THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND SUBJECTIVE SIGNIFICANCE ON THE SAUDI THEATER BETWEEN 2000 AND 2020

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the most significant social and individual issues experienced by Saudi society between 2000 and 2020, analyzing their manifestation in the dramatic structure of theatrical language. Besides, it explores if Saudi playwrights, through narrative techniques such as the four key elements of this study (dialogue, description, narration, and intertextuality), were able to express the social transformations in a theatre language with aesthetic elements which carries within it the changes that society and the individual experience and the problems they are suffering from. The findings reveal that societal influences emerged as social signifiers addressing a variety of issues, most notably women's empowerment and their societal roles, as well as family-related concerns. Themes of personal isolation and alienation that some individuals of this generation experienced were also revealed in some texts. In order to get around different kinds of censorship, the majority of Saudi playwrights have turned to the philosophical idea of alienation or distancing, employing fantasy literature as a vehicle of expressing this alienation.

Keywords: dramatic structure, theatrical language, dialogue, description, narration, intertextuality, alienation

INTRODUCTION

Definition of the Topic
Since the beginning of the current century, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone a dynamic phase of transformation in its system of values, customs, traditions, and social ideas. This shift accompanies changing the mental image in others' perception about Saudi society. Theater discourse stands at the forefront of literary texts that reflect the transformations and developments experienced by society. The relationship between theater and society is one of unique dimensions, shaped by the conditions of its inception, where theater served as a mirror reflecting society and a primary medium for expressing its identity. From this perspective, this study seeks to explore the significance of social and subjective phenomena in Saudi theatrical discourse between 2000 and 2020.

Research Problem and Questions
The research problem lies in uncovering the impact and significance of social and subjective phenomena on the structure of Saudi theatrical discourse between 2000 and 2020. This necessitates answering the following questions:
1. To what extent have playwrights been able to express contemporary social issues?
2. How are social phenomena reflected in the theatrical texts published between 2000 and 2020?

3. How can the language of theatrical discourse carry meanings beyond the literal text, interacting with other elements to convey ideas and visions to the audience?

Research Objectives
This research aims to achieve several objectives, including:
1. Understanding the relationship between theater and society.
2. Defining the concept of significance, its function, and types.
3. Exploring how theatrical texts can serve as tools for expressing social and subjective issues.
4. Revealing manifestations of intertextuality in Saudi theatrical discourse between 2000 and 2020.

Research Methodology
The constructive approach served as the primary methodology for this research, supplemented by other methods that helped clarify theatrical discourse.

Previous Studies
A substantial body of literature has addressed this topic, offered valuable insights and highlighted key theoretical and practical dimensions. Among them are:
- A study by researcher Latifah Al-Baqmi (2011) on contemporary Saudi theater.
- A study by researcher Khaled Ahmad Mahmoud (2020) on dramatic structure in the texts of Fahd Raddah Al-Harthy.
- A doctoral dissertation by researcher Jaber bin Muhammad Al-Najadi (2023) on experimentation in formal Saudi theatrical texts—a constructive study.
- A study by researcher Dr. Nawal bint Nasser Al-Suwaylim (2021) on poetic theater in Saudi literature.
- A study by researcher Dr. Montaser Nabih Muhammad Siddeeq (2023) on the uniqueness of vision and the aesthetics of tools in the plays of Sayyidat Al-Masrah Al-Saudiyyah (Lady of Saudi Theater), Malha Abdullah—a sociological approach.

Research Divisions
1. **Introduction:** Includes the definition of the topic, research problem and questions, objectives, methodology, previous studies, and the subdivisions of the topic.
2. **Prelude:** Covers the definition of social and subjective significance and their types.
3. **First Section: Dialogue**
4. **Second Section: Description (Description of Place).**
5. **Third Section: Narration.**
6. **Fourth Section: Intertextuality.**

Prelude

Social significance refers to how social factors influence the meaning and linguistic usage. Semantics studies how meanings are formed and interpreted in language, and thus social significance is part of this process. For example, words and phrases may carry social connotations related to gender, age, social class, and culture. The meaning of a word may change over time, acquiring new connotations or losing old ones due to social and cultural shifts.[1]

Additionally, social significance can impact the linguistic rules and usage. For instance, social factors may influence the choice of appropriate words and expressions in a specific context, leading to the use of special language for different social groups.

The relationship between meaning and social-cultural context indicates how meaning is derived from shared beliefs, values, norms, and customs of a particular society or cultural group. Over time, meaning can evolve as societies and cultures develop. Furthermore, social and cultural contexts shape how individuals interpret and assign meaning to various experiences and events, influencing their perceptions and beliefs.

In general, semantics aims to understand how language is used in human communication, and social significance enhances our understanding of the relationship between language and society.

