

# Human Existence in Modern Arab Drama: Al-Hakim, Idris, and Abd Al-Ghaffar, Existence and Absurdity

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## Abstract

This research aims to analyse the concept of human existence in Modern Arab Theatre by examining dramatic functions that address the themes of existence and non-being across different social and cultural contexts. The research examined "Food for Every Mouth" by Tawfiq Al-Hakim, "The Princess is Waiting," and " *Al-farafere*" by Yusuf Idris. This indicates how these authors address human issues ahead of life's non-equality and contradictions.

Research examines the most prominent philosophical topics related to human existence, such as the contradictions between the individual and society, a sense of isolation, and the damage modern people suffer in a world dominated by stress and uncertainty. The dramatic methods used by authors to express these ideas are also analysed through dialogue, dramatic structure, and character design.

Research depends on analysing dramatic texts using philosophical tools to examine the dimensions of the existence of these functions, which reveal the effects of existentialism and non-equality in presenting psychological and intellectual challenges individuals face. Through this analysis, the research aims to provide a deep understanding of how the Theatre can serve as a platform for exploring existential problems. In contrast, modern Arab Theatre reveals the social and cultural references that shape human experience.

**Keywords:** Human existence, Arab Theatre, absurdity, existentialism, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Abd al-Ghaffar, Yusuf Idris, existential crisis, contemporary Arab literature, theatrical characters, theatrical philosophy.

## Introduction

To have a deep understanding of human existence in modern Arab plays, we must reflect on how Arab writers and playwrights address the question of continuous discovery for existence, loss, and meaning. The theatres of Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Salah Abd Al-Ghafore, and Yusuf Idris, in different social and political contexts, offer distinct models of such conversations between people and society that have emerged in Arab countries since independence. Through their dramatic functions, such as "*Food for Every Mouth*" (al-Hakim), "*The Princess is Waiting*" (Abd al-Ghafor), and "*Al-farafere*" (Idris), these authors offer lively concepts between life, death, and personal self and society (Al-Hakim 45; Abd Al-Ghafor 63; Idris 12).

Modern Arab Theatre represents a fruitful environment for expressing questions about human survival, on the one hand, and for associating the philosophy of existence with social and political struggle, on the other. In each mouth for food, al-Hakim portrays a foggy social reality and asks philosophical questions about equality and existence (Al-Hakim 89). For its share, in princess weights, Abdel Gafor reflects the heroine, who reflects the disinterest (Abdel Gafor 120) in life, which falls into the trap of eternal waiting. In "*Al-farafere*", Yusuf Idris focuses on the psychological challenges the Idris Society faces (Idris 58). All of these plays reveal an intensive interaction between the concepts of existentialism, non-equation, and social division, making them a meeting point between Western philosophy and Arab society.

In this research, we will examine these four plays through an existential and absurd lens to analyse how the Arab person is represented in them. We will take up the concepts of existence.

### **Literature Review**

The last studies on survival in the Arab Theatre are insufficient. However, many have been conducted at the theatres of al-Hakim and Idris, which have helped create a solid base for understanding the subject. For example, we find that many studies are heavily influenced by the Theatre of Al-Hakim, who researched Hala Abdullah's study "existing philosophy in the theatre of Tawfiq Al-Hakim," which shows how Al-Hakim does not limit himself to presenting social reality, such as existence, which is an existence.

Another important study is Muhammad Salem's "Arab's Theatre", which analysed the plays of Al-Hakim, Abd Al-Ghaffar, and Idris from the perspective of existential philosophy's influence on the understanding of the Arabian person. This study indicates that during this period, the Arab Theatre reflected the influence of existential philosophy and served as an effective means of expressing human pain to a society unable to provide real answers to the questions (Salem 134). In the study of Abd Al-Ghaffar's Theatre, he has been described as having conflicts in his plays, especially in *"The Princess is Waiting"*, where the Arab man is trapped in a state of waiting, a position of intense existence. Many studies have addressed mainly this point, such as Mustafa Abdullah's study "Expressions of Absurd in the Arab Theater", which argues that Abd Al-Ghaffar reflects the absence of life in his characters, waiting in a metaphor waiting in a metaphor that expresses existence in the case of the event.

