to an end, 'Matter' getting liberated once again from its bondage.

So far Râzî's cosmogonic myth and what we might call his tragic world view. The 'Gnostic-Platonic expedient of Soul' (Goodman) made it possible for him to argue in favour of the *conceivability* of creation in time, against the objections of the *Dahriyya.* Soul's ignorance and irrational desire, in particular, could explain why God at that particular time changed his (rational) will, i.e. 'from the will, not to create the world, to the will, to create it' (Nâsir-i-Khosraw). All this *could* suggest a basic psychology that is comparable to that of the ancient Greeks, but I wouldn't want to press this point.

Epilogue

Râzî's case, of course, is not a typical one - he is not even representative of medieval Arabic philosophy as a whole - but my purpose with this paper was a very modest one. What I said should suffice in order to be able to conclude that historically as well in the matter of tragic vision, it is not simply a question of the West *versus* the East.

THE GREEK CONCEPT OF TRAGEDY IN THE ARAB CULTURE. HOW TO DEAL WITH AN ISLAMIC *OEDIPUS* ?

Ahmed ETMAN

Fruitful Circulation and Different Receptions

Aristotle's treatise *Peri tes poietikes (Ars Poetica)* dates from about 335 BC, i.e. towards the end of the author's life (384-322). The finishing of this important treatise is obviously so rough that many critics believe that it contains simply lecture-notes taken by one of Aristotle's students in the Lykeion. The general form and style of the text confirm this point of view. However, there is nothing like the fate of this book in all the human literary tradition. Although it is the only extensive critical and theoretical survey of Greek drama from the whole antiquity, it goes from one misinterpretation into another through the different ages and till the present time. Noteworthy is that the Greek concept of tragedy and the Aristotelian concept are not precisely identical. In other words, the Aristotelian theory does not apply to every Greek tragedy. *Prometheus Bound, Aias, Oedipus in Colonus* and the majority of Euripides' plays are not Aristotelian, but they are highly rated tragedies throughout the successive ages. It is noteworthy, however, that Aristotle himself criticized Euripides bitterly for many reasons, but nevertheless described him as the most tragic (*tragikotatos*)[1] of all poets.

This Aristotelian paradox can be naturally justified, if one remembers that when Aristotle gave his lectures on the *Poetics*, Aeschylus had been dead for more than hundred years. Sophocles and Euripides were dead for seventy years. So one must consider this gap of time between the Aristotelian theoretical notes and Greek tragic performances, which are the subject matter of this theory as a whole. It is not acceptable to use the phrases *Aristotelian tragedy* and *Greek tragedy* as synonyms. The first link in the chain of misinterpretations is the application of Aristotelian rules as strict criteria to the Greek tragedies and to applaud this, or to banish that accordingly. This does not mean that dealing with Greek tragedies, one can do without Aristotle's theory, which has assured itself as the *sine qua non* of any well-balanced effort to understand Greek tragedy or the tragic as a whole. But it is not agreable to distort or to squeeze Aristotle's theory in order to apply it to every Greek tragedy. Perhaps it is more reasonable to begin by studying the Greek tragedies and performances before moving on to Aristotle, not vice versa.

Aristotle's times, the fourth century B.C., saw transitions from Hellenic into Hellenistic, from the democratic *polis* (city-state) to the empires and cosmopolis, and culturally, and from the oral into the written[2]. The general sociopolitical background of the fourth century B.C. is quite different from that of the golden fifth century of Athens, when Greek tragedy (and comedy) flourished. Aristotle himself is rather a Hellenistic philosopher and a precedent prototype of the encyclopedic scholars in Alexandria Library. He is the tutor of Alexander the Great, whose conquests were responsible for the change from the Hellenic into Hellenistic. The reception system before Aristotle had been based on listening to or looking at, not reading. From the age of Aristotle onwards, the relation between the author and receiver began to be transformed into a writing-reading system. Aristotle notes that some authors now compose their work for reading (*anagnostikoi*)[3].

Aristotle's *Poetics* can be considered as a comprehensif and concise comment on the Greek concept of art as a whole and tragedy in particular. This means that the proper way to understand the Aristotelian theory is to begin with a systematic reading of Greek literature in general and Greek tragedy especially. The seeds of tragedy and the tragic concept lie in Greek traditions beginning with Homer, Hesiod, lyric poetry and mythic legacy. In other words, the Greek concept of tragedy is a part of their concept of human life itself.

Aristotle's rules in the *Poetics* were imitated or epitomized many times within Greco-Roman antiquity. Theophrastus, Demetrius of Phaleron, Longus, Longinus and Horatius are among prominent Aristotelian successors. In the Byzantine period Aristotle was interpreted and commented on several times. Yet all these efforts in different ages were based on different cultural and artistic backgrounds[4]. Great performances of Greek tragedy had almost faded away during, or even before his times. It is true that we have few fragments of some Hellenistic tragic poets[5]. In ancient Rome, tragedies were written by Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Accius, Pacuvius and Ennius. Also we have the ten tragedies of the Stoic Seneca, which were written in the first century A.D. Yet Roman tragedies and their performances are so different that they can not be approached in the same way as the Attic performances. We have no testimony as to whether Seneca's tragedies were performed - or not- in ancient Rome[6]. In short, tragedy flourished only in the fifth century B.C. in Athens. Dramatic festivals either disappeared or were transformed into a different kind of event. After the recognition of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, theatre was censored as a pagan and therefore undesirable heritage. Consequently there was no interest in the *Poetics* of Aristotle, except for philologic and linguistic reasons.