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[1] Ahmad, A. S. (1995). *The social and linguistic significance of the phrase* (pp. 12–13). Modern Academy for University Books.

On the other hand, subjective significance refers to the process by which individuals assign meaning and importance to events, experiences, or objects. This meaning-making process is a natural human tendency that helps us understand the world around us and develop a sense of identity and understanding. Subjective significance involves interpreting events and experiences based on personal beliefs, values, and experiences, which can influence emotions, behaviors, and decision-making.[2]

Subjective significance is one of the concepts in linguistics and philosophy, indicating that certain words or concepts can describe themselves and define their meanings by describing their inherent characteristics. This means that the meaning of a word can be understood without external guidance or instructions, as the meaning contains an internal significance reflecting the innate nature of the concept. For example, the concept of a "circle" can be automatically described in a circular shape without needing explanation or directions.

Social significance is divided into several types, including lexical and mental significance. Lexical significance refers to the independent meaning of a word in linguistic dictionaries or during communication, distinct from its morphological significance. For example, the word (Ghafoor) "غفور" (forgiving) denotes a person characterized by forgiveness, but its morphological form implies abundance and exaggeration.

Morphological significance, on the other hand, is derived from the structure and form of the word. For instance, the word (Ghafoor) "غفور" (forgiving) implies an abundance of forgiveness, unlike (Ghafir) "غافر" (forgiver), which merely denotes the attribute of forgiveness without exaggeration.

Mental significance is divided into:
1. **Inclusive Significance:** The word denotes something that is part of its concept, such as the word "house" implying a roof.
2. **Obligatory Significance:** The word denotes something outside its concept, such as the word "roof" implying a wall, as the existence of a roof necessitates the existence of a wall.[3]

This departure from the concept of denotation constitutes a form of estrangement. However, estrangement in the semantic sense may not align with Bertolt Brecht's notion of temporal and spatial distancing aimed at achieving aesthetic detachment for perceiving the estranged or distanced object. "Estrangement" is stripping away natural appearance (Denaturalization) and stripping away familiarity from the familiar (defamiliarization).

One of the primary objectives of semiotics is to strip away familiarity or natural appearance—that is, to uncover the social foundation that has been encoded into various phenomena which are commonly accepted as natural. This concept was borrowed from the Formalist idea of "estrangement" proposed by Viktor Shklovsky.[4] This act of defamiliarization or deviation from the familiar compels the semantic inquirer to remain connected to a critical component within the semantic field i.e. functionalism.

Functionalism
Functionalism, in its broad sense, represents a particular view of society and culture, emphasizing the interaction and integration of the functions of all parts or aspects constituting something in relation to the whole system that binds them together. In linguistics, functionalism reflects the view that language structure is determined by the functions it performs.[5]

Functionalism has been criticized for ignoring social changes, neglecting historical dimensions in interpreting phenomena, and failing to explain conflict and transformation. The functions of signs, according to Jakobson's

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[2] Salih, S. I. (1960). *Studies in philology* (1st ed., p. 170). Dar Al-Ilm Lilmalayin.

[3] Wahba, M., & Others. (1984). *Dictionary of Arabic terms in language and literature* (p. 169). Library of Lebanon.

[4] Chandler, D. (2002). *Dictionary of key terms in semiotics* (A. Shakir, Trans., p. 46). Academy of Arts.

[5] Chandler, D. (2002). *Dictionary of key terms in semiotics* (pp. 71–72).

model of linguistic communication, reflect the dominance of one of six factors within any utterance, each corresponding to a different linguistic function.[6]

Given that theater differs from novels and other arts in terms of reception, it relies on what is called the referential framework of creativity or, as in the social approach to criticism, the community of reception (the text's community, the creative community, the reception community). Here, the symbols of social codes and their meanings unravel, and a process of substitution occurs in the social structure as an alternative to the text's structure. An arbitrary separation of study occurs in the recipient's mind, where they receive signals sent by the theatrical text and relate them to lived reality—a concept known as social determinism.

Social determinism is considered an intellectual stance that prioritizes social and political factors over the independent influence of the medium (whether language or technological means).[7] Thus, the importance of semantics in studying drama or theatrical texts lies in understanding the symbols, signals, and meanings behind the creativity of writers. There is a serious scholarly opinion on distinguishing between semiology and semiotics, although the terms are often translated to the same meaning.

To explore social significance, we examine it through sub-sections:
1. Dialogue.
2. Description (Description of Place).
3. Narration.
4. Intertextuality.