### **Man and Society: A Theatrical Reading of the Dimensions of Human Existence in Arab Theatre**

#### **1. "Food for Every Mouth" by Tawfiq Al-Hakim**

In *"Food for Every Mouth"*, Tawfiq Al-Hakim uses it as a tool to criticise social and political reality in Egypt and the Arab world during that period. This drama reflects an internal conflict between individuals and society, with existentialist clarity, asserting that people are in a terrible confrontation with invisible forces that limit their options. At the same time, strength and loss are fitting emotions. In this drama, al-Hakim reflects the existence of character in a world full of social and economic oppression, where the concept of "food" symbolises the need for existence, which becomes a survival problem, but not in a natural way. The characters in the play are forced to eat "tasteless food", which is a symbol of life without meaning. The characters also remain in a state of constant existence because there is no clear solution in a world full of conflict. The most significant destruction humans face in *"Food for Every Mouth"* is the loss of the ability to define a clear purpose in life, leading to identity loss and internal division. Through this drama, Al-Hakim addresses the issue of existence philosophically and argues that, under political and social systems, people have no significance in their existence, remaining in a state of indifference that they cannot escape. Thus, the characters are depicted as seeking

something that makes sense of their lives, only to find themselves drawn into a cycle of repetition and chaos (Al-Hakim 45).

## **2. "*The Princess is Waiting*" by Salah Abd Al-Ghafafore**

Salah Abd Al-Ghafafore's "*The Princess is Waiting*" is considered one of the most prominent works to address absurdity in Arab Theatre. In this drama, human existence is built into eternal waiting. The protagonist, the princess, is characterised by an unfulfilled expectation of a world that never comes. The wait here is depicted as part of the existing non-equation, as the princess can only act, and her life is trapped in an infinitely vicious cycle. This eternal wait reflects the absence of human life, where everything is exposed to the future, yet there is no guarantee it will come to pass. It is a hallmark of uncertainty and continuity, which is a feature of existentialism addressed in the play (Abd Al-Ghafafore 63).

Within the structure of non-equation, this work can be regarded as an expression of psychological crisis that Arab individuals experience under oppressive political and social systems. The princess becomes a symbol of the people waiting for a change in their lives, but is unable to bring it about. She represents the general state of the Arab person, trapped in a state of lost hope. The play shows that waiting is not only a psychological process, but also an expression of indifference and constant concern for the future (Abd Al-Ghafafore 120).

## **3. "*Al-farafe*" by Yusuf Idris**

In the "*Al-farafe*", Yusuf Idris addresses the dilemma of human existence by presenting a composite picture of people suffering from social and psychological isolation. The characters in the play are in a strange position in their daily lives, each trying to save their reality in another world, yet with no real results. The play is characterized by the absurd dialogue between its characters, which reflects the growing internal stress between individuals and society. The "*Al-farafe*" characters show an apparent contradiction between their lives, full of sorrow and emptiness, and their high expectations, which are difficult to achieve under difficult social conditions.

Through this drama, Idris shows an existential crisis in Arab society, where individuals are unable to find meaning in life. Life becomes a chaotic mess, devoid of

any real value, and individuals live in a state of internal inconsistency. This drama reflects a constant sense of failure and regrets the left occasions, revealing the idea that people in the Arab world live in constant struggle with themselves (Idris 58).

### **Human Existence in Arab Theatre: A Comparison with Western Theatre**

Human existence is one of the basic concepts addressed by both Western and Eastern philosophy. It serves as a tool for understanding human nature and existence in a world full of challenges, conflicts, and uncertainty. This concept refers to man's constant search for meaning in life and reflects the struggle between a person's will and society's ability to impose obstacles. Human existence is similarly depicted in modern Arab and Western Theatre, though with variations in its expression across different cultural and social contexts.

### **Human Existence in Arab Theatre**

In the Arab Theatre, the playwright presents human existence as a complex and misleading state, in which the person is caught between social traditions, conflicting cultural identities, and a sense of existence. These philosophical dimensions are reflected deep in the works of Arab dramatists such as Tawfiq, Silah Abd Al-Ghafafore, and Yusuf Idris. Their plays express various forms of human existence, exposing psychological crises, spiritual emptiness, and existing isolations that Arab individuals experience in a stressful social context.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim: The play "*Food for Every Mouth*" reveals the Arab man in a confrontation with his society and his fate, living between his desires and his demands on society. In his acting, Al-Hakim presented a model of a person who tried to conduct self-interviews while being forced to follow social values that prohibited his freedom. Through this character, al-Hakim emphasised the dilemma the Arabic man faces: he cannot achieve self-reflection in a world of social pressure and deeply ingrained traditions. As Al-Hakim explains in his plays, "a person cannot free himself from the group's burden, no matter how much he tries" (Al-Hakim, "*Food for Every Mouth*" 34).

"*The Princess is Waiting*" by Silah Abd Al-Ghafafore: This drama reflects the pain of human existence through the hero's waiting for an unknown wealth. This wait represents the state of uselessness in the world, a person lacking a clear vision for the

future. It shows separation from the pending reality and the contingent's location, as the person suffers from an inner peace that expresses the absence of real existence. As the character says, "I waited so long ... But what did I wait for in the end?" (Abd Al-Ghaffar, *"The Princess is Waiting"* 45).