Aristoteles Arabus

Abd El Rahman Badawi, a very active and prolific translator who died few years ago, refers in the introduction of his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* to the Arab efforts to absorb Aristoteles:

> 'Reading the epitomes of El Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) one concludes painfully feeling disappointed because the Arabs did not utilize this book as the Europeans of the Renaissance did, and as the Arabs themselves did with the other writings of Aristotle which indeed fertilized the Arab mind. We imagine that if the Arabs could have absorbed the *Poetics* of Aristotle in the right way, and if they could have utilized its subjects, rules and views, Arab literature would have intended to introduce the higher poetic arts i.e. tragedy and comedy, from the period of its zenith in the third century of Hegra (= 9-10th century A.D.). Then Arab literary tradition would have totally changed. Who knows? Perhaps Arab civilization as whole would have changed in a similar way as it happened in Renaissance Europe.' [7]

This quotation from Badawi is typical of the general tendency in modern and contemporary Arab scholarship concerning the ancient Arab Aristotelian tradition. The present writer, however, is not convinced that a good translation of the *Poetics* would have resulted in the introduction of tragedy (or comedy) into the Arab literary tradition. Again it is necessary to remember that the Greek tragic production preceded Aristotle's theory by at least one hundred years. Accordingly, Arabs should have experienced dramatic performances to understand and absorb Aristotle's *Poetics*, or to have their own theory and concept of tragedy. In Byzantium, with which the Arabs had mutual cultural exchanges, dramatic performances, as we have mentioned above, were forbidden. It is unreasonable then, to expect that the Aristotelian Arabs, translators, commentators or philosophers would understand what Aristotle means by *tragoidia* and *komoidia*. Usually they transliterate the two terms, being unable to find parallel Arabic terms. And when they tried to translate the terms, they were misled using *Praise Poetry* for tragedy and *Satires* for comedy.

On the other hand, the Arabs understood very well and fruitfully the other Aristotelian principles and terms in the *Poetics* and his other works. The main reason for that, the present writer believes, was their great traditions of rhetoric and poetry. Consequently, Aristotle's theory of the arts of rhetoric and poetry were perfectly absorbed. Terms like *poiesis, mimesis, lexis, rhetorike,* etc. were easily interpreted in a very creative way by translators, commentators,

philosophers and critics. Commentators were successful not only in adopting the Aristotelian terms, but also in remodelling and adapting them to traditional Arab poetry and rhetoric. For example, the word *mimesis* was translated in the beginning as imitation, but later they turned to El Takhieel = creative imagination, which indicates an original modification of their concept of art and poetry[8]. This tendency to improve and promote the Aristotelian theory justifies why there were at least three translations of the *Poetics* in the ancient Arab tradition. They represent a certain progress in the Arabic-Aristotelian tradition.

According to Ibn El Nadim, Aristotle's *Poetics* was translated three times into Arabic, first by Abu Bishr Matta Bin Iunis (died 328 H.= about 940 A.D.), Ishaq Ibn Hunain (died 298 H. = about 910 A.D.), and Yahia Ibn Adie (282-363 H. = about 893-974 A.D.)[9]. Anyhow one translation only, that of Abu Bishr Matta, survived, the other two having been lost.[10] In the meantime there are four epitomes or synoptic abstracts of the *Poetics* in Arabic, achieved by four well known philosophers, namely El Kindi (died 252 H. = about 870 A.D.), Al Farabi (268-338 H. = about 870-950 A.D.), Ibn Sina (d. 1037 A.D.) and Ibn Rushd (514-586 H. = about 1126-1198 A.D.). The work of Al Kindi, however, has unfortunately not survived, a great loss since most probably he knew Greek. It is obvious that Al Farabi, influenced by the comparison of Aristotle at the end of the *Poetics* between epic and tragedy, tried to develop a parallel comparison between Greek and Arabic poetry. Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd were guided by such a comparison in their efforts to apply Aristotle's *Poetics* to Arabic traditional poetry[11].

Modern scholars dispute concerning the Arabic Aristotelian tradition. Many orientalists deny any understanding of Aristotle by the Arabs. The translation of Matta was not accurate, nor did it help any philosopher or critic to understand the *Poetics*. Arab contemporary critics recognize this fact, saying that no Arab understood the *Poetics* except Ibn Sina who conceived the real meaning of *mimesis* and general other Aristotelian principles, which can be applied to Arab literary traditions. This opinion has been followed by Abd El Rahman Badawi[12]. Moreover the concept of El Takhieel goes beyond the Aristotelian *mimesis*. Hazem El Qarthagani applying the Aristotelian *mimesis* to Arabic poetry adds a very important note: 'Aristotle should have added other poetic rules and genres to his book if he had found in Greek tradition what we have in Arabic'[13]. Nevertheless Hazem and other ancient Arab critics were confused by the Aristotelian ideas concerning the function of myth in poetry. In his book *Methods of Rhetors,* he says: 'Greek poets were inventing things as a basis for their poetic creations, using them as the directing marks for their writings. They made these things, which do not take place in life, as examples to what happened indeed. In

this way they build fabricated stories, exactly as the old grand mothers relate to young children tales of a kind which is impossible to take place. Abu Ali Ibn Sina, who dealt with *tragoidia*, used something about this subject saying that they were fabricated in analogy with extant names. But this was rare. Rarely also a name of something, with no parallel in life, was invented and used to denote a general meaning. Ibn Sina disapproves of this kind of poetry saying: poetry is in no need of such tales which are indeed fabricated stories.'[14]

The present writer thinks that in the foregoing quotation from Hazem the main obstacle in the way of ancient - and modern - Arabs being to absorbing *tragoidia* is underlined, i.e. the function of myths or as they say the fabricated tales. Moreover terms like *mythos* (myth), *desis* (plot), *lysis* (solution) and *opsis* (scene) can never be understood by any Arab of those days, because such terms are closely connected with the dramatic spectacle which was unknown to them[15].

Aristotle and tragedy rediscovered in Europe

Averroes (Ibn Rushd) was known to the Europeans as an Islamic philosopher and as the expositor or interpreter of Aristotle. His writings were translated into Hebrew and Latin towards the end of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance[16]. His synoptic epitome of the Aristotelian *Poetics* was translated twice into Latin: the first by Mantinus from the Hebrew version of Tadrus Tadrusy and the second by Hermanus Alemannus from the Arabic original. Abd El Rahman Badawi, the contemporary Egyptian scholar, believes that this Latin translation of Ibn Rushd misled the Europeans, because the Arab philosopher did not conceive the real meaning of the Aristotelian *Poetics*[17]. Yet it is a well-established fact that it is this inaccurate Arabic version translated in its turn into Latin that introduced Aristotle's *Poetics* into Western European culture.

