he is one of the two Western dramatists whose work was most often discussed in the important monthly review devoted to the theatre, *al-Masrah*, the other being Pirandello. (Badawi 2005, 141)

Most issues of *al-Masrah* have included a section titled: 'The Theatre Abroad',<sup>181</sup> which was written by practitioners and academics who were studying theatre in both the US and Europe.

In addition to *al-Masrah*, four Egyptian series were dedicated to the translation of Western plays in the period between 1957 and 1972. These series were *Min Adab al-Masrah* (From Theatre Literature), *Maktabet al-Fonoun al-Deramia* (The Library of Dramatic Arts), *Roa'ea' al-Masrah al-A'alami* (The World Theatre's Masterpieces), and *al-Masrah al-A'alami* (The World Theatre). Not only did these series enable Egyptian practitioners to read a wide spectrum of Western plays, but most of these translations were also accompanied by critical introductions, within which dramatic texts and/or styles of playwrights were elucidated. With nearly two hundred titles, these series altogether translated a wide range of plays that included Greek tragedies, Molière, Goethe, Büchner, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov. However, the common feature of these four series was that their main focus was on twentieth-century playwrights such as Lorca, Weiss, Anouilh, Giraudoux, Pinter, and Frisch. The latter's *The Great Wall of China* was translated in 1964 by Abd al-Ghaffar Mekawi, who studied philosophy in Germany.

Moreover, a specific emphasis was given by these series to Brecht, Pirandello, and the Theatre of the Absurd. Translations of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Tonight We Improvise*, and *Each in His Own Way* were respectively published in 1960, 1965, and 1968. The plays were republished as a trilogy in 1977 and 2012. *Six Characters* received its Cairo premiere at Al-Gomhouria Theatre in 1962. This production was directed by Mahmoud al-Sebaa', who studied theatre in Britain and the US. Both critics and

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<sup>181</sup> In Arabic: 'al-Masrah Khareg al-Hodod'.

academics praised the performance for introducing the Italian playwright to the Egyptian audience. While Fo'ad Dawara described the production as 'an artistic adventure that participates in the improvement of Egyptian theatre' (Dowara, 291), Mohamed Mandour focused on Pirandello's exploration of the essence of both life and theatre (Mandour, 200). In addition to the trilogy, *The Rules of the Game* (1918), *Henry IV* (1922), and *Right You Are, If You Think So* (1917) were respectively translated in 1961, 1966, and 1967. It seems important to mention that Arabic studies of the Italian novelist and playwright can be traced back to 1949 with Mohamed Amin Hassona's pioneer study *Pirandello*.

In the 1960s, many of Brecht's plays were translated and performed in Cairo. Directed by Ardash, who studied theatre in Italy, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was produced by the National Theatre in 1962 and 1968. Ardash directed the Egyptian premiere of *The Good Person of Szechwan* in 1966 at Al-Hakim Theatre. In 1964, at the Pocket Theatre, *The Exception and the Rule* was directed by Farouq al-Demerdash, who studied theatre in France and Britain. After he finished his study in Hungary, Kamal Eid directed *Drums in the Night* at the Pocket Theatre in 1966. In addition, *The Trial of Lucullus*, and *Mr Puntilla and his Man Matti* were translated in 1965.

As these examples suggest, although many plays of Pirandello and Brecht were translated, the latter's were more produced than the former's. Such an observation can be explained by the dominance of socialist thoughts over Egyptian society in the 1960s. Put differently, Brecht's attack on capitalism seemed to conform to the regime's political and economic orientations, which were supported by the increasing rise of nationalism in the post-colonial Egypt.

More than Pirandello's plays, the nihilistic and nightmarishly ridiculed image of the world within the absurdist plays seemed to be far from the political function of theatre according to a large number of socialist critics and academics. In this respect, it can be understood why the vast majority of reviews celebrated Brecht's plays, especially as a role model for Egyptian playwrights, while the absurdist plays were attacked. Commenting on first productions of absurdist plays in Egypt in 1962, Abdel Wahab explains:

[T]he Pocket Theatre presented Beckett's *Endgame*, Ionesco's *The Chairs* and a dramatic "lecture" made of extracts from Chekov's plays. These plays, particularly the first two, triggered a heated controversy among critics and intellectuals



generally, some of whom questioned the relevance of these "absurd" plays coming from "sick" culture of the West. (Abdel Wahab 1974, 26)

In other words, for many critics and academics, western theatre was not welcomed unless the plays' themes included socialist thoughts. In this context, I can understand why governmental theatres did not produce many of Pirandello's translations, or, to give examples, Ionesco's *Exit the King*, *Amédée*, and *Hunger and Thirst*, whose translations were respectively published in Egypt in 1964, 1965, and 1967.<sup>182</sup>

However, it seems important to realise that in the season 1967-68, three of Ionesco's plays were produced by governmental theatres. The Pocket Theatre, the Modern Theatre, and Al-Hakim Theatre respectively performed *The Leader*, *The Lesson*, and *Rhinoceros*. The latter was directed by Hussein Gom'a after he returned from his study in France. Moreover, Sobhy directed *The Lesson* for his private troupe, the Actor's Studio, in 1973. On one hand, I suggest that the specific moment of the military defeat of the 1967 War encouraged Egyptian practitioners to produce absurdist plays, which seemed to express the dominant feeling of desperation and shock that resulted from the military defeat.

On the other hand, it is crucial to highlight the role played by a group of Egyptian critics, intellectuals and practitioners in the 1960s. In other words, Egyptian advocates of modernity kept insisting on the significance of introducing modern and contemporary European playwrights, whose plays were seen by the nationalists as apolitical or irrelevant to Egyptian culture and society. *Hunger and Thirst*, for instance, was translated one year after its premiere in Paris, and two years before its first English translation by Donald Watson. The play was translated by Samia As'ad, an Egyptian academic who had just returned from her study in Paris. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, As'ad's other translations included Albert Camus' *The Misunderstanding*, Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* and Odette Aslan's *L'art du Théâtre: Anthologie de Textes*.

To give more examples, while Lotfy Fam's 1964 book *Derasa Mogaza Hawl al-Masrah al-Frensi al-Mo'aser* (A Concise Study of Contemporary French

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<sup>182</sup> A Lebanese production of *Exit the King* was hosted at the Pocket Theatre in March 1965. For more information about the performance of the visiting troupe, see Mandour 159 – 64.

Theatre) is mainly composed of translations of French critics' comments on the absurdist playwrights, Léonard Pronko's *Avant-garde: The Experimental Theater in France* (1962) was translated by Yusif Eskandar in 1967. Furthermore, after the defeat of 1967, three extended studies of the Theatre of the Absurd were published in Cairo. Yusif al-Sharouny's *al-Lama'qoul fi al-A'dab al-Mo'aser* (The Absurd in Contemporary Literature) was published in 1969. In 1970 the series al-Masrah al-A'alami published *Masrah al-Abath* (*The Theatre of the Absurd*), which included translations of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Genet's *Deathwatch*, Ionesco's *The Chairs*, and Edward Albee's *Tiny Alice*. In addition to these plays, the anthology included many studies of the Theatre of the Absurd written by Egyptian and Western scholars. In the same year, the Egyptian academic Na'im 'Ateia published his study *Masrah al-Abath: Mafhomoh wa Gozoroh wa A'lamoh* (*The Theatre of the Absurd: The Notion, Roots, and Playwrights*).

The polyglot critic, novelist, and translator Anis Mansour went further by encouraging Egyptian playwrights and directors to follow Pirandello, Brecht, Ionesco, and Genet. As the title of Mansour's 1965 book *Yasqut al-Ha'et al-Rabe'* (*Fall of the Fourth Wall*) suggests, the anti-Aristotelian aspect of these European playwrights was suggested as a new trend in theatre. Put differently, although Mansour does not use the term metatheatre, he advises Egyptian directors to produce the dramatic texts of Pirandello, Brecht, and Ionesco, many of which were newly translated. Moreover, and most significantly, the critic urges Egyptian playwrights to adopt the anti-illusionist style of European dramatists. In his 1965 review of the book, Abdel Wahab praised, and seconded, Mansour's call for modernising Egyptian theatre (ctd. in Abdel Wahab 1992, 287-304).

While a big sector of the mainstream nationalist movement in the 1960s was against Western theatre in general and apolitical plays in particular, Egyptian governmental troupes welcomed the works of a large number of Egyptian dramatists. Many of these playwrights utilised metatheatrical techniques, namely those of Brecht and Pirandello, to address social, political and historical matters. Simultaneously, there were two channels for the influence of the European avant-garde on Egyptian theatre, both of which seemed to be relatively safe from the anti-West critics: the Higher Institute of Theatre Arts and the Second Programme radio channel. Ardash, Mutaweh, Eid,

and Galal al-Sharqawy introduced Pirandello, Brecht, and Ionesco to their students at the Department of Acting and Directing. Simultaneously, modern and contemporary European playwrights became part of the curricula of the Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism, especially with the return of many academics such as Mandour, As'ad, Mohamed al-Qassas, Rashad Rushdi, and Ibrahim Hamada, from their study in Europe and the US.

Inspired by the BBC Third Programme, the Second Programme radio channel was launched in 1957 after its first manager, Sa'd Labib, was sent to London in order to get his training at the BBC. In addition to introducing classical music and Western poets and novelists to its listeners, the Second Programme broadcast translations of a large number of Western plays, many of which were not published in Arabic. These weekly radio productions included Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise*, *Henry IV*, *The Imbecile*; Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, *The Bald Soprano*, *A Stroll in the Air*, *The New Tenant*; Beckett's *Happy Days*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, and *All That Fall*; and Brecht's *In the Jungle of Cities*, *He Said Yes/He Said No*, and *The Visions of Simone Machard*. Not only did these radio plays offer a chance for a large number of actors, directors, and dramaturges to become more familiar with modern and contemporary European playwrights, but these productions were usually accompanied by critical exploration of these dramatic texts and their authors.<sup>183</sup>

So far, I have explored several ways in which the twentieth-century European critical metadrama inspired Egyptian playwrights. In the following, I will trace aspects of this possible influence within critical metadramas in Egypt since the 1960s. As the reading of the vast majority of Egyptian critical metadramas during the second half of the twentieth century reveals, there is not a single Egyptian critical metadrama whose playwright does not depend on the European form, wherein scattered scenes of traditional local forms of entertainment are imposed. Moreover, the call for pure Egyptian theatre is usually reduced to a topic of discussion. In other words, instead of using the form of quasi-theatrical phenomena such as khayal al-Del, Karagöz or al-Mahabbazeen, claims about the merit of these traditional forms shape the kernel of the theatrical matters raised by dramatic characters. On one hand, the

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<sup>183</sup> The Second Programme was the Idea of Hussein Fawzi, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture. Fawzi was a writer and academic who studied science in Paris.

resuscitation of the popular theatrical practice pre-Sannua as an alternative to the European form seems to be impossible. Perhaps, one or more of these forms can be independently retrieved away from the European form. Nevertheless, such extinct forms have to compete not only with the established practice of the European form but also with the two dominant methods of entertainment: cinema and T.V., which caused this extinction in the first place.

On the other hand, the inclusion of discussions about the search for an authentic form of theatre is one of the unique features of Egyptian critical metadramas, which cannot be found in their European ancestor. Such a topic, alongside several Egyptian-related theatrical matters, I emphasise, suggests the inseparable relationship between socio-political contexts and both the emergence and the content of critical metadrama. This chapter is going to explore the problems that faced the theatre industry in Egypt in the second half of the twentieth century as they were addressed by Egyptian playwrights within their dramatic texts. Before investigating the group of theatrical matters that shape the discursive criticism of theatrical matters, including the search for Egyptian theatre identity, I am going to extend my claim that, similar to its birth by Sannua, Egyptian critical metadrama within the second half of the twentieth century remarkably includes signs of European theatre as well as traces of local influences.

### **Pure Egyptian theatre within European form: the unfeasible hybrid**

Idris and al-Hakim, each in his own way, produced the most remarkable attempts to define an alleged genuine Egyptian form of theatre. In 1964 Idris wrote a series of three essays in the literary magazine *al-Kateb (The writer)*. Later, in the same year, Idris combined these three essays under the title: 'Nahwa Masrah Misri' (Towards an Egyptian Theatre) as an introduction to his play *al-Farafir (The Farfoors)*.<sup>184</sup> In his argument, Idris focuses on a specific form of entertainment called al-Samir which was mainly practiced in the rural regions of Egypt. Marvin Carlson describes it as 'a popular festival in which villagers gather to improvise entertainments involving singing, dancing and impersonation' (Carlson 2005, 157). However, al-Samir was not a festive

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<sup>184</sup> As the play reveals, Farfoor, the single noun of Farafir, represents the servant, slave, or dependent as an opposite to The Master. Paradoxically, in the Egyptian dialect, the word Farafir is utilised to describe spoilt and weak young men, especially those who belong to the upper middle class.

activity; it is not related to a specific occasion, and does not belong to historical or religious origin.

Most importantly, al-Samir was essentially practised by Egyptian peasants when evenings in the poor countryside were deprived of all sorts of attraction. Therefore, just like all other quasi-theatrical phenomena, al-Samir gradually disappeared and was replaced by the modern means of entertainment. Hamada argues: 'The history of Egyptian theatre is remarkably short, and we have started to recognise the possibility of developing the tiny seeds of popular entertaining activities when they declined' (Hamada 1987, 116). However, as the investigation of Sannua's plays in the previous chapter suggests, traditional forms of entertainment played a crucial role in shaping the Egyptian audience's predilection for revealing theatrical artifice. Moreover, I argue that the anti-illusionist nature of al-Samir encouraged Idris to engage his call for pure Egyptian theatre with the utilisation of European metatheatrical techniques. Put differently, while *al-Farafir* includes anti-illusionist aspects of both Pirandello and Brecht, Idris claims that he adopts the form of al-Samir whose sessions—because of their spontaneous nature—usually neglect the borders between practitioners and performers as everyone can arbitrarily participate.

The play, *al-Farafir*, which is introduced by Idris as a practical example of what is supposed to be al-Samir-like plays, is just a collage of heterogeneous influences of Western techniques, with obvious influences of both Pirandello and Brecht.<sup>185</sup> For instance, the play discusses the relationship between the playwright and his/her dramatic characters. The debate between The Master and Farfoor about the playwright's abandonment of his responsibility recalls *Six Characters in Search of an Author* as the following dialogue reveals:

MASTER: What nonsense is that? How can he desert us like that? How can he write us and leave us like this? What do we do now?

FARFOOR: The most beautiful thing on earth is feeling that you're your own author. (Idris 1974, 433)

With such comments on the relationship between playwrights and characters, the discourse of criticism within Egyptian critical metatheatre took a further step

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<sup>185</sup> The play was directed by Karam Mutaweh after his return from studying theatre in Italy.

towards raising more theatrical matters. Between the 1980s and the 2000s, both the volume of critical discourse and the number of the issues raised within dramatic texts have increased. This self-consciousness of dramatic characters within *al-Farafir* is emphasised by the acknowledgement of spectators, as the following dialogue reveals:

FARFOOR: How about if we forget about the Author and the Lady he's sending and have you marry one of the people here.

MASTER: What nonsense! These are spectators, boy! They came here to watch, not to get married. (Idris 1974, 390)

The play is full of this type of revealing theatrical artifice. In his introduction, although Idris claims that he adopts the form of al-Samir, he borrows from Brechtian techniques of acting. Marvin Carlson realises that Idris 'suggested, like Brecht, that actors never lose themselves completely in the parts, but always remain in some measure a part of the surrounding community' (Carlson 2005, 227), but Brecht's influence on *al-Farafir* extends beyond Idris' instructions about acting style; the play is a chain of challenges to dramatic illusion with occasional make-believe moments.

Regarding the content, in addition to the traces of Pirandello and Brecht, the debates between the Master and Farfoor about their domineering-submissive relationship recall the image of Pozzo and his servant Lucky in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Carlson realises that '*al-Farafir*, for all of Idris' concerns to create a distinctly Egyptian work, shows distinct influences of the French so-called Theatre of the Absurd' (Carlson 2005, 227). Apart from the fact that a large number of absurdist playwrights were translated, Idris was able to read these works in their English translations. Within *al-Farafir*, Idris seems to hint at his awareness of Beckett's no-actor play *Breath*, when Farfoor lectures the Master: 'Nowadays authors write plays to be played by one actor only. There are plays that are even more modern, plays where nobody at all acts' (Idris 1974, 434). Whether Idris sought to enlighten his audience or to show his knowledge of theatre, especially as a prominent novelist, who starts his theatre career by suggesting a new theory, such lines are far from al-Samir's simplicity.