First Section: Dialogue

"Dialogue" includes what characters say or what is said about them. It is the means by which the author conveys information, develops actions, or introduces events, characters, and relationships. It also encompasses social, subjective, and verbal significance. Dialogue relates to the effects left by the speaker/author and the listener/reader in the text, as well as the image generated by speech in each.[8]

"Significance" refers to the use of words or symbols to suggest meaning or an idea rather than a direct definition or indication. It is often used in literature, poetry, and other forms of writing to create mood, evoke emotions, or add depth to the text. For example, in the play *"Jarrah bin Sati"* by Sami Al-Jamaan, Jarrah bin Sati's dialogue carries multiple significances. When he speaks about himself:
"Jarrah: As I expected... everything has collapsed. How could my weak house withstand such a fierce storm?! Don't worry, my poor bed, you are worn out, and so am I... We have no choice but to endure the harsh wind, the rain, and the indifference of others."[9]

The first words uttered by Jarrah express intense subjectivity and his claimed ability to predict, despite the collapse of his roof and bed indicating his prediction's inaccuracy. He describes himself as worn out like the bed, where the bed symbolizes rest and relaxation. His description of it as "worn out" suggests his inability to rest or relax. If the roof and house provide shelter and protection, their collapse leaves him exposed to the wind and rain—a mental image presented by the author through language.

"Jarrah: I know the lights aren't searching for a wretch like me... The matter of poor Jarrah doesn't concern you."[10] Here, he acknowledges his poverty as a social significance embedded in the word, recognizing that fame and attention are reserved for the rich, not the poor.

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[6] Al-Ghathami, A. M. (2010). *Cultural criticism* (p. 67). General Authority for Cultural Palaces

[7] Chandler, D. (2002). Dictionary of key terms in semiotics (p. 205).

[8] Matten, T. B. (n.d.). Dictionary of semiotics terms (p. 20).

[9] Al-Jumaan, S. (2003). The play "Jarrah bin Sati". In Plays for adults and children: Volume 1 (p. 18). Al-Hofuf.

[10] Al-Jumaan, S. (2003). Jarrah bin Sati (p. 19).

"Jarrah: Tell them how my name spread in India, Sindh, Turkey, and all the world's lands. Tell them about me and my father, who spent his life serving you until he died, clutching a handful of your salt and soil."[11]

Yet, he boasts of his fame and the spread of his name across the world—a contradiction in his speech. He speaks of his poverty and lack of attention, then of his fame, creating a verbal inconsistency that reflects his character's inconsistency. The image of a hand holding salt and soil symbolizes attachment to land and sea despite death.

"Shaddad: Dear Jarrah... We know this place is dear to you and to us as well... We understand how the harbor is tied to your life... But we must face reality... It's a terrifying, dreadful place. Silence envelops it, ghosts leap within it, and the sea rages angrily! We live on the other side of the earth... In plain Arabic: This place is now nothing but a relic."[12]

The harbor, having lost its function, becomes a symbol, its only remaining role being a relic of the past. No ships dock there, no lighthouse guides lost vessels—it is now a desolate, haunted place, evoking a mental image of emptiness.

"Dhaawi: The lighthouse... They're demolishing the lighthouse tower... They're removing it."[13]

The significance of demolishing the lighthouse is functional, as the lighthouse is associated with guiding ships through illumination. The mere mention of the word "lighthouse" mentally links it to its function.

"Saber: You have no excuse now, Jarrah... Even the lighthouse that guided ships to the harbor has been removed... No, eradicated from the face of the earth."[14]

The verbal significance here is the absence of justification or reason for its existence, as its function in this place has ceased. The harbor and lighthouse are officially out of service, leaving the place abandoned. The exaggeration in "eradicated from the face of the earth" implies the complete loss of the lighthouse's function, as if the entire world has lost guidance and is adrift.

The significance of the characters' names in *"Jarrah bin Sati"*—Hulman (from "dream"), Raghban (from "desire"), Hayman (from "domination," not "infatuation"), and Jarrah (an intensive form of "surgeon," one who performs surgery or opens the body)—reflects their roles. The remaining characters—Attal, Shaddad, Saber, and Dhaawi—are names indicating professions or social/moral traits.

In the play *"Laylat Al-Wahsha"* (Night of Loneliness) by Abbas Al-Hayek, the character of Al-Sayyid (The Master) speaks to the corpse beside him:
"Al-Sayyid: It's cold tonight, cold, and a sad night, a night with no taste or smell, a night of sorrow, my friend."[15]

The author uses words that contrast with Al-Sayyid's actions; he exhales hot smoke from his mouth while uttering words expressing coldness—symbolizing emotional coldness through the theme of loss that Al-Sayyid feels upon losing his "friend/servant."

"Al-Sayyid: No one was closer to me than you throughout my life. Not my wife, with whom I spent twenty-five years before she left me ten years ago. I didn't feel the loneliness of her absence, nor that she was gone forever, as I feel now with the stabs in my chest and the loneliness of my soul this hour, finding you dead before me."[16]

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[11] Al-Jumaan, S. (2003). Jarrah bin Sati (p. 20).