R.R. Bolgar says that the efforts of Arabic scholarship have uncovered a great deal: ' They will in time uncover more, and the mists which now enshroud the intellectual life of the twelfth century may soon be dissipated. But at the moment all one can safely say is that large selections of Aristotle's treatises with numerous works by his Arab commentators and expositors reached Paris in Latin translations between 1160-1200 and were most favorably received on arrival.'[18]

Ibn Rushd's epitome of Aristotle's *Poetics* was translated into Latin chiefly in Toledo about 1200 A.D. From the end of the 13th century A.D. the tendency to translate Aristotle from Greek began to appear. Roger Bacon (1214-1294)

censured the poor quality of all these Latin translations and lamented the general ignorance of Greek in Western Europe. Highet says that at that time Greek still remained almost a closed field. A medieval copyist writes Latin correctly and beautifully, but he breaks down when he comes to Greek. He usually adds a plaintive note saying: 'because this was in Greek it was unreadable', hence the proverbial saying: 'it is all Greek for me'. It is noteworthy that Dante appears to have known no more than a word or two of Greek[19]. This ignorance was not cured until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The first Greek edition of Aristotle's *Poetics* was published in Venice (Aldus) in 1508 by Giovanni Lascaris. Thus generally speaking Ibn Rushd's Aristotelian *Poetics* was dominant in Western Europe throughout three centuries, i.e. from the twelfth to the fifteenth. From 1508 onwards a stream of literature follows in the form of textual criticism, theoretical researches, applied studies on Greek and other drama. It is almost impossible to collect a precise bibliography of Aristotelian scholarship, his theory of art and the like. And unfortunately the misinterpretations of the *Poetics* are still increasing from century to century. The Italian Aristotelians, represented by Francesco Robertello, interpreted the *Poetics* (1548) and paved the way for the Neo-Classicists in France. Yet the French neo-classicism was misled by the Italian interpretations to a kind of slavish worship of the Aristotelian Rules. The Three Unities Rule in the Renaissance drama is an obvious misinterpretation of Aristotle, who stresses only the dramatic Unity (or Unity of Action) calling it "*arche kai psyche*" (the beginning and the soul)[20]. The Unity of place and time came in the Aristotelian context simply as a remark on the Greek performances[21]. The European Renaissance dramatists were also misled by a mistaken interpretation of *katharsis* as a result of *fear* and *pity* caused by the tragic events. Consequently, and influenced by Seneca's tragedies, Renaissance drama was a sort of Bloody Kingdom. The *Spanish Tragedy* (1585-9) by Thomas Kyd can be considered as a significant example, where the ghost of Andrea and Revenge dominate the scene from beginning to the end. Moreover, they decide to follow their victims, having been killed in a terrible manner, in the other world. Gradually this defect was cured when the concept of the tragic became more poetic, and they understood that *katharsis* was the result of the dramatic action itself and not violence. This development took about two centuries. i.e. from the fifteenth to the seventeenth[22].

Tragic Hero: A Revision of the Concept

Another misinterpretation of Aristotle can be found in the favorite expression *tragic hero* used everywhere in the literature about drama. Aristotle himself never

uses in the *Poetics* the term *tragikos heros* (tragic hero), he rather speaks of *tragikon ethos* "tragic character". He even says:

> 'There remains then the mean between these. This is the sort of man who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, and yet it is through no badness or villainy of his own that he falls into the misfortune, but rather through some flaw in him, he being one of those who are in high station and good fortune, like Oedipus..."[23].

And more precisely Aristotle says:

> 'A plot does not have unity, as some people think, simply because it deals with a single character. Many and indeed innumerable things happen to an individual, some of which do not go to make up any unity, and similarly an individual is concerned in many actions which do not combine into a single piece of action' [24].

Unfortunately many critics concentrate their efforts looking for the *tragic hero* not only in Greek plays, but also in modern drama. Greek tragedy in particular suffers from another disastrous generalization. Numerous critics in the West, and in the Arab World, confine the tragic conflict as merely the defeat of Man by Gods and Fate. The present writer does not deny that some of the extant Greek tragedies can be interpreted as partly a Man-God conflict, but not all of them. Let us first investigate the meaning of the Man-God conflict in Greek Tragedy. This is closely connected with the Greek concept of heroism as a whole. Therefore one must begin with the question, what is a Greek hero?

As for the religious rituals, there is a distinction between hero-cults and god-cults. This distinction itself denotes the fundamental difference between the heroic nature and the godly. Gods are immortal, and their happiness and youth are eternal, while heroes are originally mortals whose life on earth is full of troubles, pains and adventures. After the death of a hero he is buried in a tomb, which gradually becomes the center of the hero-cult. The bones of a hero within his tomb represent the focus of worship, since they are revered either through love or fear. In other words these bones can offer many useful services to the people, but can also endanger their existence should the hero be roused to anger.

But the power of a hero is naturally restricted to the area around the tomb, he never becomes a pan-hellenic. In mythological tales about heroes, we note that no hero achieves glory unless he achieves victories in a field of the human activity,

such as war, athletics, poetry, music etc. The earthly career of a hero is a series of adventures, dangers and tests, which are crowned at the end by success. Odysseus suffers twenty years of estrangement before he returns home. Heracles fulfills the twelve labours by the order of another man less than him in strength and value, Oedipus solves the riddle of the Sphinx. Every one of them deserves a reward. Odysseus saves his wife and his son from the suitors, Heracles is deified and in the Olympus he marries Hebe, the goddess of youth. Oedipus is enthroned as the king of Thebes, the city which he saves. He is also given the hand of the widow-queen, whom he later discovers to be his mother.