Furthermore, the play is burdened by brash philosophical speeches given by Farfoor. The following is an excerpt from one of Farfoor's long monologues, where he assumes the role of the advisor:

Do you know what we really are? A pole, your highness riding his eminence and his eminence riding me and we're all piled on top of that hag over there. [...] Each distinguished person is referred to as a Master of his district, Master of his country, Master of his homeland, Master of his world, Master of his history. Even our history forms a pole, our states, our civilization, each state wants to be Mistress over all states and each civilization would love to subdue all civilization. (Idris 1974, 477)

The most striking feature of Farfoor's speech is its hint at the so-called Egyptian struggle against the imperial powers. Such connotations seem to disguise the play's imitation of Pirandellian discussion on theatrical matters by drawing on Brechtian political critique. Thus Idris' call for neglecting Western techniques, through utilising anti-illusionist aspects of al-Samir, is proven to be false by *al-Farafir*. Although the performance of the play was noticeably successful, its form and theme were different from the traditional practice of al-Samir. Richard Jacquemond argues that: '*Al-Farafir* was well received by the public and the critics, but the critics challenged not only the ideas put forward in "Toward an Egyptian Theatre," but the claim that the play broke in any way with the "imported" sources of modern Egyptian theatre' (Jacquemond, 137). On one hand, it can be concluded that both Idris' theoretical essays and play prove his overrating of the potentiality of al-Samir to be an alternative to Western theatrical forms. On the other hand, it seems that the influence of both modern and contemporary European playwrights were too dominant to be ignored.

The most striking feature of *al-Farafir*, is the fact that Idris does not exploit his dramatic characters to support, or even mention his call for al-Samir-like play. Such an observation, of which I did not find any trace within either Arabic or English studies of the play, can be explained partly on the grounds that Idris, who dedicated three critical essays to introduce al-Samir, considered that his play self-evidently proves his theory. Partly, and most likely, similar to scholars of his play, Idris reduced the function of literary criticism to the mere purpose of metatheatrical devices of revealing the artifice of the performance, which is the only link between al-Samir and metatheatre.

More controversial than Idris' attempt, al-Hakim called for what he named the 'condensed theatre', or the 'anatomical theatre'. In his book *Qalabuna al-Masrahy*,<sup>186</sup> al-Hakim argues that: 'Our form is based on al-Hakawaty [the oral storyteller] and al-Mokaledaty [the impersonator]. Sometimes, when the play requires, they can be joined by al-Maddah [the religious minstrel]' (al-Hakim 1967, 15). What initially rebuts this formula is the fact that these types of performing are not exclusively Egyptian; their equivalents can be found in nearly every cultural group. In addition, it seems that al-Hakim ignores the decline of these traditional forms of performance, which, similar to al-Samir, were superseded by new entertaining methods, including theatre.

Taking a further step beyond Idris, not only does al-Hakim suggest that his formula is able to be utilised by Egyptian playwrights in order to create pure Egyptian theatre, but he also claims that this 'condensed theatre' is capable of performing Western plays. Al-Hakim declares: 'To be accepted as a form, it should be able to contain all sorts of plays; international, local, old and contemporary' (al-Hakim 1967, 14).<sup>187</sup> To prove that his formula can enclose different types of plays, al-Hakim gives seven samples of abridged versions of texts including Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. In these examples, al-Hakim uses the storyteller as a narrator who introduces scenes and comments on them afterward, while only two impersonators—a male and a female—perform all the dramatic characters. Finally, the religious minstrel assumes the role of the chorus.

Al-Hakim's explanation of the way in which the male and female impersonators perform different characters is based on the Brechtian notion of acting within Epic Theatre. In addition, it is hard to be convinced that a single male impersonator, for instance, can perform all the male characters within a play and maintain their discrepant physical and psychological aspects. According to al-Hakim, this impersonator is supposed to rush from the speech and movement of a dramatic character to another and vice versa. In the first scene of *Hamlet*, to give an example, how can he play the characters of

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<sup>186</sup> *Our Theatrical Form*.

<sup>187</sup> Mixing Oriental and Western aspects was achieved by many performances of intercultural theatre. To give an example, in the works of the Theatre du Soleil, Ariane Mnouchkine employs the traditions of Noh, Kabuki and Chinese Opera in her productions of Shakespeare or Aeschylus. What distinguishes such theatrical experiments from al-Hakim's alleged formula is that Noh, for instance, is an established theatrical form with a long history of practice in Japan. In contrast, not only were al-Hakawaty, al-Mokaledaty, and al-Maddah unable to evolve to dramatic/theatrical forms, but they also failed to survive as popular methods of entertainment.



Bernard, Francisco, Horatio, and Marcellus, let alone the Ghost of Hamlet's father? In addition, spectators would be baffled by these shifts, especially when watching a new play. Moreover, in a play like *Six Characters*, which is one of al-Hakim's seven samples, the difficulties of using this formula should increase in terms of performing and reception. Therefore, unlike al-Samir, al-Hakim's 'condensed theatre', with its only two impersonators playing all the roles, has not been adopted, as a form, by any Egyptian playwright. I argue that the most reasonable potential of this formula is mentioned by al-Hakim himself when he argues that 'this form can be useful as method of actors' training' (al-Hakim 1967, 20). In addition, for didactic purposes, al-Hakim's formula can be effective in introducing abridged versions of international dramatic texts.

Although al-Hakim does not include in his book an example of a new play written in his suggested form, he ambitiously declares that 'The main condition of what we can call our Arabic form is that European playwrights, as well as authors all over the world, can cast their thoughts and themes into our Arabic form' (al-Hakim 1967, 15). For such exaggerated claims, it seems that, compared to Idris' call for pure Egyptian theatre, al-Hakim's formula was harshly criticised by many Arabic critics and academics. For instance, Hamada argues that: 'The hastiness, looseness, and inconsistency of this theory reflect al-Hakim's lack of a comprehensive vision and the absence of a real objective belief in his own claim' (Hamada 1987, 115-6). Nevertheless, in the footprints of both Idris and al-Hakim, the search for Egyptian theatre's identity continued by both playwrights and directors.

Idris' call for creating al-Samir-like plays was achieved, even more authentically than *al-Farafir*, by Mahmoud Diyab in his 1966 play *Laialy al-Hasaad* (*The Nights of Harvesting*). As the title of the play suggests, the action takes place at al-Gorn, wherein dramatic characters represent peasants during a session of al-Samir.<sup>188</sup> Carlson claims that

After the success of Idris's [sic] *al-Farafir* the village *Samir*, with its associations with improvisation and the mixing of role-playing and reality, gained considerable popularity among the new wave of Egyptian dramatists. Mahmoud Diyab, for example, utilizes it most originally and engagingly. [...]

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<sup>188</sup> Al-Gorn is a vast outdoor space wherein Egyptian countrymen used to temporarily store the harvest. They practiced their games of impersonation, storytelling, dancing, and singing while they were celebrating or guarding the harvest.

Traditional song, dance, outdoor games, and improvisations are featured, along with actors slipping in and out of their parts and exchanging places with spectators. (Carlson 2009, 135)

In addition to Diyab, it was Naguib Surur who managed to combine al-Samir's aspects with European form 'originally and engagingly', perhaps because, Just like *Laialy al-Hasaad*, the action of Surur's *Yasin wa Bahiya* (1963)<sup>189</sup> takes place in an Egyptian village. Despite the debate about the effect of Idris' call on Diyab and Surur, the works of the two playwrights reveal their adoption of Brechtian and Pirandellian techniques, respectively.<sup>190</sup>

Similarly, Brechtian influences can be realised in Alfred Farag's *al-Zeir Salem* (1967) and Abdel-Aziz Hammouda's *al-Zaher Baibars* (1987). However, unlike the critical response to *Laialy al-Hasaad* and *Yasin wa Bahiya*, the utilisation of traditional forms within the plays of Hammouda and Farag was condemned by many Egyptian critics. Commenting on Farag's excessive borrowing from the raw material of the popular tale of al-Zeir Salem, Abd El-Qader al-Qet argues that, in the sake of claiming the authenticity of using al-Hakawaty, Farag's play is burdened by prolonged narrative speeches (al-Qet, 357-9). Hammouda extends his borrowing from traditional forms beyond al-Hakawaty to include khayal al-Del, and Karagöz. However, as Dawara argues, Hammouda's unnecessary utilisation of traditional elements hampers the dramatic action and weakens its effect (ctd. in Hussein, 236).<sup>191</sup> What distinguishes succeeding playwrights from the two prominent ancestors, Idris and al-Hakim, is that no one of these followers dared to suggest a theory, of which his play is a prototype.

In terms of performative aspects, several directors in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s chose to produce their shows in alternative spaces to the Italian

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<sup>189</sup> Before Idris' essays and play, Surur published *Yasin wa Bahiya* with a sub title describing it as a poetic tale, perhaps because the bulk of the text is a narrator's speech with scattered dialogues. A few months after directing *Al-Farafir*, Karam Mutaweh's production of Surur's play was similarly successful. In addition, apart from al-Hakim's impractical suggestion of two-impersonators, his description of al-Hakawaty seems to be influenced by the narrator in *Yasin wa Bahiya*.

<sup>190</sup> In addition to Surur's using of Brechtian-like narrator/chorus within most of his works, including *Yasin wa Bahiya*, he rewrote *The Threepenny Opera* in his play *Malek al-Shahatin (The King of Beggars)* in 1970. The play was directed by Galal al-Sharqawy, who studied theatre in Paris. For an example of claims about the Influence of Pirandello on Diyab, see Sallam.

<sup>191</sup> Al-zeir Salem is one of the pre-Islam heroes, while Baibars was the ruler of Egypt, who fought against the Mongolian invasion in the second half of the thirteenth century. Similar to several historical figures, their heroic deeds were the theme of folk tales narrated by travelling storytellers/chanters in Cairo's cafés until the emergence of radio broadcasting.

proscenium such as streets, cafés, rural locations, and Marquees.<sup>192</sup> Based on anti-illusionist improvisation, these performances claimed a link with traditional forms of entertainment.<sup>193</sup> However, partly due to governmental oppositions to public gathering outside observed and controlled theatres, and partly because of financial problems, most directors' enthusiasm gradually faded. In addition to these social and economic reasons, induced improvisational dialogues, which are usually generated by planting actors amongst the members of the audience, contradicts the spontaneous nature of spectators' interventions in traditional forms of entertainment. In this respect, a large number of these performances, with few exceptions, end up using a mix of anti-illusionist techniques of Western theatre with local themes and characters. Ahmed al-Ashry claims that

These Egyptian experiments benefited from both Brechtian methodology and Western theatrical movements in terms of challenging the audience's identification with the performance by using many methods such as the director's repeated interrupting, actors' direct speech to spectators and playing many roles by the same actor. (ctd. in Hussein, 300)

It is important to mention that the effect of the calls for retrieving traditional quasi-theatrical forms of entertainment extended beyond both playwrights and directors to include educational and governmental institutes. In this respect, curricula of Egyptian faculties of Arts started to include popular literature and arts, including traditional forms of theatre. In addition, the Higher Institute of Popular Arts was established in 1981, where popular theatre was the chosen topic by many postgraduate researchers. Nothing can prove the influence of Idris' call other than the fact that in 1973 the Egyptian Ministry of culture established a public troupe named 'Al-Samir Theatre' for producing plays with traditional themes and forms. Ironically, since its foundation, the members of this troupe have kept demanding successive Ministers of culture to build an Italian proscenium stage for its productions. Such a discrepancy can be understood on the grounds that the vast majority of plays, which dramatise traditional narrative, are usually written and directed according to the European style, wherein popular forms of entertainment are occasionally imposed. In

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<sup>192</sup> In Egyptian slums, both wedding ceremonies and post-funerals gatherings are held in marquees established temporarily on the street.

<sup>193</sup> For more information about these experiments, see Abu al-Ela 1994, 203 – 24.

addition, the central domination of high ranked employees over all governmental troupes, especially regarding the choice and budgets of performances, prevented these troupes from making a real effect.

All these examples contradict Metawie's claim that 'the movement to Egyptianize theatre declined within the fall of intellectual drama in general after 1967' (Metawie, 320). Moreover, and most importantly, since the mid 1980s the search for Egyptian theatre's identity has become one of the topics that dramatic characters raise within Egyptian critical metadrama. My claim is that by making the calls for an authentic Egyptian theatre adjacent to, or mingled with, other theatrical matters, Egyptian playwrights have avoided the impossible mission of replacing European form by an Egyptian one.

### **Addressing the problems of Egyptian theatre within European form of critical metadrama**

The reading of Egyptian critical metadramas in the second half of the twentieth century, including *al-Farafir*, suggests that Egyptian playwrights have chosen to adopt the ready-made European form of critical metadrama, within which Egyptian theatrical matters, including the call for pure Egyptian theatre, can be critically discussed. Similar to most European critical metadramas, the vast majority of Egyptian metatheatrical plays tend to base their plots on the situation of a rehearsal or a performance, as an adequate context to raise theatrical matters, where dramatic characters are practitioners. The long title of Abd al-Sattar al-Khodary's 1989 play: *al-Aashek al-Walhan, al-Layla Natamsrah: Motawalya Mashhadya Hazlyya Tosharek fi al-Tharthara al-Naqddy Hawla ma Yousama be-A'zmat al-Masrah* suggests its critical purpose.<sup>194</sup> The first act of *al-Aashek al-Walhan* depicts two rehearsals of the same performance with a crucial change of each rehearsal's overall mood. While the first one celebrates the victory of socialism in a propagandistic manner that blandishes the undefined ruler of the country, the second one adopts a hypocritical funerary mood after the death of the same ruler. Within both rehearsals, several matters are raised such as the relationship between playwrights and directors, the social role of theatre, and the audience's fondness for commercial theatre. Furthermore, the second act seems to be a

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<sup>194</sup> *The Infatuated Lover, or Tonight We Theatricalise: Successive Farcical Scenes contribute to the critical chatter about the so-called Crises of Theatre.*

play-within-the-inner play, which is entirely dedicated to a discussion of the problems of the Egyptian theatre in the 1980s.

Akin to *Each in His Own Way*, Selim Kitchener's *al-Agouz wa al-Zabet wa al-Millionaire*,<sup>195</sup> written in 1998, begins with the inner play that represents a performance. Moreover, similar to *Tonight We Improvise*, the actors and actresses rebel against The Director's authority. Within the quarrel, the limits of the latter's role of conducting the former is discussed. By the intervention of The Playwright, who denies The Director's tyranny, the matter of tense relationship between both is raised. Eventually, The Director is expelled from the theatre, but, unlike Dr Hinkfuss, he never returns.

In addition to using the frame of the rehearsal or performance, some Egyptian playwrights contextualise critical discourse by portraying dramatic characters who represent practitioners in different situations. For instance, Mo'men Abdu's *Akher al-Shareie*,<sup>196</sup> written in 1999, is devoted to a discussion of Egyptian theatre's matters through the agony of two performers, Q and A.<sup>197</sup> The two actors find themselves without jobs because they are informed that the theatre they were working at is being refurbished. Then, they discover that it is demolished. Eventually, while they are trying to work at another theatre, it is turned into an Opera house.

The main character in Ali Salem's 1969 play *al-Boufeh (The Buffet)* is a playwright who is oppressed by The Manager of the theatre. The play comments on the corrupted system of administrating governmental theatres that enables the ignorant manager to use his ultimate authority in order to turn the talented writer into a hypocritical money-seeker. In Salem's *al-Kateb Fi Shahr al-Asal (The Writer in the Honeymoon)*, a playwright is secretly observed by the state for no apparent reason except for being a writer. Throughout the two plays, several critical issues are mentioned, most of which I explore in this chapter.