[12] Al-Jumaan, S. (2003). Jarrah bin Sati (p. 21).

[13] Al-Jumaan, S. (2003). Jarrah bin Sati (p. 23).

[14] Al-Jumaan, S. (2003). Jarrah bin Sati (p. 24).

[15] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness*. In *Complete theatrical works* (p. 10). Taif Literary Club.

[16] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 12).

This dialogue carries social information, offering concepts—especially social and functional ones. The relationship between Al-Sayyid and the servant was better than his ties to other family members who distanced themselves and left him. Thus, he uses words like "stabs in my chest" and "loneliness of my soul" to express his suffering upon the servant's death.

"Al-Sayyid: (Stands center stage, reminiscing) I remember yesterday you mocked your hunched back, mocked the white hair filling your black face. (Imitates the servant, bending as he did) Do you see, my master, how my face has become? Two colors, no third—black and white. Even my beard has lost all its blackness... Sometimes I look at my face, ravaged by wrinkles, and find no escape from my strange appearance except laughter. (Returns to his original character) And you look at me with glances that betray the weight of age."[17]

This monologue by Al-Sayyid offers mental images that form in the reader's mind about the servant's hunched back, white hair, black skin, and other actions or behaviors Al-Sayyid performs in the play-within-a-play.

The significance of the characters' names is functional and hierarchical. "Al-Sayyid" (The Master) denotes the owner of the place, the house, and the work—the upper hand and the controlling social class. "Al-Khadim" (The Servant) carries the function of service and a lower social status.

"The Servant: It seems death is not the end, nor the salvation I thought it would be from this world. But it pursues me even in the stillness of my death, pursuing me with all it contains—with this master and his thoughts and delusions. Often, I wished for death as salvation from him. Fifty years, no, fifty annoyances, fifty oppressions I lived between the walls of this palace, shackled by his madness, his moods, his whims... I've never rested since I came to this palace as a child with my father and mother... I've never rested in this palace, nor with those in it—not his father, who slapped me and slapped my father if he delayed in any matter... Even my mother wasn't spared from him and his whims, his endless demands."[18]

The servant reveals the other side of the relationship and duality (servant/friend). He is not what Al-Sayyid imagines in the master/servant relationship but differs psychologically. He resents and harbors hatred for Al-Sayyid and his father's actions but lacks the right to object or the courage to confront him. This is a social significance of the society in which the author and his characters live. His speech also contains mental images the reader visualizes, such as the young servant and the slaps he and his father received.

"The Servant: Since I was a child, I've dreamed of sitting like you on this couch or the chair by the balcony, waiting for a cup of tea at seven in the evening, just like you... I wish this moment you'd bring me the cup of tea, and I'd see in you my defeat—the defeat of a wretched slave as you see me, a slave, not a servant, bound by the curse of his slavery! (Finds a cigarette box nearby, takes a cigarette, and lights it, coughing again) Even the cigarette I so longed to try like you, you never allowed me. How could a wretched slave smoke like the masters?!"[19]

The servant's speech contains several mental images the reader sees, such as Al-Sayyid on the couch drinking tea and smoking at seven o'clock. The servant mentally reverses the image, envisioning the same scene with Al-Sayyid serving him. The dialogue exudes class hatred.

At the end of the play, the servant feels he has gained freedom through death—an escape from Al-Sayyid's oppression, who long denied him freedom, marriage, or a safe life after a lengthy monologue detailing his slavery and hatred for Al-Sayyid, who imprisoned his freedom and humiliated him.

"The Servant: I'll flee with my dead body from this damned palace! (Exits through the balcony door, his voice heard from afar) I'm free, I'm free!"[20]

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[17]A l-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 11).

[18] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 24).

[19] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 24).

[20] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 30).

Here, gaining freedom through death or liberation from slavery's shackles symbolizes breaking free from slavery by death, where death equals freedom (death/freedom). Fleeing with a dead body is a metaphor—how can a lifeless body move without a soul? It is as if a person is imprisoned in their body and freed by death.

In the play *"Halat Qalaq"* (State of Anxiety) by Fahd Raddah Al-Harthy, words take on multiple meanings, as in the following text:

"Actor 5: Let's engage in civilized dialogue."
"Actor 6: So you're looking for a civilized human?"
"Actor 2: Maybe he means a savage human!"
"Actor 3: Civilized?"
"Actor 1: How can you think of such a model? You're backward!"[21]

The verbal play here is on the words "civilized" (حضاري) [Hadhari] and "savage" (ضاري) [Dhari]. "Savage" derives from the adjective for predatory beasts, while "civilization" implies abandoning barbarism and savagery, enabling humans to live in a system of habits, traditions, values, and laws that form the concept of civilization as collectively practiced by society. "Savage," however, implies individualism and brutality.