In the Greek concept of life, reflected in their myths and literary works, there are three main elements, namely the human kind, the heroes, and the gods. If we imagine these three hierarchial levels as circles, then they are not entirely separated, or exclusive. Yet nor are they identical. In fact they intersect each other. There are two intersections, the first is the common area between the world of the human kind and heroes, the second lies between the realm of the heroes and the realm of the gods. This means that there is something heroic in human existence, as there is something godly in the heroic nature. It goes without saying that the heroic circle plays the role of a link between men and gods. Heroism is the intermediate sphere of existence, and heroes are the mediators between Earth and Heaven. The Greek saying "*panta rhei*", that is everything moves and changes, means in our context that it is natural to expect movements in between these three circles either downwards or upwards.

As for the downward movement, some scholars of Greek mythology argue that the Homeric heroes, for example, were originally gods who with the passing of time degenerated to the rank of heroes and human beings. This theory is applied to Helen of Troy, for instance, as she was in the mythological tradition, before Homer, a goddess of fertility worshipped under the divine epithet Dendritis, i.e. the protectoress of trees. Noteworthy is that anthropomorphism helped Homer to duplicate the epic action. For the Trojan War in his *Iliad* takes place on two parallel levels and at the same time. One is the actual fighting around Troy between the Greeks and the Trojans, the other level is divine, where the Olympian gods are divided into two parties, some help the Greeks, while others are on the side of the Trojans. The first group encourages the aggressiveness of the Greeks embodied in Achilles, the second group defends the cause of Trojan patriotism personified in Hector. And so each kind of human heroism finds its symbol and patron on the divine level. The Homeric anthropomorphism or the movement of the gods downwards to the rank of heroes and human beings is paralleled by a movement of the human beings upwards to

the rank of heroes and gods. All the prominent Homeric characters enjoy superhuman abilities, whether as warriors or even singers. The epithets 'divine', 'godly', 'semi-god', or the like, are bestowed on almost all the Homeric heroes. Many of them challenge the gods themselves in the field of their specialization. For example a warrior may wound Ares, the god of war, or surpass Apollo in the field of music. Odysseus going to the underworld, then returning has conquered Death itself, and the god of the dead, Hades. So these human beings are represented in Homer as superior, in some aspects, to the gods themselves.

The promotion of a man to the realm of the gods takes him across the two intersections, the common area between men and heroes on the one hand, and that between heroes and gods on the other. The first step is called in mythology *heropoiesis* (= making a hero), the second is *apotheosis*. The first is achieved after a miraculous death, which is sometimes considered as purification. *Heropoiesis* brings a man nearer to the realm of gods, nevertheless a small number of selected heroes obtain the privilege of *apotheosis*. Only the favorite heroes, and especially those who are the offspring of any god or goddess, are received on the Olympus. Two examples can be mentioned here, namely Dionysus, son of Zeus from Semele, and Heracles, son of Zeus from Alkmene. Any hero looking for the *apotheosis* is resisted by the Olympian gods themselves. This is the seed of the tragic conflict. Very often the destiny of a tragic character comes as an explanation of the ancient Greek wisdom inscribed on the façade of Apollo's temple in Delphi, viz, '*know yourself*'. In other words the shortage of the human knowledge or even late-learning *opsimathein* is the principal source of tragic suffering. The most indicative example is Oedipus who solves the riddle of the Sphinx, but fails to know himself, he is even ignorant of who his parents are. He spends his life seeking the truth, and when he finally discovers everything, it is too late, all the catastrophes he tries to evade have already taken place. Consequently, we can say that the continuous efforts of Oedipus to know himself form the kernel of the dramatic action in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*. *Know yourself* in the context of a Greek tragedy means "know your rank", know to which of the three circles you belong, and consequently it means do not overpass the limits of human existence, or in Greek terms do not commit a *hybris* or else you will be subject to *nemesis*, the punishment of arrogance.

He who obeys this divine order and keeps within his limits, loses every claim to heroism. He is a simple human being who is not equal to the challenge. He is not willing to pay the price of greatness and glory, he prefers his earthly simple everyday life. This type of human beings is represented in the Sophoclean plays by Ismene and Chrysothemis. They know their weaknesses and they refuse to

take part in any large action. On the other hand any tragic person in general, and any Sophoclean one in particular, is ready to do everything, and to pay any price in order to achieve the glory of heroism. He spends all his life in painful endeavour, he sacrifices his happiness for the sake of rising above his station, and dares to cross the limits at the expense of his life itself, to obtain immortality. Take the example of Oedipus again. This hero blinded himself when he discovered that he had killed his father and married his mother, and that he had fathered his own brothers and sisters. He was also banished from Thebes. In other words he loses everything, family, country, sight, and of course the psychological balance and the harmony with life in general. Yet our estimation of this outcast is very high, and he increasingly wins our respect and sympathy. His solid character is admirable, we feel that he is not a simple human being. He deserves to rise to the higher realms i.e. the heroic or divine world. Sophocles portrays this concept in *Oedipus at Colonus*, where we find this hero as a blind beggar, an outcast scapegoat, whom the people fear to deal with. This is the impression we get from the first glance at the play. Yet step by step, we change our opinion, because we realize that this blind beggar is more powerful, more revered and honoured than anyone else in the play. Thebes and Athens are contending to obtain from him the approval to be buried in each one's soil, because after death his bones will be a source of blessedness. This blind beggar knows his way and guides all the others around him, although they have their eyes. This blind beggar now enjoys the clarity of the divine vision. He is now at the gates of the godly kingdom and is going to be a hero-god. *Oedipus at Colonus* can be considered, then, as an apotheosis procession of the human, or tragic, pains. It testifies to the fact that one must pay much in order to reach the status of a hero-god. Everyone who is ready to pay such a price, as Oedipus did, can achieve it[25]. Obvious this play cannot be considered Aristotelian.