In Hossam al-Ghamry's *al-Kelab al-Aierlandy (The Irish Dogs)*, written in 1996, the character of a playwright—just like Ionesco in *Improvisation*—starts to write a new play. However, influenced by Pirandello, the dramatic characters of the two young lovers appear to him as soon as he describes them within the

<sup>195</sup> *The Old Woman, the Police Officer, and the Millionaire.*

<sup>196</sup> *At the End of the Street.*

<sup>197</sup> These letters stand for Question and Answer, which in the original Arabic text are abbreviated by 'س' for سؤال and 'ج' for جواب.

stage directions. Moreover, he finds himself involved within the dramatic world of his play when he falls in love with the heroine, who sticks to the way he initially portrays her; a lover of Ahmed, the inner play's protagonist:

NORA: I didn't sleep for a moment last night.  
 AUTHOR: Why? Does anything within the play concern you?  
 NORA: Quite the opposite, I'm absolutely happy. [...] I spent my night thinking of Ahmed. (al-Ghamry, 20)

When Nora realises that the Author may exploit his authority in order to split her from her lover, she warns: 'it is theatre; you decide the fate of dramatic characters. If Ahmed is to be harmed, I'll never forgive you. Do you hear me? I'll never forgive you' (al-Ghamry, 21). Similar Pirandellian depiction of self-conscious characters can be found when Ahmed asks the Author: 'please, for the sake of the play's rhythm, be brief!' (al-Ghamry, 22). Nevertheless, Ahmed proves that he is more aware of theatre's nature than his lover. Therefore, he faces the Author:

AHMED: I won't accept your decision.  
 AUTHOR: I'm the one who created you.  
 AHMED: I challenge you! You've little to do; once the author portrays the characters, he has no control over them. (al-Ghamry, 23)

After the Author realises Ahmed's strong position, the former tries to convince his rival of the advantages he may get as a reward for leaving Nora:

AUTHOR: I can make you rich, a very wealthy person. [...]  
 AHMED: What is the importance of money or power without Nora?!  
 AUTHOR: There is no dramatic character that can challenge me. I'm a tyrannous author. Before this moment, I've killed 720 dramatic characters, apart from those who have become insane.  
 AHMED: I don't mind being the madman of Nora.<sup>198</sup> (al-Ghamry, 24)

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<sup>198</sup> This is a reference to Qays Ibn al-Mulawwah, who is known as the Madman of Layla (In Arabic, Majnun Layla). Qays was a poet who allegedly lost his sanity after hearing about his lover's marriage. His poetry and love story are very famous in the Arabic literature.

It seems that the Author's dignity as a writer is more important than his feelings towards Nora. Therefore, after his failure with Ahmed, he creates a very wealthy man, Mr. Checks, in order to seduce Nora to neglect Ahmed. To impress her, the Author makes Mr. Checks' entrance a spectacular one, as the Author figure describes 'Mr. Checks enters to the stage (*thinks for a while*) by a helicopter. Let the director suffer as well; I challenge him to solve this problem' (al-Ghamry, 24). Apart from the Author's destructive anger that includes the potential director of the inner play, hinting at practical difficulties of using a helicopter recalls Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise*, when Dr Hinkfuss, gives up his ambition to depict a scene of an airfield.

A play that displays the influence of Ionesco's *Improvisation*, Abd al-Moneim Selim's *Entahat al-Galsa*,<sup>199</sup> was written in 1966 to comment on his own play *al-Koras (The Chorus)* 1963. However, as the title reveals, Selim's play is a fantasy tribunal where The Artist, who represents Selim himself, is the defendant, which recalls Taimur's *Mohakamat Moad'lefi al-Rewayat al-Tamthileia*. In this unrealistic court, the three judges are members of a censorial committee that gives the permission to publish and produce dramatic texts by the governmental organizations. Although *Entahat al-Galsa* includes several mentions of general critical matters, it is a detailed discussion of Selim's previous play which the members of the committee harshly criticise. The president of the committee precisely repeats one of The Artist's speeches in *al-koras*: 'I'll tell you a tiny thought. Firstly, you simply and easily can write it as a short story. Then, you extend it to be a novel. Afterward, if you add dialogues to the novel, it will become a play' (Selim *al-Koras*, 56 and *Entahat al-Galsa*, 96). Similar to European metadrama, the play stresses its self-reference on several levels by referring to the playwright, his works, and to theatre in general by raising critical matters.

Sometimes it becomes hard to distinguish between European and local influences on the same text. For instance, the actor who plays the role of the Millionaire in *al-Agouz wa al-Zabet wa al-Millionaire* cannot control his real emotions towards the actress who shares the scene with him:

THE MILLIONAIRE: (*Continually, kissing The Female Interviewer's hand*) It would be a fantastic night!

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<sup>199</sup>*The Hearing Session is Finished.*

THE FEMALE INTERVIEWER: Stop it! (*Hedoesn't stop*) Mind the audience! [...] The scene is over.

THE MILLIONAIRE: I don't care about the scene. I don't care about anything. I'm horny, do me a favour! (*The members of the company rush from backstage, Kareem holds a long stick runs towards the actor who plays The Millionaire and hits his head*). (Kitchener, 148)

Such a situation resembles one of the real incidents that happened during the performance of Sannua' *Ghandoor Misr*.<sup>200</sup> Janette Tagger tells the story of this situation. She claims that the actor, who plays the role of the lover in the play, was really a lover of the actress, who rejected his proposal in real life. Victoriously, after a scene of flirtation on stage, the actor whispered to his colleague: 'Thanks for theatre, which defeated your arrogance and forced you to accept my love in front of thousands of people'. Then the actress slapped him and addressed the audience: 'All the words of love I am going to say to this stupid young man does not express my real emotions. I hate him like blindness, but Sannua wrote these full-of-love speeches'. According to Sannua, the next night, some spectators loudly asked the two actors to repeat their quarrel (ctd. in Najm, 84). On one hand, whether this incident was spontaneous or made up by Sannua to amuse his audience, Kitchener more likely read about it before writing his play.<sup>201</sup>

On the other hand, revealing the distance between the actor and his/her role is one of the common methods of Egyptian comedies. Usually, practitioners justify their using of such tricks by claiming that they utilise Brechtian challenge of dramatic illusion. This is a misuse of Brecht's stress on the aesthetic distance between the actor and his/her role as one of those Brechtian theatrical techniques that is here confined to a distance in form only, without seeking the ideological functions Brecht intended. The same can be said about directors who sometimes impose some of Brecht's methods, especially planting actors among the audience, into performances of illusionist texts. Mahmoud El Lozy argues that

The influence of Brecht on Egyptian theatre has not gone much beyond theoretical and rhetorical enthusiasm. In actual practice, Brecht has been primarily sought as a source of

<sup>200</sup> The word *Ghandoor* means a spoild, ostentatious, and/or dressy.

<sup>201</sup> Many scholars of Arabic theatre cite this incident from Najm.



inspiration for "new" formalistic devices through the incorporation of songs, addresses to the audience, use of projections, etc. (El Lozy, 71)

It is hard to contradict El Lozy's claim if we exclude the political employment of Brechtian techniques in some Egyptian plays such as Diab's *Bab al-Fotouh*, and Mikhail Roman's 1966 play *al-Layla Nadhak (Tonight We Laugh)*, and *Lailat Masra' Guevara al-Azim (The Night of the Great Guevara's Murder)*, which he wrote in 1972. This reduction of Brecht's theory to its formative aspects seems to be an international phenomenon; Christopher McCullough observes that

'Brechtian' is a term often used quite separately from any significant ideological association with the work of the German playwright. Yet the term has found its way into common parlance, among groups of theatre workers who use it to mean any theatrical construction in which the actors admit to being actors on a stage. (McCullough 1992, 120-1)

In Egypt, while Brechtian techniques, especially revealing the artifice, have been adopted by the playwrights of critical metadramas, the actors of commercial theatre sometimes justify their disrespect of dramatic texts—when they mockingly comment on political or social aspects, or even tell irrelevant jokes—by claiming that they utilise Brecht's theory.

Regardless of the artistic quality or the content of such interruptions, a large sector of Egyptian spectators usually expresses its cheerful admiration of any revelation of theatricality. Such an observation can be understood on the grounds of the relatively long history of this trend in Egyptian theatre in traditional forms of entertainment. I argue that Egyptian spectators' familiarity with watching dis-illusionist theatre containing improvisational interventions was crucial in encouraging playwrights to raise *theatrically critical* matters within their plays, especially if we consider that these matters by their nature and content are unable to attract an entertainment-focused audience. In other words, I claim that Egyptian critical metadrama has lured its audience's interest in theatrical matters by exploiting its preference for dis-illusionist techniques, especially considering that these theatrical matters are intrinsically related to social and political problems in Egypt.

### Documentary critical metadrama

The vast majority of Egyptian plays that utilised the form of critical metadrama to tackle Egyptian theatre criticism, base their imaginary dramatic realm on the playwrights' present time, as had been the established practice of European metadramatic form in the first half of the twentieth century. However, there are some fascinating exceptions in Egyptian critical metadramas that based their plots on the retelling of the history of prominent practitioners who influenced the history of Egyptian theatre. I focus on three examples of this type of plays: Mohsen Misilhi's *Darb Askar* (1985) and Muhammad abu al-'Ela al-Salamouni's *Abu Naddara* (1985) and *Amir al-Masrah: Muhammad Taimur* (1995).<sup>202</sup>

Although these three plays of Misilhi and al-Salamouni include some documentary features as they revisit the history of Egyptian theatre, most of the factual events are utilised in order to comment on one or more of the critical matters related to theatre. This aspect distinguishes *Darb Askar*, *Abu Naddara*, and *Amir al-Masrah* from plays such as No'man Ashour's two plays *Masrah Ya'qub Sannua's* and *Fagr al-Masrah al-Misri*, whose mere historical narrative does not include any discussion of critical matters.

Based on a complex structure of the play-within-a-play, *Darb Askar* is entirely dedicated to discussing theatrical matters. A group of modern travelling actors and actresses surveys the prosperity and decline of improvisation in the Egyptian theatre. The frame play is an ongoing performance in the present time, which is interrupted by fragments of several performances that belong to different moments of theatrical history. By praising the art of theatrical improvisation, *Darb Askar* seems to reproduce the calls for pure Egyptian theatre. However, unlike Idris and al-Hakim, whose attempts sought to prove resemblances between traditional forms of entertainment and the European form, *Darb Askar* celebrates improvisation as a self-contained innovative practice, which, according to Misilhi, essentially defines the specific nature of the Egyptian theatre.

As the successive fragments of old performances within the play suggest, the improvisation reached its peak with the traditional forms of entertainment such as the shadow play and al-Mahabbazeen, which were

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<sup>202</sup> *Amir al-Masrah* literally means *The Prince of Theatre*. The three plays were published in 1996, 1995, 1998, respectively.

intrinsically based on improvisation. Later, when the European form of theatre replaced these traditional forms, improvisational acts repeatedly occurred within traditional plays.<sup>203</sup> Gradually, improvisation shrank to occasional incidents within performances. Eventually, according to the play, theatrical improvisation became an extinct art.

Because *Darb Askar* praises improvisation as a free mode of theatrical expression, compared to illusionist drama, Misilhi's critical metadrama intentionally counteracts the make-believe realm as the following dialogue suggests:

THE OLD MAN: Samy, you have broken the dramatic illusion!  
 SAMY: I don't care if it is demolished. You shouldn't start the performance without me. Who is responsible for this show?  
 (Misilhi, 233)

Not only does the play excessively use a large number of inner plays, but it also regularly interrupts these inner plays with the actors, whose dramatic existence keeps moving between the outer play and the consecutive pieces of old plays. Commenting on such a complicated structure, Nehad Selaiha observes:

The constant breaking of dramatic illusion, the frequent temporal and spatial shifts and the proliferation of masks are at once dizzying and exhilarating and have the effect of gradually subverting traditional, rational logic and common sense, substituting for them a quasi-surrealistic, artistic logic, based on contrapuntal repetitions and variations. (Selaiha 2004, Web)

Through tracing the decline of improvisation within Egyptian theatre, Misilhi suggests two specific socio-political reasons for such a decline. Firstly, the characters of *Darb Askar* insist that improvisation was negatively affected by the change in the structure of social classes in Egypt. The Modern travelling actors in Misilhi's play argue that

The bourgeoisie grew and extended. [...] The bigger this middle class became, the faster the art of theatrical improvisation disappeared. [...] The middle class likes respect and rules. [...] Bit by bit, the middle-class audience enforces

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<sup>203</sup> In this context, by 'traditional', I mean written plays whose plots do not originally consider any chance of improvisation.

its taste. [...] The artists of improvisation lost their spectators: ragamuffins, wretches and common people. (Misilhi, 262)

In this respect, *Darb Askar* claims that the members of the increasingly growing middle class were against improvisational theatre, which kept entertaining working-class spectators in Egypt for decades. Secondly, *Darb Askar* suggests that because many actors exploited improvisation to address political matters, Egyptian governments used to prevent such deviations from the plots whether by closing productions or by making regulations that censored performances, insisting that they had to adhere strictly to the texts approved by the government. Misilhi's claims, though, cannot be totally accepted. On one hand, it is predicted that a sector of the educated middle class might arrogantly consider improvisation as a low art because of its long history as a reflection on the interests of the working class. On the other hand, the vast majority of Egyptian bourgeois spectators have always preferred the entertaining mixture of comedy and music.

With the consideration of the Egyptian audience's long history of intervening in the live performance, it is crucial to distinguish between governmental and private productions. In the former, there is more respect for written texts, especially with the increasing number of Egyptian playwrights who adopt the European form, which led to considering improvisation as an inferior artistic expression. In this respect Dina Amin's argument can be understood as she claims:

In the twentieth century, while Western theater tried to destroy the fourth wall, Arab artists tried to erect it. As Western practice was trying to incorporate audiences' interaction and participation, Arab directors and playwrights were trying to silence their spectators and restrain their interaction with the pretended world of the play. (Amin *The Arab Studies Journal*, 79)

In Egyptian commercial theatre, I argue that, because of the end of military occupation and the increasing dominance of the police state, the topics of within-play improvisations sought spectators' laughter through irrelevant jokes and situations to the plots. Moreover, in order to satisfy star actors, playwrights themselves started to add these irrelevant interventions, which leading actors pretend to improvise on stage.

As the title of al-Salamouni's *Abu Naddara* reveals, the play celebrates Sannua's role as the pioneer of Egyptian theatre in the 1870s. The play seems to be a record of the pivotal events of Sannua's theatrical career, which are portrayed as a play-within-the-play. The action of the outer play takes place at the present time as a group of actors reveal their intention of portraying Sannua's legacy. The most striking feature of these actors is that al-Salamouni gives them the real names of the members of Sannua's troupe as they are introduced in *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*. Moreover, *Abu Naddara* includes a rewriting of one of the scenes of Sannua's last play, in which actors complain about their financial problems.<sup>204</sup>

These resemblances between *Abu Naddara* and Sannua's play can be understood as grounded in the informative nature of al-Salamouni's play, which is emphasized by the way in which Hasan, one of the dramatic characters, introduces a borrowed scene. Hasan declares: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, we are presenting a scene about some troubles of the troupe. Now, we are in one of our colleagues' house for rehearsing a new play. Pay attention, what we are going to see happened about a hundred years ago, exactly in 1872' (al-Salamouni 1995, 127). Similarly, before asking his colleague who represents Sannua to read an abridged version of a lecture given by the pioneer playwright in Paris in 1903,<sup>205</sup> Hasan directly addresses the audience: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, in the words of Abu Naddara, our master and the founder of our theatre, we are going to present a summary of the establishment of the first popular theatre in Egypt. [...] Come on, it is your turn' (al-Salamouni 1995, 125). Throughout the play Hasan repeatedly assumes the role of a contemporary narrator who, in the outer play, introduces a series of inner-play historical scenes wherein other actors share their representation of the members of the troupe, including Sannua.

*Abu Naddara*, though, does not limit itself to recounting Sannua's efforts in his artistic role in founding Egyptian theatre; al-Salamouni's play contextualises Sannua's theatre in the emerging nationalist movement by the end of the nineteenth century as it was led by thinkers such as Abdullah al-Nadim, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Muhammad Abdu. By representing these

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<sup>204</sup> Al-Salamouni declares that he has never read *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*, about which he has read many references (al-Salamouni 2013, e-mail).