The verbal play also appears in pronunciation, such as the word "مطلقة" (divorced/unlimited), where the placement of diacritics changes its meaning to either "unlimited" or "divorced," depending on pronunciation. This is a feature of the Arabic language, used here as a means of humor.

"Actor 1: I might need your help."
"Actor 2: Conditional or unconditional (or divorced)?"
"Actor 3: Perhaps it's divorced!"
"Actor 4: Did you marry to get divorced?"[22]

This opens one of Saudi society's issues within the framework of the theatrical game—the rising divorce rates as a social significance:

"Actor 6: The rising rates of divorcees and divorcers necessitate studies, research, surveys, and data collection, which we then file away." [23]

The preceding excerpt subtly hints at Arab thought and its handling of the Palestinian issue as the era's central cause—ideas are mere cries into the void, surveys stored in files.

"Actor 1: I tried to resist it, but it was stubborn. It grew so much it left me no space. I was defeated before it. It quickly took over spaces in my home... I fled from it, from one room to another, but it pursued me, gradually expelling me. Until all my details faded. I no longer had anything, not even my clothes. Everything became its property." [24]

The significance here is evasion of responsibility, blaming others. They hold Actor 1 responsible—he is the one who opened his home's door to the stubborn stranger who occupied it. With repeated attacks and blame, Actor 1 collapses and dies, and so do the others one by one.

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[21] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety*. In *Saudi theatrical texts* (1st ed., p. 259).

[22] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 259).

[23] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 259).

[24] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 260).

"Actor 3: His very self split apart, then overlapped chaotically. His soul wrestled with his soul!"
"Actor 4: His departure was tragic because it came suddenly, and we weren't ready for it."
"Actor 5: He left as people leave, vanished as they vanish." [25]

Among the social significances is also the reference to "ordered chaos" prevalent in the early 21st century, as the author hints in a dialogue between characters:

"Actor 2: In the thirties and forties of this current era, matters overlapped in a way resembling ordered chaos."
"Actor 3: My colleague's words about cosmetics—their essence and metaphysics—caught my attention."
"Actor 4: This is verbal extortion we must abandon."[26]

Through the concept of subjective significance—where language takes on a special role—the author delves into using words out of place to create a unique linguistic system (jargon):

"Actor 4: His words fill the void. He possesses thick language, delicacy, transparency, depth, connection, overlap, and structure! You're overcrowded, my friend."
"Actor 2: We circle in a void bordering on isolation, separating us. I want to reach you, to make you feel my pain!"
"Actor 4: And we don't feel you. Right?"
"Actor 5: His voice sounded different—now desolate and dry!"
"Actor 6: He wants to break language, using the harsh stones of words."
"Actor 3: (Sharply) Whoever lives in a glass house shouldn't throw stones at others' doors."[27]

The new calls accompanying the Arab Spring revolutions had earlier, in the early 20th century, overthrown the paternalistic model and dismantled the charisma of older figures. This is a social significance employed here to highlight personal aspects or errors in upbringing that have become prevalent in our Arab societies.

"Actor: There's a temptation for modern technologies."
"Actor 4: Let's be prepared for a tough confrontation."
"Actor 5: The negatives of globalization are devouring all our details."
"Actor 6: I don't know... I think time is short, but I'll try to summarize as much as possible."
"Actor 3: I understood what you imagined through the contexts of speech."
"Actor 4: These are mere telegraphic messages not subject to a specific address." [28]

The social significance in the preceding dialogue is the spread of globalization through all aspects of life, revealing its negatives. Language has become like telegraph messages—concise, not revealing the essence of language itself or its gems.

"Actor 6: Yesterday, they were managing a dialogue where they spoke of the fall of communism, old and new capitalism, liberalism and fundamentalist movements, international trade movements, Zionist fascism, democracy, and military movements. Whenever someone spoke, I'd say: 'You're right,' and the other lied. I no longer know who's managing these conspiratorial movements against my mind!"[29]

Here, we notice a social significance pointing to fleeting culture and the clash of economic and social theories governing the world, past and present.

"Actor 3: The suppression of creators by each other resembles wives suppressing husbands!"
"Actor 4: Among the mentioned topics was the philosophical aesthetics of overlap, divergence, conflict, and

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[25] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 261).

[26] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 261).

[27] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 262).

[28] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 263).

[29] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 263).

inflammation!"
"Actor 5: I expect you to have some kind of thinking, deepening, and diving into the depths of words."
"Actor 3: There's a temptation for modern technologies."
"Actor 4: Let's be prepared for a tough confrontation!"
"Actor 5: The negatives of globalization are devouring all our details."[30]

The talk about globalization's negatives is also a social (and cultural) significance reflecting the intellectual elite's concerns about globalization's negative impact on culture and social thought.