Yet it is not reasonable to reduce Greek tragedy to a conflict between Man and God or even Man and Fate. The Olympian Gods, headed by Zeus, are themselves subject to Fate *Moira* and the laws of Necessity (*Ananke*), i.e. the natural occurrence of events and things. For instance Zeus himself was unable many times to save his sons (demi-gods begot from human women) from dangers or even from death decided by the goddesses of fate, *Moirai*. Many times he obeys painfully the requirements of Necessity. We meet such situations in Greek literary works from Homer[26] to Greek tragedies. On the other side the tragic conflict in *Antigone* is not between a man and a god, but between two human beings. Creon represents *nomos* that is law written by human beings, or civic law, to protect society and the welfare of the citizens. Antigone represents *physis,* i.e. the unwritten laws of Nature, or even the natural occurrence of things, namely to bury the dead[27].

Tragedy in Modern Arab Culture

Modern Arab Culture, naturally, reflects the Aristotelian Arab tradition together with the modern European Aristotelian scholarship and the different modern trends of theatre arts. Arab critics on the other side dispute the problem of the originality of Arab theatre. Some believe that it is an imported art which came to the Arab World from Europe very recently. Others say that Arabs knew drama from ancient times. Others even state that the Arabs influenced European drama during the Renaissance through Andalusia in Spain. That many countries which are now included in the Arab World, had practiced some forms of dramatic performance before the Arab conquest is beyond question. The ancient Egyptians, for instance, acted some religious plays inside the temples with subjects based on the myth of Isis and Osiris[28]. The other ancient civilizations of this area are rich in myths and rituals which contain the germ of drama. The ancient Greeks were influenced by such oriental myths and rituals. Dionysus himself is considered as oriental by origin, and he is identified with Osiris by Herodot, Plutarch and other Greek writers[29]. What interests us now is that, according to some scholars, certain concepts and rituals of these oriental civilizations survive in Islamic folklore. This means that the Arabs of the early Islamic ages knew some *rudimental forms* of drama. Yet these forms never reached the stage of maturity except in modern times after being fertilized by European infuences. Thus some Islamic rituals, popular among the common people, contain the germ of drama. It is sufficient to mention here one example only, namely the "*ta'azi*" (Consolations) of the Shiat, especially those of Iraq and Persia around the tomb of El Hussein. These rituals which are still performed yearly in the festivals of 'Ashura', held in honour of El Hussein's death and around his tomb, are considered by some scholars as the remnants of pagan times, i.e. the heritage of the oriental civilizations before Islam. Noteworthy is that El Hussein of these popular festivals bears - in the beliefs of simple masses - some attributes of Baal, Adonis, Osiris and Dionysus which were not testified by the Holy Koran.

Passing by the shadow plays of Ibn Danial during the thirteenth century A.D., let us move directly to modern times. The theatre emerged in Lebanon, and in Syria and Egypt from the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet in a way an idea of this art had been introduced into Egypt by the French expedition led by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798. From that date onwards many European companies visited Egypt and performed plays either in French, English or Italian. On the other hand educational missions to Europe, beginning with that of Rifaha Rafi el Tahtawi in 1834, helped to create an audience capable of understanding the techniques and functions of the European theatre. George Abyad, a Syrian by

origin, was the first to be sent by the Egyptian government to France to study theatre in 1904. On his return in 1912, he organized an Egyptian company. His first performances were of plays translated into Arabic, from French, by Farah Antun. The first pure Egyptian theatrical company began with the Greek play *Oedipus*. In addition, the works of Shakespeare, Corneille, Racine, Molière etc. were performed in Arabic by other Egyptian companies, having been previously performed in Egypt by foreign companies. These works included many pieces of the neo-classics in Europe, such as *Andromache* by Racine, *Tartuffe* by Molière, *Anthony and Cleopatra* by Shakespeare etc.

On the other side, the poetic translation of Homer's *Iliad* by Soliman El Bostany (1904) and the establishment of the Classical Studies Department in Cairo University (1925) mark a turning point. Writing a book with the title *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Taha Hussein asserts that the historical connections between Egypt and Greece or the Mediterranean culture as a whole are unique and are perhaps stronger than the connections between Egypt and the other countries of the Middle East. He even believes that there will be no cultural renaissance in Egypt if the Egyptians neglect the Classical heritage. These opinions of Taha Hussein were strongly resisted by some nationalists and Muslim scholars of El Azhar. The Philhellenism of Taha Hussein brings to our memory the Dutch Desiderius Erasmus and his role in the revival of Classics in the European Renaissance. Taha Hussein was the first to translate Sophocles' plays into Arabic. This translation played a great role in developing the Arabic theatre, although the translator depended on the French rather than the Greek original itself. The success of this translation is partly due to the charming style of the translator, being undoubtedly one of the best modern Arab prose writers.

Lewis Awad followed the model of Taha Hussein and published many translations and studies of classics depending on his wide readings in English. In the present time, however, many Egyptian Universities, among which is El Azhar, the most ancient Muslim University in the world, include a Classical Department. So there is a new generation of Classicists who finished their studies in England, France, Germany, Italy and Greece. They diffuse philhellenism not only in Egypt but also all over the Arab World. They publish new translations of the Greek authors, especially the dramatists, from the original texts. The efforts of the classicists are reflected in the creative literature[30] and especially in poetry and drama.

The originator of poetic Arab theatre is Ahmed Shawqy. At first glance one can discern the two essential aspects and purposes of his play *The Death of*

Cleopatra, viz. the innovation of Arabic poetic drama and the defense of Cleopatra's patriotism. Noteworthy is the fact that, being semi-foreigner on the side of his (Greco-Turkish) grandmother, Shawqy's attitude is similar to that of his heroine, Cleopatra, Macedonian by origin. The two aims of Shawqy proved to be too ambitious to be achieved in the Egypt of the twenties of the foregoing century. Introducing dramatic art into Arabic poetry requires beside Shawqy's poetic genius, an in-depth knowledge of the origins of drama, a thing which Shawqy lacked. Dramatic education must begin with the Greeks, that is, with Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes. This rule is to be established later in the Arabic dramatic literature through the experience of Tewfiq El Hakim. But as for Shawqy depending on his education and its sources, one cannot find any indication that he knew the Greek dramatic masterpieces. Of course simple knowledge, which as a matter of fact Shawqy had obtained even before his stay in France, is not sufficient.