<sup>205</sup> Sannua's original speech, in which he recalls the establishment of his troupe and the success of its first production, is documented in Najm 80-83.

figures within *Abu Naddara* as comrades of Sannua, the play suggests that the latter's theatre was one of the nationalists' weapons in their conflict with both Khedive Ismail and foreign interventions in Egypt. As one of Ismail's consultants argues, 'Theatre encourages insurgence. [...] His Highness Khedive should realise that theatre is as threatening on his rule as al-Afghani's political colloquies' (al-Salamouni 1995, 157). According to the Khedive's advisor, because Sannua's plays criticise specific aspects of the political system, the playwright urges the Egyptian people to revolt against Ismail. Thus, Sannua in *Abu Naddara* is portrayed as a writer and producer of political theatre in its Brechtian sense. In this respect, al-Salamouni's play seems to ignore the fact that Sannua's theatre includes purely entertaining plays.

In *Amir al-Masrah: Muhammad Taimur*, al-Salamouni continues his interest in celebrating the birth of Egyptian theatre. The play focuses on Taimur's effort to create thematically-authentic Egyptian theatre. As the introductory stage directions define, the action of *Amir al-Masrah* takes place 'at the imaginary city of theatre in the kingdom of death, where a big festival is organised and attended by a large number of theatre practitioners from all time' (al-Salamouni 1998, 19). Similar to Taimur's *Mohakamat Moa'lefi Al-Rewayat Al-Tamthileia*, al-Salamouni's play is built on the form of a tribunal where Egyptian theatre practitioners are tried. In *Amir al-Masrah*, al-Salamouni takes a further step by prosecuting Taimur himself who tells the porter the reason for interrupting the festival by his visit to 'the theatrical kingdom of death':

TAIMUR: The state of Egyptian theatre is disastrous. [...] I am asking your highness to hold an artistic tribunal of Egyptian authors and actors where the judges are a group of prominent universal playwrights. [...]

PORTER: And who are the prominent playwrights you need? Do you ask for Shakespeare?

TAIMUR: Yes, Shakespeare is the chairman of judges aided by Molière and Goethe. (al-Salamouni 1998, 21-2)

By choosing these three playwrights as judges, al-Salamouni indirectly refers to his play's resemblance with *Mohakamat Moa'lefi Al-Rewayat Al-Tamthileia*. Furthermore, *Amir al-Masrah* seems to hint at the influence of Aristophanes' *The Frogs* on the tribunal form within Taimur's play by insisting on the ancient

Greek features of 'The entrance to the theatrical kingdom of death' and the festival.

*At one side of the stage there is a Greek gateway under a placard that reads "The entrance to the theatrical kingdom of death". Similar to dithyrambic and Dionysian festivals of the ancient Greek, celebrants wear historical costumes and masks, while they are singing and dancing in a bustling way. (al-Salamouni 1998, 19)*

Throughout *Amir al-Masrah*, the informative purpose regarding Taimur's life and works is mingled with his critique of the Egyptian theatre in the 1910s. al-Salamouni extracts Taimur's opinions on theatre from his critical articles. al-Salamouni declares that 'all Taimur's opinions on theatrical issues are concluded from his own published articles' (al-Salamouni 2013, e-mail). The information about Taimur's works in al-Salamouni's play takes two shapes: firstly, through his direct speeches in which he replies to the judges' questions. Secondly, by using the play-within-a-play, *Amir al-Masrah* includes scenes of Taimur's plays, which enables al-Salamouni's play to mention the problems that faced Egyptian theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. Finally, I argue that although the plays of al-Salamouni and Misilhi return to history, they are concerned with the current problems of Egyptian theatre, which are represented by the topics of discussion within these plays.

## **Theatrical matters raised within Egyptian critical metadramas**

### **a. The purpose of theatre**

Just like European playwrights of critical metadrama, some Egyptian playwrights comment on the aesthetic function of art in general and theatre in particular. For example, in Fawzi Fahmi's 1986 play *Lea'bet al-Sultan*,<sup>206</sup> while al-Beliatsho (the Clown) believes the role of art is to entertain people, Saheb al-Sandouk (the Storyteller) insists on teaching them. Before they introduce the inner play they argue:

THE CLOWN: You always insist on telling stories about irritating things; raise people's concerns. You are fond of blood. The coquettes in your stories, instead of dancing, they

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<sup>206</sup>*The Sultan's Game.*

are crucified. Laughter in your stories swiftly run away. That makes your audience, as well, runs away [...]  
 THE STORYTELLER: Oh my son, you are still naïve, in the future you will understand. (Fahmi, 31-32)

Even at the finale of the play, their views are still discrepant; when The Storyteller addresses the audience to conclude the moral of the inner play, The Clown intervenes to prevent him from continuing his serious speech (Fahmi, 158). However, the vast majority of Egyptian critical metadrama insists on the social function of theatre, as The Author in *al-Kelab al-Aierlandy* argues: 'art should deal with social problems. Otherwise it will be useless' (al-Ghamry,18).

In *Abu Naddara*, al-Salamouni focuses on Sannua's attempts to provide theatre to the ordinary people in order to enlighten and elevate them. On the contrary, the Khedive declares: 'I'm inclined to watch comedies, and more specifically I prefer vaudeville and farce, which make me indulge in laughter' (al-Salamoni 1995, 164). Moreover, in order to emphasise Sannua's insistence on producing social and political plays, *Abu Naddara* contradicts the fact that all Sannua's plays were successful in terms of attracting spectators. Thus, al-Salamoni creates a situation where the troupe faces a financial problem because of the audience's preference for mere entertainment. However, Sannua maintains his belief in the role of theatre as the following debate with one of his actors suggests:

HABIB: My master, these political plays harmed our theatre. Let's return to our light comedies.  
 ABU NADDARA: No Habib, theatre has never been just a means of entertainment. It is an important cultural platform where people learn the principles of morals, nationalism, civilization and liberty. This is the real theatre. (al-Salamoni 1995, 133)

In *Amir al-Masrah*, Taimur insists on the enlightening role of theatre as he argues: 'As intellectuals, we must not conform to spectators' taste. We have a mission. Our responsibility is to educate, guide and refine the audience gradually' (al-Salamouni 1998, 34). For Taimur, comedies must have more utilitarian purpose rather than mere laughter. Therefore, when he first meets the porter of '*the theatrical kingdom of death*', Taimur defines the problems of Egyptian theatre in the 1920s by arguing that



All respectful companies are disappearing. Respectful actors abandoned theatre and searched for governmental jobs. Only clowns and comedians such as Keshkesh bek, Barbari Misr al-Waheed, and Sharafantah<sup>207</sup> are still working. These are the worst examples of Egyptian theatre so far. (al-Salamouni 1998, 21)

Through a debate, al-Salamouni's play introduces Al-Rihani's contradictory point of view to Taimur's belief in the social function of theatre:

AL-RIHANI: My plays are comedies regardless of any social or moral lessons. It is theatre not a school.

TAIMUR: No, theatre is just like school; it has an ethical, educational, and patriotic role. That is what distinguishes theatre from night clubs. (al-Salamouni 1998, 62)

In order to achieve such a social function of theatre, Taimur declares his goal of writing theatre as he claims: 'I wished to save Egyptian theatre from shallowness. I eagerly dreamed of making a pure Egyptian play, which is not a translation, adaptation or an Egyptianization of a foreign play' (al-Salamouni 1998, 56-7).

Taimur's eagerness can be understood on the grounds of the fact that the bulk of Arabic theatre, including Egyptian plays, since its birth has been borrowing from European plays. The following imaginary debate between Molière, whose plays are the most exploited by Arabic theatre, and Egyptian actors insists on such a fact:

AL-RIHANI: I did not steal from Al-kassar. I only borrowed from his plays, adapted them...

AL-KASSAR: Which means that you stole my ...

AL-RIHANI: Just like you when you robbed Molière's Al-Bakhil,<sup>208</sup> and called it an adaptation...

MOLIÈRE: Blimey! How dare you steal my play? You have to pay me, or I will sue you. [...] Nothing is more important than author's copyright. (al-Salamouni 1998, 63)

In addition to the comic effect of Molière's anger, which reverses his position from being a judge to an adversary, it seems that al-Salamouni supports

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<sup>207</sup> These are the names of farcical characters, which were repeatedly played by Al-Rihani, Al-Kassar and Muhammad Kamal Al-Masri, respectively.

<sup>208</sup> The Arabic translation of *The Miser*.

Taimur's attack on Arabic theatre's dependence on European theatre in general and Molière's works in particular.

SHARAFANTAH: You are angry with al-Kassar, while you do not care about those who kept stealing your plays for years.

MOLIÈRE: Are there more thieves.

SHARAFANTAH: More than you can count; Al-Naqqash, Adeeb, Is-haak, Al-Khayaat, Al- Qabbani, Sannua, Salama Hegazi, Eskandar Farah, George Abyad, Abd El-Rahman Rushdi, Aziz Eid, and others. (al-Salamouni 1998, 63)

Because *Mohakamat Moa'lefi Al-Rewayat Al-Tamthileia* is dedicated to commenting on playwrights rather than actors, I suggest that Taimur's critique of al-Rihani within al-Salamouni's play is educed from Taimur's group of articles: *Naqd al-Momathelin*.<sup>209</sup>

In his article, Taimur claims: 'Nothing in what al-Rihani is doing can be called acting, unless acting means that a group of people arbitrarily move on stage and tell whatever riffraff jokes collected by a group of writers, who search for the most disgraceful situations to include such shameful jokes' (Taimur *Naqd al-Momathelin*, 116-7). The three judges' disapproval of a mixture of belly dancing and Franco-Arab songs, as an example of the plays of both al-Rihani and al-Kassar, indicates that al-Salamouni's play shares Taimur's negative opinion on the two actors' works:

SHAKESPEARE: Terrible!

GOETHE: Horrible!

MOLIÈRE: Awful! [...]

SHAKESPEARE: What we have watched was entertaining. However it was not theatre. [...] It is obvious that we do not like your Franco-Arab...

MOLIÈRE: This is not Franco-Arab, it is Franco-crap. (al-Salamouni 1998, 65)

It seems important to mention that many of al-Rihani's plays have been repeatedly reproduced by governmental theatres in the 1960s, wherein the Franco-Arab is replaced by Egyptian-dialect songs. In its turn these reproductions were imitated by a large number of commercial plays during the 1970s and 1980s, within which actors tell irrelevant jokes interrupted by songs and belly dancing.

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<sup>209</sup>A Critique of Actors.

In Magdy al-Gallad's operetta, *Khamsa wi Khmisa* (2000),<sup>210</sup> the Karagöz insists on the role of art as a method of social reform declaring: 'my tongue was a whip that punished all wrong-doers, and it was a cure for the wounds of indigent people. I have never amused the higher class' (al-Gallad, 192). However, the unique aspect of commenting on the purpose of theatre within Egyptian critical metadrama is materialized as the search for the core identity of Egyptian theatre. Choosing The Karagöz to give such a message hints at the self-determined identity of Egyptian theatre, which allegedly can be defined through the use of such semi-theatrical popular forms. Apart from the uncertainty of whether the Karagöz was originally Turkish or Egyptian,<sup>211</sup> al-Gallad, in contrast to both Idris and al-Hakim, does not suggest that traditional forms can be an alternative to European theatre. However, I claim that the play's superficial utilisation of Karagöz is unnecessary as there would not be any difference if this glove-puppet was replaced by a human actor. Karagöz can be effectively unique only as a portable, easily accessible, low-cost method of popular entertainment, or even enlightening, in its original space, away from the Italian proscenium.

It seems that the insistence on the capabilities of traditional forms has provoked Abdu to criticise the overestimation of the Karagöz in his play *Akher al-Shareie*:

ACTOR A: As long as people don't go to theatre, theatre must go to them. [...]  
 ACTOR Q: This is not theatre, this is funfair' stuff. (Abdu 2008, 11)

However, removing seriousness from all forms of popular theatre by considering them mere trivial entertainment that belongs to public carnivals rather than theatre seems to be unfair. Put differently, these traditional forms are different from, and unable to replace, European forms of theatre. However, they are able to be considered theatrical in their own way. Imposing such traditional means within the European form of critical metadrama seems to be a sign of the obsession of Egyptian playwrights to uphold the simplistic argument about Western cultural invasion, which leads us to one of the most unique matters that

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<sup>210</sup> This title is a mantra, according to a superstitious belief, it prevents its speaker from being harmed by envy.

<sup>211</sup> More information about such a debate can be found in the studies of Chen and Öztürk.

distinguishes the discourse of Egyptian critical metadrama from its European ancestor.

### **b. The khawaga complex<sup>212</sup>**

According to Earl Sullivan 'the khawaga complex' means that 'some people love all things that are foreign while others abhor them' (Sullivan, 168). Such a contradictory attitude towards foreign/Western/European things was originally related to the state of occupation. Consequently, fierce accusations were exchanged between pro and anti-Western positions. While the advocates of Western culture are considered traitors by the nationalists, the latter are seen by the former as reactionaries. Despite its origin, the expression 'the khawaga complex' has been utilised in everyday life in Egypt, especially accompanied by debates about the dangers and consequences of globalization. Galal Amin argues: 'The educated, in general, are more afflicted with the khawaga complex than others' (Amin *The illusion of Progress*, 10-11). However, a large number of the well-educated elder generation of theatre practitioners in Egypt, especially those with a Marxist background, is indiscriminately against Western culture.

Within both of his plays, al-Salamouni stresses this issue. In *Amir al-Masrah*, when Taimur chooses Shakespeare, Molière and Goethe to judge Egyptian dramatists and actors, the porter of '*the theatrical kingdom of death*' warns him: 'Your compatriots will accuse you of having the khawaga complex' (al-Salamouni 1998, 22-3). In *Abu Naddara* Sannua insists on writing plays with local themes rather than producing European plays as the following argument between Sannua and Khedive Ismail suggests:

KHEDIVE: You can produce tragedies such as *Oedipus*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*.

ABU NADDARA: Why do I produce theatre that ignores the disastrous problems of Egypt? (al-Salamoni 1995, 260)

It seems that al-Salamoni's eagerness to draw the image of Sannua as a strict, socially-committed man of theatre led *Abu Naddara* to contradict the fact that Sannua was not against producing adaptations and translations of European plays as he did several times. I argue that perhaps al-Salamoni is influenced by

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<sup>212</sup> In Arabic 'ukdat al-khawaga' is sometimes translated as 'the foreigner complex' or 'Western complex'.

the calls for creating pure Egyptian theatre, which did not appear until the second decade of the twentieth century, after the death of Sannua.

In *al-Koras*, Abd al-Moneim Selim criticises the exaggerated fascination for the West among both practitioners and critics:

THE PRODUCER: Has he really studied abroad?

THE DIRECTOR: Yes, he's studied abroad.

1<sup>st</sup> EDITOR IN CHIEF: Do you understand the virtue of studying abroad?

2<sup>nd</sup> EDITOR IN CHIEF: Abroad is a million persons' dream.

THE DIRECTOR: Abroad is the film makers' dream.

THE PRODUCER: And producers [...]

2<sup>nd</sup> EDITOR IN CHIEF: Abroad is the theatre. (Selim *al-Koras*, 30-31)

It is important to mention that the appreciation of, and belief in the superiority of both Western education and practice of theatre, have always been considered self-evident. Nevertheless, Egyptian scholars and practitioners who studied abroad are usually accused of being arrogant and pro-West, especially by the callers for Egyptian authentic art.

The conflict between Western and traditional Egyptian forms and subject matters within *Khamsa wi Khmisa* is based on the *khawaga* complex. Zico, a director who has just returned to Egypt after long years, intends to produce a musical. In contrast, Abdelbatoul, the artistic director of a governmental theatre, is rehearsing an operetta that depicts a local topic by using traditional Egyptian instruments. From the first moment, the play portrays Zico's arrogance; he boastfully declares: 'I got a PhD from the most prestigious university in Europe. I have spent ten years in Broadway's theatres in the United States. You should realise that I am an intellectual' (al-Gallad, 159). This comic description matches his physical image, which recalls the appearance of both Dr Hinkfuss in *Tonight We Improvise* and Nicolas in *Victims of Duty*. According to the stage directions, 'Zico enters, a caricature of a director; with a dishevelled hair, a tobacco pipe is lolling from his mouth' (159). However, in al-Gallad's play, Zico is a parody of over-ambitious young directors in general and the westernised artists in particular. In addition to its denotation as a sign of Westernization, the tobacco pipe is one of a group of signals that compose the comic stereotype of a pretentious artist. Other signals of mediocre artists may include wearing a hat in the Egyptian hot climate, long messy hair, and the constant use of foreign

languages incorrectly. In spite of Abdelbatoul's effort to protect the members of the company from Zico's thoughts, they are amazed by the arrogant pro-West director. Because the entire troupe moves to Zico's musical, Abdelbatoul decides to scour the whole country for new talents. Eventually, he returns with two young potential performers to discover that the members of the troupe have left his rival. Then the play emphasizes its call for committing to Egyptian roots of art:

Neither the Rhone nor the Seine,  
No for London, no Hollywood.  
From the Nile, art is genuine,  
In tradition is the perfect mode. (al-Gallad, 225)

It is not to say that all the Egyptian playwrights of critical metadrama exaggerate the potential of traditional forms of entertainment.