As chairs decrease, one is hung on the back wall, resembling the musical chairs game where players compete for seats. Here, however, each person leaves their seat for another, and the play ends with everyone collapsing. Outsiders carry them away and hang their chairs on the back wall.

From the above, we conclude that Fahd Raddah has loaded his text (*State of Anxiety*) with many social and subjective significances.

In the play *"Al-Qaryah Takhla' Aba'ataha"* (The Village Sheds Its Cloak) by Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, we encounter the following dialogue:

"Ahmad the First: I won't believe you, Ahmad... The birds have left the village."[31]

The birds leaving the village signifies the absence of life, as they search for water and food they couldn't find. It also metaphorically represents the characters themselves who left the village, rendering it desolate or devoid of human life.

"Ahmad the Second: There's no life here, Ahmad! How can you say there are rare birds here?!"
"Ahmad the Third: Don't you remember, Ahmad... and you, Ahmad, when we were young, we saw beautiful birds... We wished to catch them but couldn't."[32]

The return to roots and origins here is a case of nostalgia and longing for childhood. The characters attempt to return to their roots after a quarter-century, with social significance emerging through urbanization—moving to the city and leaving the countryside, seeking another life.

"Ahmad the First: I remember they decided to renovate the houses... and brought life back to them."
"Ahmad the Third: They couldn't... Rain became scarce, wells dried up, and the desert began swallowing the village."[33]

The nostalgia for the past drives the three cousins to travel a long distance to reach their village, the cradle of their childhood. They bring drinks and hunting tools, hoping to catch some birds, but the village is in ruins—no life exists there!

"Ahmad the Second: The place is terrifying... Snakes might be lurking."[34]

Alongside nostalgia for childhood, the possibility of snakes or enemies isn't ruled out.

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[30] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 263).

[31] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). The Village Sheds its Cloak (p. 12). Literary Publishing Foundation & Tabuk Literary Club.

[32] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 13)

[33] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 1)

[34] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 14)

"Ahmad the Third: The drought here suggests it hasn't rained for a long time."[35]

The repetition of the spatial adverb "here" twice, linked to drought and lack of rain, carries social significance. The three falling into the well together symbolizes unclear vision or direction for these characters or society at large—another social implication, especially as it coincides with waiting for what's to come or the future.

"Ahmad the Third: Don't worry; the weather will be beautiful with the rain... Come on, pay attention (screams)."[36]

When they fall into the well, covered with dirt, and emerge, they see the two elderly figures!

"Ahmad the Third: Cousins... Each of us is named Ahmad, but we differ greatly among ourselves. For a year, I've been asking them to visit our old ruins, to enjoy hunting the birds that delighted us as children."[37]

The significance of similar names, shared ancestry, and common roots gives a specific jargon to concepts. Language, religion, origins, customs, traditions, and a shared past form the concept of a unified Arab identity in the past and future.

When the cousins stand together facing a single situation, their efforts scatter, each taking a different path with different hardships, leading to tragic endings for all, differing in their conclusions—some drowning in sand, others falling into the well, or crushed by stones—because they didn't unite, and each acted according to personal whims, a social implication.

"Ahmad the Second: I'll die in the desert, near my birthplace. I'm a city boy! I have no relation to the desert... But I spoke a lot about the desert when I studied in that new world... Ooh! An Arab... You have a camel and a tent and live in the desert."[38]

The linguistic terms linked to the desert environment and Arab identity in the preceding excerpt ("desert," "tent," "camel") form a concept of the Arab image in the West, where he studied and married his wife, Ginger (whom he calls "Jana"). "Ginger" linguistically means ginger, a plant used as a spice in food and drink—he savors the West in everything, lives a Western life, and fears village life! He represents the Arab man in general, who doesn't carry his wife in the car with three men—this doesn't suit the Arab mentality.

"The First Man: Do I look convincing like this?"
"The Second Man: As if you're one of this village's inhabitants. What do you think of me? A good actor!"
"The First Man: In a few hours, the film producer will arrive and see the location in person... A deserted village... resembling his own."
"The Second Man: Even his choice of me, you, and the other actors came after a long search for the features of this village's people."[39]

Here, irony emerges—they are a film crew, and the question arises: If these characters are real and not ghosts or specters, how did the other characters not see Ahmad and his cousins? There is no indication they saw and ignored them.

"The First Man: When we stood at the street entrance, before the rain fell, we heard voices."
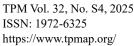*"One of them called: 'Ahmad!' I thought they were from the crew at the village entrance."*

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[35] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 15)

[36] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 15)

[37] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 20)

[38] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 30)

[39] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 34)

"The Second Young Man: One of the workers saw a car parked behind that large dune. If it hasn't moved, the sand must have buried it."[40]

There's a state of blending between reality and mirage, between dream and wakefulness.