Furthermore the present writer believes that the dramatic education of Shawqy as a whole is neither high, nor systematically complete. No doubt he knew the neo-classical writers of France and the heads of the Romantic revolution there, such as Victor Hugo. He also knew many other dramatists, yet he did not digest their works. Even the performances which he attended in Egypt and in France, were not so fruitful for him. The genius of the prince of Arabic poetry had been previously directed elsewhere, to fields different from the dramatic art. Composing any play of classical origins, such as *The Death of Cleopatra* of Shawqy, needs two basic requirements. First the author has to keep a direct and systematic contact with the classical sources. Secondly he must possess considerable experience in dramatic art and technique. Fortunately the new generation of Arab verse dramatists tries to meet these two requirements[31].

Arabic prose drama profited from the classical culture more fruitfully than the poetic. Going to France ostensibly to study law, Tewfiq El Hakim devoted himself to drama. From his wide reading in French Literature he was convinced that in order to achieve any success as playwright he must begin from the natural beginning, i.e. to go back to the Greek authors, the eternal masters of drama. He read them, but in French translations. The result was that Tewfiq El Hakim wrote three plays with Greek themes, namely *Pygmalion,, King Oedipus* and *Praxa.* The last one is an imitation of Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazousai* or *Women in the Assembly,* the Arabic title *Praxa* being an abbreviated form of Praxagora, the protagonist. Yet the Greek influence upon Tewfiq El Hakim is not confined to these three plays, it extends to all his works and even to his very way of thinking. In his play *Food for Every Mouth,* he adapts the myth of Orestes to a

contemporary theme. And in his semi-autobiographical story *A Bird From the Orient* he falls in love with a beautiful French girl during his stay in Paris; and he reveals his feelings to her for the first time through a French translation of a poem by Anacreon (frgm. No.11) entitled *To Love*, although he translated it into Arabic as meaning *The Combat* [32].

The influence of Tewfiq El Hakim was tremendous. It is enough to mention here that there are no less than four Arabic adaptations of Oedipus. Each one reflects a certain period, and is connected with this or that political event from the debacle of Palestine (1948) to the defeat of the Arabs June (1967). This means two things. First that Oedipus has been absorbed into Arabic modern life at least on the stage. Secondly many other plays on the Oedipus theme are to be expected in the coming years.

Noteworthy is that many other Greek myths have been exploited one way or another on the Egyptian stage. In short, the study of the classical sources of modern Arabic theatre is recommended by the present writer as a promising approach for a well-balanced understanding of philhellenism in the Arab World as well as the development of the concept of tragedy in Modern Arab Culture.

The efforts to adapt Oedipus to Islam

The Ancient Arabs avoided translating Greek tragedies for many reasons, foremost of which is that pagan myths are the *sine qua non* in these tragedies. Generally they did not digest the function of myths or - as they say - "*fabricated tales*" in poetry as has been noted in the foregoing lines. In modern times the situation is somewhat different. For instance the prominent poets in Egypt and the Arab World use myths of Ancient Egypt, Greece, Mesopotamia, Persia and India in their poetic imagery. Yet the problem in dramatic performances is more complicated. Tewfiq El Hakim in the introduction to his play "*King Oedipus*" says that by this play he aims to reconcile Arab traditional culture with the concept of Greek Tragedy. Being asked if indeed he planned to create an Arabo-Islamic character from the Greek mythological Oedipus he answered:

> 'When I began to write *Oedipus* I read four years about the myth, but also I read some books of Islam scholars on Fate and Destiny as explained by Abu Hanifah and Ibn Rushd and others... These readings convinced me that my interpretation of Oedipus should be in harmony with Islam' [33].

El Hakim also justifies the traditional Arab avoidance of Greek tragedy on the basis that this literary genre was not for reading, but for performance. He adds that these tragedies cannot be separated from the theatre technique which was unknown in the ancient Arab World. But why does the Arab tradition, being rich in mythology and poetry, not include drama ? Tewfiq El Hakim suggests that they lived in the desert without any civic settlements. This is probably right as far as the Pre-Islamic period is meant, yet in the Northern and Southern edges of the Arabian Peninsula there were many big cities with established great settlements rich in every kind of luxurious life. The main reason that they did not translate Greek tragedies. according to Tewfiq El Hakim, is that they considered their own poetic tradition the perfect prototype, and so had no need of translations from any other nations poems. Tewfiq El Hakim states that any modern Arab should absorb Greek tragedies with the background of his own national tradition, not as any European. He thinks that the religious origin of Greek tragedy is nearer to the Oriental peoples who are more religious than the Western. Man, he said, became god for Modern Europe. And this is exactly what we see in the *Oedipus* (1932) of André Gide (1869-1951), where man became the center of the whole universe. Such point of view cannot be accepted in the Orient.

In his book *El Ta'aduliah* (*Equilibrium*) El Hakim states that man is not alone in this universe and thus he cannot be absolutely free. Man is not the God of this World. Nor is his will quite free, but he moves freely within the circle of the Divine Will. This does not mean that Man is to be passive, on the contrary he must do his best to go beyond the limits imposed upon his will. El Hakim states that his aim in *Those of the Cave* - known in the European tradition as the *Seven Sleepers* - was not just to adapt a Koran story to a simple performance, but to look in the Islamic traditional stories through the Greek concept of tragedy. Thus, he said, we can achieve a reconciliation - or even a marriage - between two traditions and two different concepts.

El Hakim did his best to remove the mythological elements which the Arab Islamic mentality cannot easily digest. Some critics think that Islamic fatalism is in contradiction with the Greek concept, i.e. the defeat of Man by the Divine Fate. El Hakim however stresses the interpretation of Islam as denoted by the words of Abu Hanifah: 'My belief lies in the middle, i.e. there is no irresistible obligation, nor absolute free will but in between'. Man is responsible, because he is - at least - partly free-willed[34]. El Hakim goes on to say that he deprived Oedipus from his mythological glory, in order to increase his human dignity. Such a humanized Oedipus can be received better by the Muslims, whose prophet Mohamed was merely a human being. Many Islamic sayings and ideals are repeated in the play.