Although Misilhi's *Darb Askar* praises the improvisational nature of traditional forms of theatre, the play displays the opposite point of view that persists in adopting the Western form of proscenium/auditorium theatre. This opinion is represented by Ya'qub Sannua. In the play, Sannua defends his theatre and argues that he 'bridged between the Western form and the improvisation in Egypt' (Misilhi, 248). However, because the anti-West opinions of strolling actors occupy the bulk of critical discourse within the text, its overall impression is contradicting Western theatre. In one of the most successful performances of *Darb Askar*<sup>213</sup>, the director exploits the play's attitude to root the theatrical phenomenon in Egypt to define the role of theatre as a reflection of its own society rather than introducing foreign matters. This performance, though, was not against producing translated plays, but it was an indirect attack on the governmental administration of theatre, which insists on ignoring new Egyptian playwrights. Inside a marquee, imitating the atmosphere of a public ceremony, the play introduced its additional message through songs that comment on the dramatic action. The lyrics of one of these songs, which were performed by the imaginary audience of the inner play, reveals this point of view as it demands:

I need theatre about my own agonies,  
Within which I watch my real life.

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<sup>213</sup> This performance won the Competition of Egyptian Universities Theatre in 1997.

Every time I watch Oedipus,  
I fear taking my mother as a wife.<sup>214</sup>

Paradoxically, the music of these songs, which is based on traditional Egyptian themes and instruments, was played by a Western musical keyboard.

In the context of the calls for maintaining own identity from the hegemony of Western culture, Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre (CIFET) was criticised on the grounds of the *khawaga* complex. In addition to the critique of the festival's high cost, many academics and critics condemned the increasing number of performances that marginalize or neglect the verbal language, such as dancing theatre and mime shows. Simultaneously, the plays of some international companies were completely based on unknown written texts in their local languages, which were impossible to understand for Egyptian audiences. This debate infiltrated the critical discourse within Egyptian metatheatrical plays. Just one year after the first session of the festival, a long discussion revolves around the experimental theatre in *al-Aashek al-Walhan*:

THE DIRECTOR: Experimentation is the only way to solve theatre's crisis.

THE AUTHOR: An actor moves his fingers and toes, that is what you call experimentation.

Dr. K: Objection! Experimental theatre is a historical and artistic necessity to overcome the crisis. [...]

Dr. SH: Experimentation is a dangerous venture. [...]

THE DIRECTOR: Experimentation is a search for a new form; new theatre, new text, new language, and a new audience.

THE AUTHOR: With all our theatres we could not attract enough spectators. Now, your experiments will expel the audience totally. (al-Khodary, 192)

It is predictable that The Author contradicts the experimental trend to marginalize verbal language, while The Director supports the foregrounding of visual elements. In contrast, Isa, the director in Mo'men Abdu's *Akher al-Mataf*,<sup>215</sup> written in 2001, scorns Cairo Festival for Experimental Theatre when he declares: 'I thought of directing a play without *mise en scène*; experimentation' (Abdu 2002, 145). It can be argued that Abdu may force the dramatic character to express his own refusal of increasing the importance of visual-based theatre at the expense of dramatic text. Nonetheless, Isa

<sup>214</sup> Lyrics were written by the Egyptian poet and playwright Alaa Abd al-Aziz Sulayman.

<sup>215</sup> *The Last Destination*.

represents a large sector of Egyptian directors, who shared the playwrights' opposition to the absence of written texts in favour of nonverbal theatricality. Such debates seem to be far away from the bulk of Egyptian people whose notion of theatre is limited to commercial comedies, which they watch on TV, while the makers of governmental theatre keep blaming spectators for their low taste.

### c. Commenting on the Egyptian audience

In *Amir al-Masrah*, while Taimur complains that his plays did not appeal to the Egyptian audience, the three judges positively comment on three scenes of these plays. In this respect, al-Salamouni's play indirectly criticises the two major aspects of the dominant entertaining form of commercial theatre, which have been shaping Egyptian audience's preferences since the last third of the nineteenth century: farce comedy and singing. For instance, after watching a scene of *Al-'usfur fi'l-qafs*, the three prominent playwrights praise Taimur's style. Therefore they express their surprise at the Egyptian audience's response:

MOLIÈRE: (*Clapping*) Bravo, this scene is wonderfully written. Amazing, is it not?  
 GOETHE: How did the audience react?  
 TAIMUR: Sadly, the play did not receive the success I predicted!  
 SHAKESPEARE: What is the reason? (al-Salamouni 1998, 33)

The answer to Shakespeare's question comes from the conversation between Taimur and Abd El-Rahman Rushdi, the owner of the theatre company which produced *Al-'usfur fi'l-qafs* in 1918:

RUSHDI: Spectators seek fun and entertainment not gloomy tragedies.  
 TAIMUR: My play is neither gloomy nor tragic.  
 RUSHDI: I know that it is a respectful critical comedy, but people need farce and vaudeville. [...] Alas, this is our audience's preference. (al-Salamouni 1998, 33)



Egyptian spectators' excessive favouring of singing is discussed within al-Salamouni's play when the judges watch a scene of *Abd al-Sattar Effendi*, in which Taimur remarkably attempted to match the audience's taste of comedy:

SHAKESPEARE: Well done, Muhammad Taimur!

GOETHE: Great!

MOLIÈRE: (*While embracing Taimur*) Bravo! You are a first-rate writer of comedies. Congratulations! Let us shake hands.

TAIMUR: (*Unhappily*) However, the play did not succeed. [...]

It was my fault that I let my play performed by the company of Mounira al-Mahdeia<sup>216</sup> while she had no role in it. [...]

Because al-Mahdeia's voice is what really attracts spectators to watch her company's productions, they were disappointed when they discovered that the play includes no song. (al-Salamouni 1998, 40)

It is important to mention that the inclusion of both songs and dances have continued to attract Egyptian spectators to theatre. That explains why a large number of contemporary Egyptian performances are filled with songs and dances regardless, even at the expense of dramatic quality.

In *Amir al-Masrah*, al-Salamouni's attack on entertaining theatre extends beyond Taimur's critique of the Egyptian theatre in the 1910s to include criticism of more recent periods. Provoked by the three judges' negative comments, al-Rihani declares: 'We do not care about your opinions. [...] The only judge we trust in is the audience, who fills our theatres each evening. [...] Let us go (*He exits with both al-Kassar and Sharafantah*)' (al-Salamouni 1998, 66-7). This argument insists on the indivisible and causal relationship between the purpose of theatre and spectators' preferences. In addition, although there is no evidence that al-Rihani factually made such a claim, it has been repeatedly utilised by the producers and actors of Egyptian commercial theatre since the 1970s.

Moreover, al-Salamouni's play directly refers to the disastrous effect of audiences from the Gulf countries on the prosperity of Egyptian commercial theatre. As the linkage between the real world and the imaginary realm of the kingdom of death, the porter has the ability to tell other characters about the future, which is the state of Egyptian theatre between the 1970s and the 2000s. The porter declares: 'Later, there will be many commercial companies, which

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<sup>216</sup> Al-Mahdeia is the famous singer and lead actress whose company produced Taimur's play.

will be called the private-sector theatre, worse than the Franco-Arab. It is the 'petroleu-Arab' (al-Salamouni 1998, 70).

To justify his idea of starting the performance with a profligate dance, The Director in *al-Aashek al-Walhan* claims that 'seriousness annoys audience. My spectators are vulgar. I have to amuse them, indulge them. Then I impose the message; this is art' (al-Khodary, 159). Even when the T.V. reporter asks him about the prosperity of private theatre, The Director accuses the audience of superficiality:

THE INTERVIEWER: Why does private theatre attract spectators, who pay for its expensive tickets? Some of these performances last for two or three years.

DR. K: There is a play that continually lasted for ten years.

THE DIRECTOR: The audience is ignorant, superficial prefers rubbish and lewdness. (al-Khodary, 197)

As with the Protagonist in Kaiser's play, the Director's negative image throughout *al-Aashek al-Walhan* indirectly challenges his arrogant opinion on spectators. The audience in *al-Agouzwa al-zabetwa al-Millionaire* is portrayed as a victim of the conflict between the practitioners who interrupt the performance to express their discrepant points of view. The Upper-Egyptian<sup>217</sup> is a spectator who keeps urging them to resume the show. He attacks them 'You should respect yourselves and give us a useful play that contains a valuable moral [...] Now, play the two scenes you are fighting about, or do you need us to beg you?' (Kitchener, 144-5). This situation comments on practitioners' preoccupation with futile debates while they ignore their audience's existence.

Similar to the Author in Lorca's *Play Without a Title*, The Old Man in *Darb Askar* prefers workers to bourgeois spectators. Although his son describes his father's audience as riffraff, The Old Man, who produces shadow plays for the public, insists 'I will always perform for poor people, not for big money men. I'll keep doing this till I die' (Misilhi, 233). Mo'men Abdu's *Akher al-Shareie* defends audiences by blaming both Egyptian governmental organizations and practitioners for the failure of theatre. At the beginning, the play refers to the absence of the spectators as an indication of the Egyptian theatre's failure:

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<sup>217</sup> Upper-Egyptians, the inhabitants of the south parts of Egypt, are usually portrayed as tough, naïve, or both, with a funny dialect.

THE DIRECTOR: Excellent. You're a brilliant actor. Your artistic future will be great. [...]

ACTOR Q: The attendance is free, but nobody watched it except your family and a bunch of children. (Abdu 2008, 10)

The rest of the play seems to explore the reasons for theatre's inability to attract audiences. Just like The Director in *Al-Aashek Al-Walhan*, actor A, the colleague of Q, blames spectators for the decline of theatre. However, one member of the audience faces him:

ACTOR A: That is what the public need.

THE OLD LADY: No, that is what you need. (Abdu 2008, 12)

The so-called Egyptian audience's low taste has been increasingly utilised to justify the decline of Egyptian theatre since the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, the remarkable success of serious productions, including comedies, of both translated and Arabic texts has repeatedly proved the falseness of this claim. It is a fact that theatre in Egypt, just like any other country, has been facing a fierce competition with cinema and television to attract audience. However, the major factors that distinguish the crisis of theatre in Egypt are censorship and administration. Therefore, it is understood that both matters are persistently raised within critical metadrama.

#### **d. Censorship**

The three taboos that limit the freedom of creation in Egypt and all Arab countries are religion, politics, and sex.<sup>218</sup> Except for politics, these taboos were raised by conservative social norms which were shaped on the consensus between both Islam and Christianity. Therefore, usually, practitioners themselves are keen not to enter the thorny territory of religion. Regarding sex, both playwrights and performers usually find a way to use a kind of suggestive verbal language that some strict spectators may consider offensive against the rigid decency. In al-Ghamry's *al-Kelab al-Aierlandy*, there is a hint at this kind of censorship. To asperse Ahmed, the Author introduces him to Ghada, a sluttish woman. Although Ahmed neglects her, the Author's trick seems to succeed when Nora thinks that her lover has responded to Ghada's seduction.

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<sup>218</sup> In addition to theatre, Egyptian cinema has been suffering from governmental censorship since its emergence by the end of the nineteenth century. For more information, see Ali.

GHADA: Thanks Mr. Author. Can we... (*Whispers in his ears*)  
 AUTHOR: (*In an exaggerated style*) No, do you think that I'm just like Ahmed?  
 NORA: Do you mean that Ahmed has ...  
 AUTHOR: (*The same exaggerated style*) Stop, Nora! Don't describe! There is a censorship. (al-Ghamry, 29)

Usually, the blunt description of what the Author hints at is overlooked by censors unless they receive complaints.

Before the Egyptian revolution in 1952, the government directly observed performances to preclude any reference to the national revolutionary movements against the British occupation. One of the first incidents of governmental censorship on theatre can be traced back to 1872 when Khedive Ismail, who was the patron of Sannua, enforced the closure of his theatre because of Sannua's insistence on the harmful influence of British and French domination of political and economic systems in Egypt. Apart from this political message, Sannua's play suggests that the European advisors of Ismail were more aware of the potential effect of theatre on stimulating nationalist movements than the Khedive.

In order to underscore the role of Sir Evelyn Baring, the Consul-General of Egypt, who was known as Lord Cromer, in this censorship, Karim Alrawi explains:

Abd Allah al-Nadim (1844-96) was [...] a popular journalist [...] used the theatre to reach a wider audience, notably through his play *al-Watan (Homeland)*, which promoted his calls for unity. In response to such activity, Lord Cromer sought to control the proliferation of theatre companies, censorship laws being introduced in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Alrawi, 723).

It seems that Lord Cromer was inspired by his compatriot Lord Chamberlain. Steve Nicholson affirms the political purpose of censorship on theatre since the Eighteenth-Century as he explains:

The immediate origins of theatre censorship lay in Walpole's Parliamentary Act of 1737, which had been specifically designed to prevent criticism from the stage of his government and himself. Under this Act, no play was to be performed without first being licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, and since there were no stated rules or guidance as to what he

should or should not allow, power was effectively left in the hands of one individual (Nicholson, 11)<sup>219</sup>

In *Abu Naddara*, al-Salamouni focuses on the Khedive as the only authority that practice's censorship. As a patron, Ismail uses a strategy of carrot-and-stick by offering Sannua a big sum of money in order to produce a new pure-entertaining play. Refusing the Khedive's bribe, Sannua has to obey Ismail's punishment as a group of policemen led by a sheriff interrupts the performance of Sannua's *al-Watan wa al-Huriyya*:

SHERIFF: Khedive's policemen, invade theatre. (*Policemen get on the stage while they are drawing their swords*).

HASSAN: Blimey! What are you doing? Shame on you! It is an acting, theatre. It is not a real thing.

SHERIFF: No acting. Close this theatre, policemen! [...] (*Shows papers*) This is the Khedive's decree. [...] (*Reads*) Because of his dangerous plays, which are as evil as Satan's seductions of people, the theatre of Ya'qub Sannua, who is known as Abu Naddara is closed indefinitely. (al-Salamouni 1995, 189-91)

According to Sannua in *Abu Naddara*, limiting the freedom of writers by censorship prevents theatre from achieving its essential role in enlightening the audience. In his debate with Khedive Ismail, Sannua argues: 'What is the point of theatre when brave words are forbidden on stage' (al-Salamouni 1995, 265)? Here, al-Salamouni highlights that the Khedive's support for theatre was limited to entertaining plays.

In *Amir al-Masrah*, Al-Salamouni refers to Taimur's suffering from the political censorship on theatre. After the failure of *Abd al-Sattar Effendi* because of its lack of songs, Taimur wrote the dramatic text of the operetta: *Al-Ashra al-Taieba*. However, although the production attracted spectators, it was forcibly closed by the authority because of its political allusions. After watching several scenes of the operetta, the judges comment:

SHAKESPEARE: I am not surprised that they banned the play. You are harshly mocking the rulers.

MOLIÈRE: I agree. Mr Taimur, you are lucky that they did not sue you or send you behind the sun.<sup>220</sup> (al-Salamouni 1998, 54)

<sup>219</sup> The same thought of censorship's political priority can be found in Conolly.

In *Darb Askar*, Misilhi refers to some of the censorial measures in the period between 1910 and 1912, as the Policeman declares to Michael Girges, one of the famous Egyptian improvisers:

**POLICEMAN:** The government warns all the owners of theatres that before putting any play onstage, its text must be approved and officially stamped by the local consul. [...] A group of secret detectives have attended theatres to prevent actors from producing any text which was not approved by the government. Eskandar Farah Effendi's play *The Martyrs of Patriotism* is completely forbidden to be produced. (Misilhi, 250-51)

Moreover, to prevent actors from making any indirect hints which may not be realised by police detectives, the government take a further step by establishing a specific department, which assigns three dramatists to observe each performance on a regular basis (Misilhi, 251).