"The Third Man: A while ago, I spoke to the producer, and he asked me to leave this site."
"Everyone: Why?"
"The Third Man: This village doesn't deserve to be immortalized in a film that the world will see... Its people abandoned it, leaving it to sand, winds, and ghosts to settle in."[41]

"The Third Man: The producer says the government asked him to leave the site because there is an oil lake."[42]

There is also great confusion—is this a desert, agricultural, touristic, artistic land, or oil-rich land? Nothing is certain, making it a maze where opinions clash, and this village is no longer the one where the characters were born. Doubt about belonging to it becomes apparent, leading to loss, dissolution, and blending between reality and imagination. The reader ultimately does mot know if Ahmad's characters are real or mere figments in a crew member's mind. If they're imaginary, what about the large car behind the dune? If the characters are real, where did they go? Why didn't the film crew see them despite standing among them? It's akin to the turmoil the Arab person lives in—a social significance.

In the play *"Mawt Al-Mu'allif"* (Death of the Author) by Sami Al-Jamaan, words play a crucial role in social and subjective significance.

"(The Storyteller recounts several real events that occurred in 1997 as follows: On the fifteenth, a Wednesday morning, several deaths occurred; Uncle Harfoush died and was buried in a cemetery outside the city, per his written will. On the same day, a grave event occurred, causing the Barada River to flow with tears and sorrow. The Levant wailed in mourning, and Damascene houses drew their curtains in grief for his absence. The esteemed author passed away after a malignant disease that spread in recent years, called cancer by the people of that time, may God protect us from its harm and devastation)."[43]

Here, the "death of the author" is physical, caused by an organic disease that infected the body and spread through its cells, not a symbolic death. In a narrative form, the storyteller recounts the impact of the author's death and the people's panic after his passing, especially his created characters, including Al-Qabbani, Hanzala, Khaddour, the Storyteller, the Town Crier, and even the King's Elephant and the Mamluk Jaber—all characters of playwright Saadallah Wannous, who died on May 17, 1997.

"The Storyteller: Between speech and speech, there's a difference. A rose in lovers' eyes isn't the same as a rose to one who doesn't see the rose at all. This is a tale combining fantasy and history, attempting interpretation. If you agree on it, that's good... If you disagree, that's even better! But may God not deprive you of pleasure in both cases. God bless you, and thank you for your presence."[44]

Through dialogue, it's revealed that the crier, the storyteller, and the audience have secretly agreed with all the characters of Sa'ad Allah Wannous's plays to gather at the cemetery without drawing attention—to perform the duty of mourning and condolence for the author. The semantic meaning here is the sender, receiver, and the media medium.

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[40] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 35)

[41] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 36)

[42] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 37)

[43] Al-Jumaan, S. (2009). Death of the Author (special ed., p. 15). Saudi Arabia.

[44] Al-Jumaan, S. (2009). *Death of the Author* (p. 52).

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Here lies the message and significance behind the theatrical text. The difference in word meanings and significances varies from one system to another, from one linguistic framework to another, from one linguistic code to another. Every work can have its own code, making its significance subjective, while another's significance becomes social, touching society and influenced by its behaviors and events.

In the play *"Muwatinun Raghma Anfih"* (A Citizen Despite Himself) by Malha Abdullah:

"Lareen: Today, I'll only offer you one glass."
"Taj: One?!"
"Lareen: Yes, because when you drink wine, you rave and talk nonsense."[45]

The link between delirium and drunkenness to a state of unconsciousness or loss of control—wine becomes a metaphor for love.

"Taj: Lareen, I drink wine because I love it. You know I'm the greatest connoisseur in our country and all neighboring lands. Thanks to it, you own more than half of this town's farms."[46]

Drinking wine here is a subjective significance of love and passion for what he creates with his hands, as well as a tool for wealth and possession.

"Lareen: But the doctor says wine makes abscesses spread in your body and fester."
"Taj: Don't listen to this doctor—your mother perished under his care." [47]

The character Taj's use of the word "*Nafaqat*" (perished), typically used for animal death, to describe his wife's death is an insult to her and women in general, reflecting his hostile or dismissive stance toward her. He doesn't hesitate to exploit the doctor staying at his house to monitor his condition, insinuating a relationship between the doctor and his daughter as blackmail to let him drink as much wine as he wants.

"Lareen: You're trying to force me this way."
"Taj: Finally, you understand! Hand me the evening bottles... Come on, spare yourself from my tongue and give me the wine."[48]

Though he knows wine will kill him, he continues drinking it as a form of passion accompanied by pleasure.