The tragic essence in El Hakim's *Oedipus* is based on the fact that he lives in a great lie created by the conspirators around him. He tries continuously to find out the truth about himself and his parents referring to the Greek wisdom embodied in the words: *know thyself* inscribed on the temple of Apollo in Delphi. El Hakim's Oedipus after the terrible recognition does not blind himself, nor does he cut his relation with his mother - wife. He justifies his unexpected reaction by the ideas explained in his book *Equilibrium*. This means that any one committing an error is not to be punished, but to lead a life of goodness and charity, for thus he balances his errors with beneficient deeds[35].

Aly Ahmed Bakatheer, of Yemen origin, graduated in Cairo University from the English Department. He introduces his play *The Tragedy of Oedipus* saying: 'a new treatment of the Greek myth, with a new content, a new ideology different from Greek beliefs which made man a plaything in the hands of Fate, a victim of the divine caprices'. His play reflects the sociopolitical changes in the Arab World from 1948, i.e. the debacle of Palestine, to the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. The author connects the inner corruption in the Arab World with British Imperialism. The interaction of these two factors created the tragedy of Palestine. The major problem in Bakatheer's play is that this political content cannot be easily concluded from the dramatic action itself. This meaning has been exposed by the author himself in his explanatory note. In the meantime Bakatheer followed in the footsteps of El Hakim with the aim to create an Arabo-Islamic Oedipus. Like El Hakim he created from the myth of Oedipus a great lie without any religious flavour, a chain of wicked intrigues planned by a villain priest. In this play the frame of the actions and the names of the characters are Greek, but the sayings and behaviour are Islamic to the degree that Tiresias says: 'You know, our God does not eat, nor drink, and he gives us all these goods and these treasures to utilize and live...'. It seems as if Tiresias here is a priest of Allah! He has no idea about anthropomorphism in Greek theology. It escaped his notice that the Olympian Gods eat ambrosia and drink nektar. Like human beings they also are vulnerable and subject to many flaws, yet they are immortal, as has been explained above. Bakatheer's *Oedipus,* after the terrible recognition of his parents, prefers not to blind himself, in order to put himself in the service of his people, i.e. for patriotic reasons. This non-tragic end indicates also the failure to create an Arabo-Islamic tragic character of Oedipus.

Oedipus the Egyptian was transformed into a comic character. Ali Salem, a contemporary playwright read the book of I. Velikovsky *Oedipus and Akhnaton Myth and History* translated into Arabic[36]. He wrote his play *You are the killer of the Monster. The comedy of Oedipus* under the influence of this book. Oedipus in

this play is a Pharaoh, because the author believes that the Greek myth of Oedipus was moulded after the historical events in the palace of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhnaton and his family. Moreover Ali Salem believes that there was an Egyptian play about a king who married his mother. It was performed in Egypt, Ali Salem thinks, and it was the prototype for *Oedipus Tyrannos* of Sophocles. He generalizes saying that the Greeks took the dramatic art as a whole from Egypt. Ali Salem in the introduction of his play stresses his belief that Oedipus was originally a Pharaoh. The present writer thinks that such justification is not necessary. Every playwright is free to delineate his Oedipus as he likes, with the essential condition to be artistically convincing. The Sphinx riddles represent in Ali Salem's play the Arabs' defeat within six days in the war of June 1967, *The Sphinx conquered the people of Thebes*, i.e. Egypt and the Arab World. Through the bitterness of the defeat and the efforts to decipher the Sphinx riddles the play exposes the different diseases in sociopolitical life before and after 1967, e.g. despotism, hypocrisy and corruption. These diseases also offer a fertile soil for sarcasm and many comic elements. In spite of the heavy defeat Oedipus was deified, and thus he is identified with Nasser of 9 & 10 June 1967. The major issue is that a great tragic hero was transformed into a clown.

Fawzi Fahmi's play *The Return of the Absent* utilized all the previous Arabic versions. It tries, sometimes successfully, to avoid the dramatic defects of these versions, but generally speaking it follows their main outlines. Oedipus of Fawzi Fahmi after the recognition of the terrible truth convinced his mother to keep the whole affair secret, and to stop their husband - wife relations, i.e. to save themselves for the sake of the people's common interests. In addition, Oedipus married a young girl, Euryganeia[37], to save himself, his mother and his country, because he is a socialist champion of the poor proletariat. Fawzi Fahmi omitted any mention of Oedipus' four children from his own mother. This, added to the marriage of Oedipus - Euryganeia, aimed to make him more acceptable to an Islamic audience.

To conclude it is noted that the Egyptianized Oedipus passed through four stages. Tewfiq El Hakim based his Oedipus' character on the fervent search of truth: Oedipus does not blind himself and continues his husband-wife relation with his mother, even after the tragic recognition. Bakatheer's Oedipus was atheist, but recognizing that his wife is in fact his mother he stopped this relation and became a great believer and reformer. Oedipus of Ali Salem is more popular, a Pharaoh nearer to a farce character, more remoted from the mythological origins. Fawzi Fahmi's Oedipus was more successful as a dramatic performance[38]. This Egyptianized Oedipus reflected successively the current

changes in the sociopolitical life. This means that it is reasonable to expect many other Oedipus performances as dramatic responses to the great events and radical changes, which took place in the Arab World during the last few decades. Peoples, there, still live and daily suffer, looking forward for a new version.

NOTES

1 Aristoteles, *Poetica* 1453a 10

2 Noteworthy is that the present writer has stressed the general oral nature of Greek Literature as a whole from the beginnings to the fourth Century B.C.: See Ahmed Etman, *Ancient Greek Literature. A Human and Universal Legacy* (in Arabic) third edition, Cairo 2001, pp. 41-102, 525-541. cf. G.S. Kirk, *Homer: The Meaning of an Oral Tradition*, in "The Classical World" edited by D. Daiches and A. Thorlby (Aldus Books London 1972) pp. 155-171. J.B. Hainsworth, *The Criticism of an Oral Homer*, in: JHS 90 (1970) pp. 90-98. M.S. Jensen, *The Homeric Question and the Oral- Formulaic Theory*, in: Museum Tusculanum Press, (Copenhagen 1980) pp. 36 ff. J.A. Notoupolos, *Studies in early Greek oral Poetry,* in: HSCPh 68 (1964), pp. 1-77.