Yusuf Idris: The play *"Al-farafe"* is a Psychological Crisis that examines human existence through individuals when faced with the harsh realities of life. The characters in this drama must face an injury situation, in contact with unexplained conditions, which reflect the disrespect for human existence amid social and political obstacles from which a person cannot escape. Here, Idris is a symbol of human existence in a social context, living on the margins of life and unable to find true meaning. Idris says in his drama: "Everything in this life lives in its place and does not run like us" (Idris, *"Al-farafe"* 28).

### **Human Existence in Western Theatre**

In the Western Theatre, man's existence is known for its intense philosophical dimensions, as presented by thinkers such as Sartre and Camus. Theatre is used as a platform to highlight human crises in modern times. The Western Theatre focuses on personal existence and internal conflict, while the Arab Theatre varies in its methods and symbolism, reflecting this. In movements such as Western philosophy, especially in those of existence and absurdity, these problems are more widespread and directly addressed.

Jean-Paul Sartre Theatre: Sartre is considered one of the most prominent existential philosophers, providing a philosophical basis for understanding human existence. In his plays, such as *"The Deluge"* and *"The Devil and the Good Lord"*, he shows that humans are not born with a specific meaning but make their way through their choices. In their plays, man's existence is depicted as a tension between personal freedom and the heavy burden of personal responsibilities. The existence in Sartre's Theatre is a continuous function of self – self-construction, but with continuous recognition of the burden of personal freedom, such as feelings of guilt or loss. As Sartre said in his acting: "Existence is the only one; man is just what he does" (Sartre, *"The Deluge"* 102).

Samuel Beckett's Theatre: The most famous play, "*Waiting for Godot*", is one of the most prominent absurd plays that addresses the question of human survival within a structure of non-equality and meaninglessness. This drama is always focused on the idea of waiting and the indifference that can surround life, because there is nothing specific throughout the piece and no theatrical development. Through this story, the back expresses an existence that seems devoid of purpose and makes no promise of real meaning. As the back says in the reading of the drama: "We just wait, but nothing comes" (back, "*Waiting for Godot*" 16).

Albert Camus Theatre: In his play "*The Myth of Sisyphus*", Camus presents the concept of existence through the non-life of life, from which it is impossible to get off. Camus believes that man in modern times remains in a state of false existence, which reflects the basic idea of absurdity: that life is meaningless, yet man must face this reality with complete acceptance. The existence of Camus faces the most significant challenge: finding meaning in a world full of meaninglessness. As Camus states in his work: "The Existence is absurd; we all search for meaning in an empty world" (Camus, "*The Myth of Sisyphus*" 99).

### **Comparison between Arab and Western Theatre**

Although human existence in the Arab Theatre raises many questions similar to those in the Western Theatre — such as rudeness, isolation, and conflict with oneself — local social and political contexts influence the way Arab dramatists present these subjects. In the Arab Theatre, the author often portrays characters in conflict with external forces such as society and tradition. In contrast, in the Western Theatre, the struggle is more concentrated in the characters, especially in existential and absurd movements.

Stylistically, the Western Theatre uses more modern techniques in dramatic construction, focusing on short, direct communication and indirect conditions. In the Arab Theatre, we can find a more precise representation of the social and cultural pressures that affect character development. However, both types of Theatre share a common theme: exposing human suffering and the ongoing quest for meaning in a world of uncertainty and pressure.



## **Conclusion**

The dramas analysed in this research, "*Food for Every Mouth*", "*The Princess is Waiting*", and "*Al-Farafere*", are modern Arab dramas that reveal many philosophies of human existence, the Arab understanding, and the effects of absurd philosophy. These plays not only reflect the characters' internal conflicts but also reveal social and political tensions that define this struggle. Through the character who discovers meaning in a chaotic world, "*The Princess is Waiting*," and the characters, in the end, without hope, facing social powers that threaten their existence, we see how Arabs cope with existence and non-liking in the context of their changing environment. What is the difference between these tasks, how they add existence and absurd philosophy on the one hand, with the challenges of social and political life, on the other, making them a detailed reflection of Arabic reality after independence? On the other hand, the Western Theatre, especially the baked work, aligns with some ideas presented in these Arab plays, but with a fundamental difference in social and political context.

The interaction between Arab and Western philosophies creates a fruitful field for the study and analysis of these literary and dramatic works. These tasks also enrich the dialogue between Arab culture and Western philosophy, underscoring the importance of human existence as a basic subject in literature and Theatre. Through this research, we hope to explore how existence and absurd philosophy have shaped the Arab character, and to open the door to a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the Theatre's role in spreading these philosophers' and social issues to a broader audience.



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