Although the policemen's interruption of performances seems to be an exaggerated depiction of governmental intervention in theatre practice and the freedom of speech, it is important to realise that the Egyptian Ministry of Interior Forces was responsible for censorship for theatre. After the revolution of 1952, a governmental organization was established to undertake the mission of giving permission to dramatic texts to be performed and to assure that no new lines were added by actors in real performances. The main role of these censors was to ban any critique of the political system. Sayed Ali Ismail declares that, up to this moment, censorship is practised according to the law of organizing theatrical censorship, which was issued on 3 Sep 1955. Moreover, on 27 May 1976, the Ministry of Culture announced new strict rules that have decreased the freedom of expression of playwrights, directors, and actors. One of these rules, to give an example, asserts that the play will not receive a permission to be produced or performed if it represents social problems in a way that leads audience to feelings of despair (Ismail 2009, 22-4). This kind of artistic censorship limits the choice of directors who cannot direct any play other than the dramatic texts accepted and approved by the authorized body.

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<sup>220</sup> To be sent behind the sun is a figurative expression, which is utilised in Egypt to describe the detention of political activists where no one can know their place.

Mohsen al-Khayyat argues that 'censorship is the disease that harmed the theatre movement in most countries of the Arab world by the imposition of a central reading committee that decides what is to be produced on behalf of the practitioners themselves' (al-Khayyat, 98-9). Comments on this system of initial censorship can be found in *Entahat al-Galsa*. Selim's play portrays the ultimate authority of the committee whose members are not qualified for such a mission. When the playwright asks the critics about the meaning of what they call 'dramatic character's dimensions', the President of the committee explains: 'if you cannot understand what dimensions mean you shouldn't write theatre in the first place. [...] Dimensions are metres. The distance between me and you is a dimension. Dramatic characters must have dimensions' (Selim *Entahat al-Galsa*, 101). In addition to their ignorance, the members of the committee judge all sorts of writings, including dramatic texts, according to a huge book of rules as the President proclaims: 'We have a constitution, an artistic constitution which determines our duties and the measures by which any artistic work must be evaluated' (Selim *Entahat al-Galsa*, 78). To blame the playwright for representing negative images, The Right Member of the court/committee reads from the book of artistic rules: 'The Article number 1100 demands the artist to be kind to his people; he has to correct their mistakes by kindness and polite advice not by defamation' (92). Therefore, playwrights must not shock their audience; they have to play the role of entertainers rather than social reformers. The President emphasizes that 'the finale of the play should be cheerful because our goal is to gladden people' (103). Thus, the tyrannous political regime employs a cultural official authority to define the function of arts, including theatre, determining whether it should be propagandistic or entertaining.

*Darb Askar* portrays an image of a stupid modern censor who insists on ending the inner improvisational performance, and ends the play as well, for no political, religious, or sexual breach, just because actors and actresses replaced some words. He states:

You said similar words, and these similar words are not in the approved and stamped script. [...] (*Victoriously*) I'm the censor, I'm the censorship. Arrest all of them. Bring me the director, the stage manager, and the executive director. Audience, arrest all spectators; they were watching an

unapproved play. They should be poisoned. The epidemic will spread. Arrest them. I'm the censorship. I'm the censor, I'm the censor. (Misilhi, 263)

This comic portrait of the official censor should remind Egyptian audiences of the dark image of the real life.

In *al-Aashek al-Walhan*, the censorship is represented as an ambiguous sound which addresses both The Author and The Director twice to end each rehearsal with the same warning: 'there are several reports that contain a large number of critical comments and censorial notices. Stop this mess and rush to the office!' (al-Khodary, 166 and 179). Here, the play comments on the regulatory role of the managers of governmental theatres, who are eager to protect their jobs by preventing any word or gesture that may cause censorial problems.

More viciously, the consequences of breaching political censorial limits, specifically related to the ruler, sometimes extend beyond the performance itself to affect practitioners. In 1983, the General Organization of Censorship on Artistic Works prosecuted the Egyptian actor Sa'id Saleh because he altered the approved text of the play *Lea'ba esmaha el-folous*.<sup>221</sup> An Egyptian court sentenced Saleh to six months in prison. Although the sentence was suspended, such an incident indicates the Egyptian regime's effort to control theatre by disguised regulations that claim to be protecting moral, religious, and patriotic values. Alrawi refers to al-Hakim's refusal of this punishment as he bitterly commented: 'We can only assume that Sa'id Saleh has been made an example of for the shameful act of making people laugh. The only shameful act in this whole affair is that of the theatre censor' (al-Hakim ctd. in Alrawi, 728). The line that caused Saleh's agony was a sarcastic description of Egyptian successive presidents: Nasser, al-Sadat, and Mubarak, respectively in a metaphorical way, as he said 'My mother married three times, the first enforced us to eat el-mish<sup>222</sup>, the second taught us to deceive, and the third does nothing at all'.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> *A Game Called Money*.

<sup>222</sup> El-mish is a kind of traditional highly salted cheap cheese.

<sup>223</sup> Although it is a famous incident in the history of Egyptian theatre, it is rarely mentioned as we can find in Saleh. However the line itself is not mentioned. Alrawi translated part of this line in which he describes Sadat as the one who 'told us lies', which does not precisely suggest the connotation of Saleh's pun that hinted at the common image of Sadat's period as the golden era of fraud.



In the early days of his honeymoon, the character of The Playwright in Ali Salem's *al-Kateb Fi Shahr al-Asal* keeps telling his bride about feeling that he is being spied on by a guest at the same hotel. Although she insists on denying his unverified suspicions, his doubts increase to include the hotel servant, the telephone, and even a fly which invades the couple's room. With no hope of changing his mind, she justifiably accuses him of being paranoid and asks for divorce. Eventually, when he leaves for a walk, we discover that his doubts are proven to be right. Furthermore, his wife reveals her role as the chief of the entire process of spying. When she phones her employers she insists that 'there are other parties watching the target. [...] There are also other people watching the other parties who are watching the target. [...] there are doubts about the existence of other persons who are watching the other people who are watching the other parties ...etc' (Salem *al-Kateb*, 232). As The Wife's speech reveals, the writer privacy is breached by several secret governmental institutions, which themselves clandestinely observe each other in a typical police state.

The Author in *al-Kelab al-Aierlandy* believes in the role of theatre in representing social problems, which are mainly caused by the failure of the political regime. Therefore, he is chased by the authority whose representative visits the playwright. The disguised cop, who is described as The Person, threatens the Author with being eaten by genetically modified Irish dogs. According to The Person, these dogs are man-eating, two-metres long at birth, and with teeth as long as human index finger (al-Ghamry, 14-16). To avoid this danger, he decides to write a play about a love story. To get rid of Ahmed, his rival in the inner play, the Author writes political lines for him to cause him to be arrested. However, he regrets this and bravely faces the authority as he confesses 'I'll tell them that I take responsibility for every single word said by Ahmed. I'm the playwright; he is just a dramatic character. Then, they will release him and arrest me (*The dogs' barking is heard*) I don't fear the Irish dogs any more' (35). Indeed, it is hard for real playwrights, including al-Ghamry to be as brave as the imaginary playwright in his play. The bad effect of this choking censorship is allied with the problems of administration in the governmental theatres.

The Manager in Salem *al-Boufeh* represents both artistic and political censorship. At the beginning, the Manager politely asks the Playwright to omit a

specific obscene phrase from his play. Gradually, because of the latter's refusal, the former becomes tough. Under the Manager's insistence, the Playwright goes to the buffet to rethink the matter. Nevertheless, it seems that the Playwright was sent to be punished for his stubbornness. As the stage directions reveals:

*The Playwright reluctantly exits with the Waiter. The Manager listens to wild music lasts until the return of the Playwright, who, apparently has just been beaten in a fierce fighting; his clothes are torn, his face is full of contusions and bruises, and he walks and sits with the help of the Waiter. (Salem al-Boufeh, 30)*

After his visit to the buffet, the Playwright not only accepts all the Manager's orders, but also voluntarily removes an entire act of his own play. This intersection between censorship and management is one of the administrative problems in the Egyptian governmental theatres.

#### **e. Criticising administration**

One of the most striking aspects of the bad policies of governmental cultural organizations is its neglecting of the needs of the vast majority of Egyptian people for theatre. The two actors in *Akher al-Shareie*, are upset because the two governmental theatres in which they used to participate in free productions have disappeared; one is closed and the other is transformed to an opera for the elite:

ACTOR A: They are going to turn our theatre into an opera house.

ACTOR Q: What does it mean?

ACTOR A: It will be for people in tailcoats.

ACTOR Q: The woman who suffers in order to feed her children.

ACTOR A: She has no evening dress.

ACTOR Q: And the worker man.

ACTOR A: He has neither a suit nor a necktie. (Abdu 2008, 12)

While they dream of establishing their own theatre, where poor people can watch plays, the two actors indirectly criticise the regime's cultural policies, which favour the bourgeoisie and neglect the working class.

Similarly, in *Akher al-Mataf*, Abdu disappointedly comments on the bad conditions of professional theatre in Egypt. The play portrays some practitioners, including a writer, director and actors, who chose isolation from society. Abu Salma, a director, explains their agony: 'We sought a good life. We're a group of actors, playwrights and composers, a bunch of theatrical artists who didn't find a stage. So, we decided to imprison ourselves in a dark room' (Abdu 2002, 127). When they recall the demolition of the theatre where they were working in order to build an apartment building, the play indirectly criticises the depreciation of art by voracious consumption. In order to restore his memories, Ezzat, an actor of the group, reaches the roof of the building imagining that he is onstage, and describes his distress:

EZZAT: I realised that the roof is planted with satellite TV dishes. I started to count them.

ABU SALMA: (*Mockingly*) The building receives the entire world...

EZZAT: While it refuses to receive us. (Abdu 2002, 127)

In addition to the hint at the impact of the prosperity of television channels on the decline of the number of theatregoers, the replacement of the theatre buildings by the modern apartment building where the upper middle class live refers to the change of socialist policies towards capitalism since the middle of the 1970s.

In all governmental theatres, except for the Egyptian Opera House, practitioners' low salaries reflect on the bad financial conditions of governmental employees in general and the state's lack of interest in theatre in particular. The following dialogue between the two actors in *Akher al-Shareie* comment on this issue:

ACTOR A: I got both our salaries.

ACTOR Q: Where's the money?

ACTOR A: Nearly finished.

ACTOR Q: When?

ACTOR A: I paid for the tea, coffee, and cigarettes we bought on credit during rehearsals. (Abdu 2008, 11)

Usually practitioners' complaints are accompanied by comparisons with the exaggerated incomes of the people who occupy high-ranked administrative positions, especially the managers of theatres.

Furthermore, whether the managers of governmental theatres are chosen from directors, playwrights, actors, or academics, there are always complaints. While practitioners usually claim that academics lack the practical experience, practitioners are accused of exploiting their jobs to boost their artistic career. Abdelbatoul, the manager of the theatre in *Khamsa wi Khmisa* contradicts this common charge:

DANDRAWY: I can't stand this Zico.

ABDELBATOUL: You must. We have to. Because of my position as an artistic director, you know, he may tell papers the common lies of these young directors. He can allege that my play snatched most of the theatre's budget while crumbs were left to his show. (al-Khodary, 153)

This direct defence of the director/manager can be understood when we consider that al-Khodary, who wrote this play, was a director who occupied administrative positions in the governmental theatres. It is not to say that he, himself, benefited from his job, but it is hard to find such sympathy with directors who manage governmental theatres, let alone the ideal image of Abdelbatoul, as he supports Zico, who used to be his arrogant rival:

ZICO: I give up. I'm leaving.

ABDELBATOUL: No, you're not leaving. I do believe in your right to produce the sort of art you like. [...] I'm against neither you nor your visions; I'm only contradicting your zeal. Let's both finish our performances and audience will judge. (al-Khodary, 206)

In *al-Boufeh*, Ali Salem portrays the privileges that the playwright/manager can get from his/her position when the Manager teases the Playwright: 'If you were in my chair, your play would have been produced soon. Exactly as you wish; with no alterations, with the best publicity. It would have also had the Director and actors you wished for' (Salem *Al-Boufeh*, 50-1). Perhaps, there are some managers of theatres who ethically abandon their personal artistic ambition to their objective mission. However, the administrative

system that forces a young director to compete on unequal terms with the manager of the theatre should not exist in the first place.

**f. The tension between playwrights and directors:**

There are several famous disputes between Egyptian directors and playwrights in the second half of the Twentieth Century. Surur, who practiced both professions, is certain that this conflict is inevitable as long as some writers insist on their strict and unchangeable vision while some directors spoil good plays by imposing their irrelevant interventions. Therefore, Surur sarcastically advises playwrights who need to protect their texts, firstly, to direct them and, secondly, to never die (Surur 'Al-Seraa', 8). However, most of Surur's plays were directed by others. In 1968, Surur wrote his critical metadrama *Ya Bahiya wi Khaberini: Komedia Naqdeia*,<sup>224</sup> which is dedicated to the harsh critique of Galal al-Sharqawy's direction of the playwright's previous play: *Ah ya Lil Ya Qamar*.<sup>225</sup>

Similar to *Bahiya wa Yasin*, *Ya Bahiya wi Khaberini* was directed by Karam Mutaweh, which caused a fierce debate about Mutaweh's right to direct a play, within which his colleague is criticized.<sup>226</sup> Al-Qet argues that Surur, Mutaweh, and the administration of the Pocket Theatre, which produced the play, must avoid fueling the already tense relationship between Surur and Mutaweh on one side and al-Sharqawy on the other side (Al-Qet, 371-2). As al-Qet's comment suggests, there was a dispute between the two directors, which raises an ethical question about Mutaweh's choice of directing *Ya Bahiya wi Khaberini*.

Within the play, a troupe performs what is supposed to be a real story to the inhabitants of the village where its incidents happened several years ago. Surur portrays the Director as an arrogant person who even condemns the audience:

DIRECTOR: you are not entitled to teach me the difference between drama and melodrama. I know exactly what I am doing. I studied cinema, theatre, television, radio broadcasting, pure mathematics and impure mathematics. I

<sup>224</sup> *Bahiya, tell me: A Critical Comedy*. The title of the play is part of the introductory sentence of the popular tale, which is 'Bahiya, tell me who killed Yasin'.

<sup>225</sup> Literally *Oh Night, Oh Moon*, which are the starting words of a very famous folkloric song.

<sup>226</sup> Both Mutaweh and al-Sharqawy were academics at the Department of Acting and Directing in the Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts.

have got the most prestigious certificates in theatre directing from foreign countries. [...]

AUTHOR: I have only one certificate.

DIRECTOR: There is no certificate in playwrighting.

AUTHOR: Yes, there is, it is given by these people, the common; the fellahin. (*Surur Ya Bahiya*, 260-1)

In addition to hinting at 'the khawaga complex', the Director's bragging words sarcastically refer to al-Sharqawy who graduated from the Faculty of Science before studying theatre and cinema in France.<sup>227</sup>

Moreover, Surur seems to exploit his personal disagreement with al-Sharqawy in order to highlight the conflict over authority between directors and playwrights in general:

AUTHOR: I want you to announce that I am the author of the play.

MANAGER: Why does the audience care about the author?

AUTHOR: What else does it care about?

DIRECTOR: It cares about the performance and the owner of the performance.

AUTHOR: And who is the owner of the performance?

DIRECTOR: I am, of course. [...]

AUTHOR: Then what is the author?

MANAGER: The author is a husband who allows his wife to marry someone else.

AUTHOR: Is there anyone who allows his wife to marry someone else?

MANAGER: All playwrights do. (*Surur Ya Bahiya*, 258)

The play, however, does not limit its critique to directors; all practitioners except for the playwright are responsible for the fake image of both the village and the heroes of the factual story. When Hanawa blames the Author for the fake image of Bahiya, he defends himself by claiming:

AUTHOR: I swear, I did not write it like that. They deformed her.

HANAWA: Who are they?

AUTHOR: All of them the manager of the troupe, the director and actors. (*Surur Ya Bahiya*, 258)

Apart from Surur's support for himself, and all playwrights, Hanawa's expression of her anger towards the actress who played the role of Bahiya by

<sup>227</sup> For more information about the director's life and career, see al-Sharqawy.