3 Arist., Rh 1413b 12-14. Cf. F.G. Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome*. Oxford 1932.

4 G.A. Kennedy (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Volume 1 *Classical Criticism*. Cambridge 1989, reprint 1997, pp. 200 ff.

5 On Hellenistic drama see: G.M. Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Hellenistic Drama*. London 1967 ; G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth Century Tragedy*. Akademia Athenon. Athens 1980.
T.B.L. Webster, "Fourth Century Tragedy and the Poetics", Hermes LXXXII (1954) pp. 294-308.

6 On Roman Tragedy generally and Seneca in particular see: P. Grimal, "La role de la mise - en - scène dans les tragédies de Sénèque: Clytemnestre et Cassandre dans l' Agamemnon" (in: Théâtre et spectacles dans l' Antiquité, Leiden - Brill 1983), pp. 123-140. L. Hermann, *Le Théâtre de Sénèque*. Paris, Les Belles Lettres 1924. J. Jacquot - M. Oddon, edd., *Les Tragédies de Sénèque et le Théâtre de la Renaissance*. 2nde edition. Ed. Du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) 1973.

7 Abd El Rahman Badawi, *Aristoteles*, *Poetics* together with Ancient Arabic Translation and the explanations of El Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd. Modern Translation and Interpretation. Dar El Thaqafah Beirut, 1992, p. 56. Noteworthy is that there are at least three other modern Arabic translations of Aristotle's *Poetics.*

8 Shukry Aiad, *Aristoteles' Poetics*, The Translation of Abu Bishr Matta bin Iunis El Kunaie from Syriac into Arabic. With Modern Translation and A Study of its Influence upon Arabic Rhetoric. Cairo, 1993, pp. 225-248.

9 Ibn El Nadim, *El Fihrst*, p. 349-350.

10 See G.D. Ziaka, *Aristote dans la Tradition Arabe*. Thessalonika 1980, passim.

11 cf. F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (Trans. by Emile and Jenny Marmorstein, Routledge, London- New York 1992, pp. 256 ff.

12 See note 7.

13 Abd El Rahman Badawi, *Hazem El Qarthagani and Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Rhetoric*, Cairo 1961, p. 11.

14 Ibidem.

15 Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 256 ff.

16 Ahmed Etman, *Greek into Latin through Arabic*, in: JOAS (Journal of Oriental and African Studies) Vol.9 (1997-1998) pp. 29-38.

17 Abd El Rahman Badawi, *Aristoteles,*, p. 13.

18 R.R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries*, Cambridge, 1973, University Press, Reprint 1973. p. 174, cf. 172-3, 284-285 and passim

19 G. Highet, *The Classical Tradition. Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*, Oxford, 1949, Clarendon Press, p. 14 and passim.

20 Arist., *Poet.*, 1450 a19-20.

21 Ibidem, 1449 b8-9.

22 Ahmed Etman, *Classicism in Renaissance Theatre & The Restored Tradition in the Plays of Shakespeare and Racine*. Cairo, 1999. pp. 284-300.

23 Arist., *Poet.*, 1453a 5.

24 Ibidem, 1451 a 1-2.

25 Ahmed Etman, *The Conception of Heroism in Greek Literature*, in: Classical Papers Vol. III, (Cairo University 1994) pp. 35-50.

26 Hom., *Iliad* III, 348, 458, XV 199. "ananke" in Greek means "necessity, compulsion, constraint, compulsion of circumstances".

27 See Ahmed Etman, *A Light from Thucydides on the Problem of Sophocles' "Antigone" and its Tragic Meaning*, in: L'Antiquité Classique 70 (2001) pp. 147-153.

28 On the theatre of Ancient Egyptians see: E. Drioton, *Le Théâtre dans l'ancienne Egypte*. Paris 1954: Translated into Arabic.

29 On the Egyptian and Oriental origins of Greek Myths generally and Dionysus particularly see: Ahmed Etman, *Isis in the Greco-Roman World with a Special Reference to Plutarch's Treatise 'De Iside et Osiride'*, in: JOAS Vol. 2 (Athens 1990), pp. 11-21.

30 Idem, *Gli Studi Classici e il loro influsso sulla Letteratura Creativa in Egitto e nel Mondo Arabo*,in: ACME LIV (Milano 2001) pp. 3-10.

31 Idem, *Cleopatra and Antony: A Study in the Art of Plutarch, Shakespeare and Shawky*. Second ed. Aegyptus, (pp. 511) Cairo 1990 (with summary in English).

32 Idem, *Les Sources Classiques du Théâtre de Tewfik El-Hakim: Etude Comparée*, (avec un résumé en français). Ed. Seconde Longman 1993. cf. Idem, *The Classical Sources of Arabic Theatre, in:* Xlle Congrès International d'Archéologie Classique, Athens 4-10 September 1983, Practica Tomos 1 (Athens 1985) pp. 126-129.

33 Idem, les Sources classiques, pp. 48-53.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ibidem, pp. 72-75.

36 I. Velikovsky, *Oedipus and Akhnaton Myth and History,* London, 1960, Sidgwick and Jackson (Translated into Arabic by Farouq Farid).

37 According to another Greek mythical version Oedipus begot his four children from another wife, and not from his mother. This second marriage of Oedipus is mentioned by Pausanias (IX, 11) and Apollodorus (III 85). Yet Pherekydes (Schol. Eurip. Phoenissai, 53) gives her the name Astymedousa.

38 Ahmed Etman, *Oedipus between his Mythical Origins and his National Anxiety on the Egyptian Stage*, Al-Bayan, (Kuwait), Nos. 155-158 (February-May 1979).