'pulling her hair and bringing her down on the stage' (Surur *Ya Bahiya*, 254) recalls Delia Moreno's slapping the actress within *Each in His Own Way*. However, while Pirandello utilises the inner play to reveal what Moreno does not realise about her own feelings, *Ya Bahiya wi Khaberini* criticises the false theatrical image of Bahiya. In this respect, Hanawa's violence towards the actress reflects on the opinion of the entire village. Expressing her disapproval of the way in which the main female character is portrayed, Hanawa angrily wonders: 'Was Bahiya that wanton, prankish, and sassy?' (Surur *Ya Bahiya*, 249). Nevertheless, apart from the punishment of the actress, Surur's play blames the director for actors' improper representation.

Another variation of the playwright-director dispute is raised in *al-Aashek al-Walhan*, where, exactly like Dr Hinkfuss in *Tonight We Improvise*, The Director refuses the playwright's appearance in rehearsals:

THE CLEANER: You're not allowed to be in the rehearsal.  
 THE AUTHOR: I'm the author.  
 THE CLEANER: It's the Director's orders. [...] The writer's place is the poster or among spectators on the premiere. (al-Khodary, 155)

Later, when the playwright attends the rehearsal he discovers why his absence was preferred by The Director who gives him clear instructions: 'I don't mind your attendance, but please, don't interrupt my work during the rehearsal; you must wait until I finish and then tell me whatever you think' (al-Khodary, 157-8). However, the playwright cannot keep silent while The Director is modifying the characters and their dialogue:

THE AUTHOR: You have ruined my play.  
 THE DIRECTOR: Never mind, the performance will succeed.  
 All these pages are useless dialogues. We just kept the gist. I do love concentration. (al-Khodary, 163)

What all playwrights may consider essential alterations are described by The Director as 'just tiny changes; an explanatory vision' (al-Khodary, 157). Usually, the stage directions are the first victim of Directors' intervention; when The Actress reminds The Director of the stage directions, he angrily declares: 'To hell! Writer's instructions are not your business. These parentheses are written by playwrights to be ignored by us. If you had paid enough attention, you would

have realised we produce an utterly opposite explanation of the text' (al-Khodary, 160). Therefore, when the playwright gets the chance to express his point of view he tells the academic critics that 'the core of theatre's crisis is the director; from the moment they invented this job, directors have been botching dramatic texts' (al-Khodary, 181).

It is important to notice that although Egyptian metatheatrical plays comment on several negative aspects of directors, the relationship between playwrights and director is rarely raised within these plays. It can be justified by the fact that there are more urgent matters that concerns the writers of these plays. It may also be explained by the system of production in governmental theatres, which makes any playwright believe that for his/her play to be performed is a rare chance, despite the way in which it was directed.

#### **g. Commenting on acting:**

Similar to European critical metadramas, *Amir al-Masrah* refers to the inferior social image of the acting profession. After the character of the Sultan of Egypt watched Muhammad Taimur's acting, he blames the latter's father:<sup>228</sup>

TAIMUR PASHA: Do not you like my son's acting?  
 THE SULTAN: Unfortunately, I liked it and this is the disaster.  
 [...] Theatre in Egypt is undignified. Shame on a son of a Pasha to be an actor, just like Karagöz! (al-Salamouni 1998, 26-7)

Just like the actors in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, *Paris Impromptu*, and *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih*, the leading actress and actor in *al-Aashek al-Walhan* are absent while the rehearsal has already started:

THE DIRECTOR: Who is absent?  
 THE ASSISTANT: The protagonist is at the café and the heroine is finishing her make-up. (al-Khodary, 169)

Moreover, The Actress is interested in moving her audience's senses regardless of the dramatic character's attributes. She decides:

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<sup>228</sup> Taimur pasha was a member of the elite class who had the privilege of meeting the Egyptian ruler.



I don't care about the moral. You are conspiring to humiliate me in front of my fans who like to watch me dancing in a sexy dress. I accepted to wear these dirty clothes of a factory worker, with neither a wig nor beautiful make-up. Now you need to deprive me of my fans' applause when I die onstage! No way, my whole body will stiffen while I'm dying.<sup>229</sup> (al-Khodary, 164)

Not only does the actress consider her adherence to the character's image a sacrifice, she insists on altering the finale of the play in order to impress her fans. However, The Director easily convinces her of changing her mind:

THE DIRECTOR: (*Takes her aside.*) Don't be fool! This finale is specifically done for your favour; you have died several times in movies and plays, but this time you will be a real heroine. You will kill the bourgeoisie, imperialism, and capitalism. Then, you will become a symbol for liberation.  
THE ACTRESS: (*Happily.*) Wow, I agree. (al-Khodary, 164)

Thus, the only way for the Director to protect his vision of the play from the Actress' exaggerated interest in her appearance is satisfying her vanity by claiming that the finale was specifically designed to highlight her significance.

In contrast to the Director in al-Khodary's play, the Playwright in *al-Agouz wa al-Zabet wa al-Millionaire* supports actors' alterations of his dramatic text and considers it a kind of improvisation. When the experienced actress blames her younger colleagues for changing their speeches, the Playwright contradicts her as he assures: 'this kind of modification will never irritate me. It is beautiful. Please, keep doing it every night' (Kitchener, 141). It is hard to claim that Kitchener is as tolerant as his imaginary character, but it is obvious that he supports the actor's right to alter the dramatic text.

One of the most noticeable features of both acting and directing in Egypt is the debate about natural talent compared to academic study. After he journeyed Egypt to search for new talents, Abdelbatoul in *Khamsa wi Khmisa* returns with two new alumni of academic institutes as they introduce themselves:

SA'DEIA: I've just graduated from the Institute of Arabic Music.

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<sup>229</sup> In Egypt, leading actors and actresses in many commercial performances wear stylish clothes regardless of the social class of the characters they portray.

KARAM: And, I am a fresh graduate from the Institute of Theatre Arts. (al-Gallad, 217)

This positive image of studying art is exceptional; the academic actor or director is usually portrayed as arrogant, inexperienced, and mediocre. In *al-Aashek al-Walhan*, a quarrel between two minor actors hints at this comparison:

REBEL 1: I cannot rebel properly. He obstructs me.

REBEL 2: You obstruct me.

REBEL 1: I am graduated from the Institute, and I have the card.<sup>230</sup>

REBEL 2: My experience is ten-time yours. (al-Khodary, 161-2)

The Director himself is a representation of useless study whose benefits do not appear; he looks proud of his academic qualifications 'Hey! (*Indicates his head*) Here, four years of academic study, eight years in Europe, and a PhD in directing' (al-Khodary, 191). If some plays criticise the arrogant and falseness of academic artists in general, criticism increases when these artists study abroad.

#### **h. Commenting on critics:**

The image of critics as arrogant, who never express their satisfaction at artistic works, is hinted at in *al-Farafeer*, when the MASTER wonders: 'Don't you like anything at all? Are you a critic or something?' (Idris 1974, 375). Similar to the three academics in Ionesco's *Improvisation*, Doctors S, SH, and K in *al-Aashek al-Walhan* are a group of ostentatious academic critics. It seems that they get their importance from affirming the crisis of theatre because it gives them a chance to engage in useless arguments:

DR. SH: In 1960, there were ten troupes of the Television Theatre.<sup>231</sup> In addition, there were several public, private, and other companies. However, on a T.V. programme, I insisted,

<sup>230</sup> He means the Higher Institute of Theatre Arts whose alumni are exclusively entitled to get the membership card of the Theatre Practitioners Guild. This membership is also required to act in T.V. and movies, except for star actors. Otherwise, non-member actors should pay to get a temporary permission. Not only a strange law, but it is also, as the practice has proven, a perfect way to corruption.

<sup>231</sup> The so-called Television Theatre was a group of governmental troupes, which were established in the 1960s. While the plays of these companies were performed for a few nights, televised versions of these productions were repeatedly broadcast by the Egyptian television. Most of these productions were comedies, which were freely adapted from European plays.

then, that theatre was facing a crisis. My testimony was for the sake of honesty, history, theatre, and God.

DR. K: Objection! There was a crisis in 1960s; not just a crisis, it was a catastrophe.

DR. S: the most striking feature of this crisis is both fools and traitors who claim that we had a prosperous theatre in the 1960s. Now, I clearly and frankly proclaim that theatre was in a crisis in 1960s as well as in 1980s. (al-Khodary, 180-81)

The Artist in Selim's *al-koras* is an egotistical critic who, similar to The Critic in Boccioni's *Genius and Culture*, claims his ability to be a creator. Because he has just returned from Europe, he assumes the role of the saviour of the Egyptian theatre. Just like Bartholomeus in *Improvisation*, he uses complicated meaningless language to justify his intellectuality; he argues that 'there is a new artistic theory which suggests that dynamic and dialectic logic of the meaning or meaningless, reasonable or unreasonable, and absurd or seriousness are swinging among different vibrations according to the nature of the artistic work' (Selim *al-Koras*, 44). When other characters refer to the importance of introducing works of criticism to the public, the Artist argues 'in my opinion, this is a waste of time; my last book about the modern theatre is enough' (Selim *al-Koras*, 63). It is important to mention that Selim studied in London, albeit without getting any certificate, and he wrote both plays in London. Therefore, his attack on the pro-West artists can be seen as a result of the strong mainstream's resistance to Western influence.

Thus, it can be concluded that not all Egyptian metadramas include dramatic characters' comments on literary and theatrical matters. However, there are many critical metadramas, which have never been academically considered in this way. In terms of the content, most critical matters within the Egyptian critical metadrama in the second half of the Twentieth Century reflect on the specific circumstances of the Egyptian theatre. Even these issues that resemble what I have explored within the European critical metatheatrical plays in the first half of the twentieth-century are influenced by the particular socio-political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts in Egypt. However, in terms of theatrical techniques, since the early examples of critical metadrama within Egyptian theatre in the nineteenth century, playwrights have clearly adopted European models, despite some Egyptian playwrights' ignoring or disavowal of that contaminating force. One of the most striking examples of such a

paradoxical phenomenon of drawing on the European form of critical metadrama in order to address Egyptian theatrical matters, which are shaped by unique socio-political contexts, is the call for pure Egyptian theatre within critical metadramas wherein influences of Pirandello, Brecht, and Ionesco are repeatedly realised.

Finally, although this kind of critical metadrama's commentary defines significant problems that have been challenging Egyptian practitioners for decades, it has had no crucial influence on theatre, or institutions. Up till now, it seems that playwrights' comments on socio-politically driven theatrical matters have vented all practitioners' disapproval without a real effect on the de facto state of Egyptian theatre. In this respect, it is important to mention some incidents that happened after the Revolution of January 2011, which I argue, suggest that practitioners' great efforts are still needed in order to change long established cultural policies. For instance, in March 2011, in what seems a response to the critique of corrupted administration, the Minister of Culture<sup>232</sup> enforced a resolution that the directors of governmental theatrical troupes must be elected by the members of these troupes rather than being appointed by the Chairman of Theatre Organization.<sup>233</sup> However, without any change of the centralization system, the members of troupes had to choose one of three candidates, who were decided by the Chairman of the Theatre Organization. Moreover, similar to the pre-revolution era, the latter is the only person who decides what plays to be produced and their budgets, while the elected directors of these troupes have no real authority.

The harmful effect of censorship is another example of the matters raised by Egyptian critical metadrama without any practical change. Although the calls for the revocation of censorship on all sorts of arts have increased since January 2011, all dramatic texts and performances have to be permitted by the General Organization of Censorship on Artistic Works. Will the near future bring real cures of Egyptian theatre? The answer seems to be part of a more essential dilemma: can the revolution succeed in turning its ambitious mottos to practical measures. As a researcher and a practitioner, I hope and I will do my best to see this hope comes true.

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<sup>232</sup> Emad Abu Ghazi, the Minister of Culture from 5 March to 21 November 2011.

<sup>233</sup> For more information about this resolution see al-Saied.

## Conclusion

By the turn of the twentieth century, European theatre faced several challenges that motivated practitioners to suggest and practice a variety of reformative aesthetics, most of which concentrated on contradicting the mainstream popular theatre, namely Naturalism and melodrama. While directors' experimentations insisted on the foregrounding of nonverbal aspects of performance, playwrights adopted revolutionary moods of representation that shaped the so-called avant-garde movements of the first half of the twentieth century such as Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism, and surrealism. To different degrees, the aesthetics of such movements were influenced by the early twentieth-century sceptical vision of reality and truth. Even the notion and the purpose of art itself were questioned. This uncertainty itself can be seen as a result of several interacting and sometimes contradictory trends in science, philosophy, psychology, and even politics. Accompanied with the increasing authority of directors by the turn of the twentieth century, one of the most influential changes on the state of theatre was the emergence of cinema as a rival art of representation, especially with film's adoption of the popular forms of entertaining theatre.

In these intersecting contexts, one of the ways adopted by avant-garde playwrights in order to reform theatre is the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within their plays in the form of dramatic characters' discussions. Examples of this praxis include plays of Shaw, Sorge, Boccioni, Andreyev, Kaiser, Pirandello, Lorca, Frisch, and Ionesco. While dramatic characters' speeches within these plays mainly address matters pertaining to theatre practice, these matters themselves indicate the influence of socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects of the early twentieth-century Europe on the theatre industry. Furthermore, these topics of literary and theatrical criticism included within plays reflect on and respond to ongoing debates amongst theorists, critics, and practitioners of arts, literature, and theatre. The common features of this group of European plays are the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism with its reformative goal, which links these plays despite their belonging to different movements of the historical avant-garde during the first half of the twentieth century.

Although responding to different socio-political and artistic circumstances, many Egyptian plays during the second half of the twentieth century include dramatic characters' comments on literary and theatrical matters. Considering these contexts is crucial in tracing resemblances and differences between the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within European and Egyptian plays regarding both theatrical forms and topics of dramatic characters' discussions.

Most post-Abel studies of metatheatre reduce the function of metatheatre to a question of form. Therefore, these studies usually ignore the possibility that self-reference can extend beyond merely challenging dramatic illusionism. While all modern metatheatre can be seen as an *indirect* self-critique of illusionist theatre, dramatic characters within the examples of metadramas studied in this thesis *verbally* comment on literary and theatrical matters of criticism. If Brecht utilises metatheatrical techniques in order to raise the audience's political awareness, dramatic characters' discussions on theatrical criticism within plays address problems of theatre practice in order to reform it. Therefore, I suggest we identify aspects of metatheatricality that may be specifically called 'critical metadrama' to insist on the comprehensive existence of the discourse of literary and theatrical criticism within such plays.

Although some topics of literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadramas are initiated by playwrights' own experience, whether with critics, practitioners, or even spectators, most topics are usually contextualised in a more general concern for reforming theatre. Such an observation can be explained by the inseparable relationship not only between different topics of discussion, but also between all these topics and historical circumstances, which in turn shape the crisis of experimental avant-garde theatre during the first half of the twentieth century. For example, a significant part of the crisis that faced European theatre in the early decades of the twentieth century is related to the financial difficulties of production, which is pertinent to the unprecedented boom in commercial theatre. In its turn, such prosperity of profit-centric performances seemed to motivate the playwrights of critical metadrama to comment on the significant role of the audience's preferences in defining the function of theatre. This function, consequently, seemed to reflect on the ideological conflict between Marxism and Capitalism, on which the artistic dispute between committed and formalist art is partly based.

Comparing literary and theatrical criticism within critical metadramas suggests that although each topic of discussion is mentioned within several plays, these comments vary. A good example of such a variety is the dominance of commercial theatre, which is addressed by dramatic characters of *Play without a Title*, *The Mountain Giants*, and *Paris Impromptu*. While Lorca's play limits its critique to the middle-class audience, Pirandello's text condemns both types of spectators. In contrast to both, Giraudoux's play defends spectators, who, regardless of their social classes seem to be victims of the boulevard theatre, whose prosperity is the responsibility of practitioners, critics and the wrong cultural policies of the French government. Consequently, in accordance with each play's comment on the matter, Jouvet in *Paris Impromptu* insists on the necessity of modern states' financial intervention in the theatre industry as a replacement of the seventeenth-century royal patron, while the Author in *Play Without a Title* believes that the working class must take the place of the bourgeoisie in auditoriums. Although the dramatic characters of *The Mountain Giants* do not praise or criticise the old system of patronage, their discussions about the bankruptcy of the Count, who is the patron of the troupe, suggest that there is no hope. Such a rather pessimistic message reflects on the biased policies of Mussolini's dictatorship. While the Italian leader played the role of the patron for propagandistic plays, he deprived Pirandello of both financial and creative support. Similarly, with various, and sometimes contradictory opinions Sorge, Kaiser, Andreyev negatively comment on the role of private patrons in theatre production at different moments of theatre history within their critical metadramas: *The Beggar*, *The Protagonist*, and *Requiem*, respectively.

Instead of reading dramatic characters' discussions on theatre matters within any of the examples studied in my thesis as an unprecedented invention of a single playwright, my thesis traces the phenomenon of including literary and theatrical criticism within plays as a method of the avant-gardist reflection on theatre crisis by the end of the nineteenth century in particular. Such a new approach shapes part of my contribution to the field of metatheatre studies, which mainly relies on my exploration of Egyptian critical metadrama during the second half of the twentieth century.

The inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism within Arabic dramatic texts can be traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century, namely within

*al-Saleet al-Hasoud* (1851), written by the Lebanese playwright, director, and producer Marun al-Naqqash. Considering al-Naqqash's dependence on Molière's works in general, comments on theatrical matters within *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* can be seen as the influence of Molière's *Impromptu of Versailles*. However, because dramatic characters' comments on theatrical matters within al-Naqqash's play are marginal, *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* cannot be considered a critical metadrama.

More influenced by metatheatrical techniques of *Impromptu of Versailles*, Sannua's *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* (1912) can be considered the first Egyptian and Arabic critical metadrama. Literary and theatrical criticism dominates the discourse of dramatic characters who, as in Molière's play, represent the playwright's real troupe commenting on theatrical matters such as the difficult financial and social position of actors. One of the most striking features of *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* is its inclusion of what can be considered the first example of criticism of criticism within Egyptian theatre, when dramatic characters defend Sannua's use of colloquial language in order to rebut one of Sannua's critics' opinions.

The focus of theatrical criticism within *al-Saleet al-Hasoud* and *Molière Misr wa ma Yokasih* seems limited to commenting on the two playwrights' works. On one hand, al-Naqqash and Sannua initially encountered theatre through Molière's plays during their stay in Italy. Therefore, it is predictable that the subjective purpose of *Impromptu of Versailles* dominates the discourse of theatrical criticism within their plays. On the other hand, the comments of the two pioneers of Arabic theatre on their own careers indirectly reveal the difficulties faced by emergent theatres in Lebanon and Egypt. In this respect, such difficulties can be considered the equivalent to the crisis of European theatre in the first decades of the twentieth century. This crisis incited many European playwrights to adopt metatheatrical techniques in general, and urged them to write critical metadramas in particular.

Muhammad Taimur, who studied in France, took a further step towards commenting on the current state of Egyptian theatre rather than the playwright's own plays. Similar to Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, Taimur's *Mohakamat Moad'lefi al-Rewayat al-Tamthileia* (1920) compares several Egyptian playwrights, who are tried by a group of judges that include Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, Corneille, and Racine. Within the play, Egyptian dramatists are repeatedly accused of



adapting Western plays in low language and imposing irrelevant songs and dances. *Mohakamat Moad'lefi al-Rewayat al-Tamthileia* reflects Taimur's interest in literary aspects of dramatic texts. In addition, the play repeatedly calls for the Egyptianization of dramatic texts' subject matters, which can be seen as part of the increasing nationalist movement.

In 1942, Tawfik al-Hakim wrote *Pygmalion* wherein the protagonist discusses the aesthetic matter of the relationship between life and art, which suggests that al-Hakim was influenced by Pirandello's insistence on exploring such a relationship within his four critical metadramas. The Italian dramatist's plays have been one of the major impacts on Egyptian critical metatheatre since the middle of 1960s. Similarly to his ancestors, who included literary and theatrical criticism within their dramatic texts, al-Hakim had the advantage of his direct contact with European theatre during his study abroad.

While Sannua, Taimur, and al-Hakim had the privilege of encountering European theatre through education and travel, the vast majority of Egyptian playwrights of critical metadrama since the 1960s benefited from the regime's inclination towards modernisation as part of the so-called building of a new Egypt after the 1952 revolution. As part of this mission to modernise Egypt was a series governmental grants to a large number of young academics of all disciplines, including literature and theatre, in order to study abroad. Not only did these scholarships enable many Egyptian scholars to get first hand experience of Western theatre, but a large number of European plays were translated, directed and studied by these scholars when they returned.

Studying abroad was a significant chance for Egyptian critics and directors to have contact with European theatre directly. These scholars in turn created more channels of influence through which Egyptian playwrights became able to read, watch, and read about European metadrama in general and critical metadramas in particular. Since the late 1950s, an unprecedented trend for translating and producing modern and contemporary European plays, including metatheatrical works of Brecht, Pirandello, and Ionesco, was accompanied by a large number of theatre studies. Whether written or translated by Egyptian scholars, essays about European playwrights occupied the monthly theatre magazine *al-Masrah*, whose first issue was published in 1962.

With the socialist inclination of the Egyptian regime, Brecht's metadramas were more accepted by governmental theatres than the apolitical

utilisation of metatheatrical techniques within Pirandello's plays and the Theatre of the Absurd. However, the dramatic texts of Pirandello, Ionesco, Beckett, along with Brecht and Frisch found two platforms, within which these plays were appreciated for their aesthetic aspects rather than political messages. These two channels of European influence on Egyptian practitioners in general and on playwrights in particular were the Higher Institute of Theatre Arts and the Second Programme Radio channel. The essential role in introducing European theatre, whether to the students of the Institute or to the listeners of the radio channel, was played by the academics who returned from governmental scholarships to both sides of the Atlantic.

However, adopting the European form of critical metadrama was paradoxically motivated by calls in the 1950s for defining and celebrating authentic Egyptian culture. Parallel to the belief in Western superiority in both science and arts, the post-colonial era in Egypt was charged by an obsessive need for highlighting Egyptian identity. Consequently, calls for defining the pure Egyptian theatre sought to retrieve traditional forms of entertainment such as khayal al-Del (shadow plays), Karagöz (glove-puppet performances) and al-Mahabbazeen (improvisational travelling troupes). In this context, al-Hakim suggested the 'condensed theatre' to be the Egyptian/Arabic form, which, according to al-Hakim, could be utilised by playwrights all over the world. Basing his form on al-Hakawaty (the oral storyteller), al-Mokaledaty (the impersonator), and al-Maddah (the religious minstrel), al-Hakim ignores the fact that these forms were not originally Egyptian. Moreover, they nearly disappeared and were replaced by modern forms of entertainment such as television and cinema. Therefore, neither al-Hakim nor his successors of Egyptian playwrights adopt this formula.

More valid than al-Hakim's suggested form, in 1964 Yusif Idris wrote three theoretical essays to claim that the Egyptian tradition of al-Samir could be an alternative to the European form of theatre. Idris highlights the fact that al-Samir (spontaneous sessions of impersonation, singing, and dancing in rural districts) is just like all popular quasi-theatrical activities, which intrinsically ignore the borders between the performance and its spectators, who used to intervene, and sometimes participate in the show. In the same year, Idris wrote *al-Farafir* as an example of utilising the form of al-Samir in theatre. However, most Western and Egyptian scholars suggest that, without the impulsivity of al-

Samir, *al-Farafir* ends up imitating European theatrical techniques of metatheatre. Moreover, regarding the content of its dramatic characters' comments on literary and theatrical matters, I claim that *al-Farafir* is specifically influenced by European critical metadrama, from which Idris borrows the discussions of the relationship between dramatic characters and their author, the tension between playwrights and directors, and the negative image of critics. Put differently, because of its anti-illusionist nature, *al-Samir* was claimed by Idris as an authentic Egyptian form of *al-Farafir*, while the play itself was written according to the European form of metatheatre in general, drawing on the topics of theatrical criticism within critical metadramas in particular.

Thus, the emergence of Egyptian critical metadrama in the 1960s, as a trend, can be described as a result of two socio-political factors: seeking to modernise Egypt and searching for the country's cultural heritage. Adopting the European form of metadrama, mainly Brechtian techniques, in general, and the inclusion of literary and theatrical criticism, of which Pirandello and Ionesco were the most influential, in particular can be seen in Abd al-Moneim Selim's *al-Koras* (1963) and *Entahat al-Galsa* (1966), Naguib Surur's *Ya Bahiya wi Khaberini* (1968), Ali Salem's *al-Boufeh* (1969).

However, during the 1970s it is hard to find any Egyptian critical metadrama. Several socio-political circumstances can account for such an observation. Events such as the death of Nasser (1970), October War (1973), decisions of economic openness (1974), the uprising against economic crisis (1977), and the peace agreement with Israel (1979) seemed to be more urgent to be commented on by playwrights than literary and theatrical matters. In addition, al-Sadat's neglect of governmental theatre and his regime's support for the private sector in general led to the prosperity of private troupes. The latter's aim of gaining maximum profit through offering mere entertainment understandably runs counter to including literary and theatrical criticism within plays.

The recurrence of Egyptian critical metadrama in the 1980s seemed to shape the beginning of a noticeable phenomenon, which increasingly continued through the 1990s and the 2000s. Raising literary and theatrical matters within plays has taken two routes. Firstly, some playwrights chose to highlight the legacy of one or more of the pioneers of Egyptian theatre. Examples of such a documentary approach are Mohsen Misilhi's *Darb Askar* (1985) and

Muhammad abu al-'Ela al-Salamouni's *Abu Naddara* (1985) and *Amir al-Masrah: Muhammad Taimur* (1995). These three metadramas appreciatively depict the efforts of Egyptian artists of improvisation, Sannua, and Taimur, respectively. The second type of Egyptian critical metadrama since the 1980s is based on portraying imaginary practitioners who discuss theatrical matters, whether during a rehearsal/performance, or in their everyday life. This type, to give examples, can be found in Abd al-Sattar al-Khodary's *al-Aashek al-Walhan* (1989), Selim Kitchener's *al-Agouz wa al-Zabet wa al-Millionaire* (1998), and Mo'men Abdu's *Akher al-Shareie* (1999) and *Akher al-Mataf* (2001). The common feature, though, of semi-documentary and imaginary plays is that they both comment on, or refer to problems that face Egyptian theatre in the time of their playwrights.

Similar to their ancestors, Egyptian playwrights' inclusion of literary and theatrical discussions within their plays since the 1980s reveals significant evidence of the impact of European critical metadrama, whether in terms of techniques or the topics on which dramatic characters' critical discourse comment. Nevertheless, the particular socio-political, economic, cultural, and historical circumstances of Egypt have defined crucially the critical matters raised within plays. Therefore, brutal censorship and corrupted management of governmental theatres remarkably occupy the bulk of dramatic characters' critical discourse.

While Idris and al-Hakim claimed two models of an authentic Egyptian formula, which are allegedly based on the utilisation of traditional quasi-theatrical forms, it was only Idris who included literary and theatrical criticism within his play. However, playwrights since the 1980s have tended to integrate questions about the possibility of a pure Egyptian theatre into dramatic characters' speeches, in a trend which can be described as the second phase of the call for retrieving traditional forms of entertainment.

The focus on the unique Egyptian socio-political contexts, though, does not prevent Egyptian critical metadramas from commenting on aesthetic and theatrical matters such as the purpose of theatre, the audience, acting, critics, and the tension between playwrights and directors. However, these comments are usually tinted and orientated by social and political circumstances of Egypt. For instance, the function of theatre, which is mentioned within several European critical metadramas, is merged with the discussions about the search

for the roots that represent Egyptian theatre's own identity, as we can find in Magdy al-Gallad's *Khamsa wi Khmisa* (2000) within which using the Karagöz as a dramatic character, with its support for the poor and its critique of bourgeoisie, is introduced as a reform of both theatre and society.

Even what seem to be purely aesthetic issues, such as the relationship between playwrights and their dramatic characters, is impacted by the Egyptian socio-political context as we can find in Hossam al-Ghamry's *al-Kelab al-Aierlandy* (1996), where the conflict between the dramatic character of playwright and his imaginary characters within the inner play is shaped, censored and interrupted by the intervention of secret police. In other words, while dramatic qualities and theatrical practicality shape the major criterion that rules the Director-characters exchanges in *Six Characters*, social and political oppressions compose the vital factor for deciding imaginary characters' fate in the Egyptian play.

Because most problems of Egyptian theatre are related to, and sometimes intentionally caused by the policies of successive dictatorial political systems, I argue that playwrights' addressing of these problems within their dramatic texts did not urge Egyptian regimes to tackle what critics and academics kept describing as the crisis of Egyptian theatre since the 1970s. Paradoxically, the problems mentioned by the playwrights, especially corrupt administration and censorship, are crucial factors for reducing the effect of their plays. Unlike their ancestors of the 1960s, when theatre was supported by the political regime, critical metadramas since the 1980s are already marginalised by low budgets, and poor conditions of theatres, let alone the mighty difficulties that playwrights have to challenge in order to make their plays acceptable for production in the first place. With the increasing trend of governmental theatres for achieving commercial success, the works of critical metadramas seem unattractive to be produced or watched. Furthermore, performances of these plays, which usually last for just a few days, are rarely mentioned by the vast majority of critics and academics.

In this respect, my thesis is an attempt to make the voices of these playwrights heard, especially by focusing on their adoption of the established European form of critical metadrama, as a regular phenomenon within Egyptian theatre since 1912, which has never been thoroughly considered by theatrical studies in Arabic. In addition to filling this gap in Arabic research, my thesis

seeks to contribute to the studies of Egyptian theatre in English, which usually limit their range to exploring mainstream playwrights in the 1960s.

Finally, understanding the enduring influence of European theatre on Egyptian playwrights highlights a paradox which seems to dominate the relationship between the West and most Arabic countries, including Egypt. On one hand, the bulk of contemporary Arabic discourse—from politicians, journalists and even many scholars—warns that the so-called Western cultural invasion is the historical successor to European military colonialism and the concealed weapon of an alleged contemporary American imperialism. On the other hand, most aspects of Western culture on both sides of the Atlantic are widely admired and adopted by a large section of Arabic populations. A good manifestation of this discrepancy of an admiration-opposition dichotomy can be seen in Egyptian metadramas in the second half of the twentieth century, wherein Egyptian playwrights' dependence on European forms was claimed as a rebellion against the dominance of these forms.

Such a paradox cannot be understood without observing that the image of the West from the standpoint of the vast majority of Arabs is in the main composed of two inseparable, yet contradictory, features. For centuries, Western philosophy, science, arts and literature have functioned as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for a large number of Arabic intellectuals, especially those who—through education and travel—have had a chance to intersect and interact with Western culture. However, military advantage, which has enabled Western countries to occupy many Arabic territories, has negatively evoked an anti-Western discourse that reduces the West to the colonial aggressor. Simultaneously, some Arabic intellectuals, especially those with leftist inclinations, have increasingly expressed their detestation of Western cultural and political infiltration of Arabic cultures as products of Anglo-American capitalism.

In this respect, both the calls for, and attempts to, create authentic Egyptian literature and art, including theatre, can be seen as an aspect of a nearly fifty-year postcolonial era. Not only did Egyptian playwrights exploit their characters to condemn Western military and cultural dominance, Egyptian anti-illusionist plays in the second half of the twentieth century utilised traditional forms of entertainment. Ironically, these forms were superficially imposed within the European formula of metatheatre. Put differently, while Egyptian playwrights

were allegedly contributing in the nationalist resistance of Western cultural dominance, Egyptian plays ended up affirming the unavoidable influence of European theatre. This observation suggests that approaches of colonial and postcolonial studies to investigate Egyptian theatre can enrich both Arabic and Western scholarship.

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### **Live Performances**

*Darb Askar*. By Mohsen Misilhi. Dir. Mohamed Abd al-Fattah. The field of the University of Alexandria, Alexandria. 2 April 1997.

*The Notebook of Trigorin*. By Tennessee Williams. Dir. Ben Crocker. Perf. James Wallace, Liz Crowther, Riann Steele, David Peart, and Philip Cumbus. Northcott Theatre Company. The Northcott Theatre, Exeter, Devon. 1 March 2008.