"The Doctor: Mr. Taj, I've despaired of your condition. You know your health is deteriorating, and wine accelerates the end of your life."[49]

He's responsible for his actions, akin to the tragic hero's fatalistic notion, knowing his fate and marching toward it. Despite being a former hero against occupation, he now seeks and longs for death.

"The Doctor: But this goes against my principles. Wine clouds minds, numbs humans will, and controls them. Whoever owns this wine controls those around them. You not only own it but produce it—you own the means of
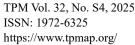
[45] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself*. In *Complete theatrical works, Vol. 1* (p. 355). Taif Literary Club.

[46] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 355).

[47] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 356).

[48] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 357).

[49] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 359).

production."
"Taj: Oh, the socialist thought dominating your mind! I don't seek to control their will but to own their money..."[50]

Here, the clash of ideas between socialist and capitalist thought—which dominates people's thinking and controls their economy—is a social and cultural significance.

The idea of locusts coming from the West is a danger from the West, where "the West" isn't just a spatial adverb but signifies all foreign countries or the West of the Arab world as a whole—the United States.

"Taj: The locusts will devour everything. They'll turn these green lands into barren deserts, kill living plants and future generations."[51]
"The Doctor: Could you tell me about the locusts?"
"Taj: The locusts come from the West to threaten this existing entity."
"The Doctor: From the West? Locusts come from the south—that's more scientifically accurate."
"Taj: But this time, they'll come from the West."[52]

Thus, locusts symbolize the danger coming from the West, merging social and subjective significance, where symbols like wine, the river, locusts, and the West carry subjective meanings within the text's structure.

"Lareen: He'll tell you the difference between us and him is that we look at the cup, not the bottle."
"Taj: The difference is in the content. You think of fullness, not emptiness."[53]

But the stranger comes to Taj's house. The word "stranger" (غريب) derives from "the West" (الغرب) linguistically and etymologically, giving a dramatic foreshadowing of Western dominance over the homeland.

"The Stranger: I won't buy the winery you own or this castle-like house."
"Taj: Buy the factory and the castle?! Where will I live and work?"
"The Stranger: In your house and factory. As long as you're alive, I'll buy them with registered contracts stipulating I won't take possession until after your death."[54]

Despite the doctor and Lareen's talk about the deal being profitable, he refuses to sell his house, memories, and factory.

"Taj: The locusts are coming, and then there'll be no future. They'll eat everything—past, present, and future."[55]

This special awareness of Taj's character is what he managed to spread in the minds of those around him, shaping the prevailing consciousness. Farmers began selling their lands to strangers in deals they saw as profitable, until strangers owned the other riverbank. But some farmers still share Taj's awareness and refuse to sell—where will their children eat if they all sell the land? This is called "possible consciousness."*

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[50] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 362).

[51] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 368).

[52] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 369).

[53] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 372).

[54] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 373).

[55] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 375).

*[Note] The terms "existing consciousness," "possible consciousness," and "worldview" were coined by Lucien Goldmann for analyzing social structure.

"As for our knowledge of the world, the distinction between the knowing subject and the world of objects or things—a distinction positivism made a fundamental methodological principle—will be replaced in the process itself. Humanity reaches true self-knowledge, where its understanding of the world aligns for the first time with the world as it truly is, and the world aligns with humanity's understanding of it."[56]

The vision of the world here is summarized in seeing the danger of locusts coming from the West and setting nets on the riverbank to catch them after failing to catch fish.

"Farmer 3: Why do they fear the locusts? They themselves uprooted trees and bulldozed the land until it became barren."[57]

The analogy between the locusts' action and what the strangers do is a metaphor for Western colonizers coming from the West. The stranger's plan to control the village and turn the entire western bank into a tourist village with development, theaters, amusement parks, and hospitals renders the other bank existing only to serve the tourist village. Doubting the awareness Taj spreads and accusing him of misleading others, their purpose is to re-colonize the land and build small houses for themselves. This is evident when Taj describes the doctor's house:

"Taj: With narrow walls and a low ceiling, forcing its inhabitants to stoop."[58]

This expresses a social significance derived from the surrounding environment, with a dimension and history drawn from non-Arab civilizations—low ceilings in emperors' palaces and low doors forcing those who pass through to bow or lower their heads.

"Taj: Didn't I tell you low ceilings make people stoop, the beginning of kneeling?! And when it ends with more stooping, they see only what's under their feet."[59]

This is a subjective reading and significance of modern architecture, rejecting the deification of civilization.

Mr. Taj refuses to sell to the stranger to deny him citizenship rights, keeping him a stranger as he came. His entire civilization is for robbing the villagers' minds, activity, and thought in exchange for a false civilization. But the reader discovers the stranger conspired against Taj.

"The Stranger: Your body will now collapse. You'll feel it decaying and wish for death, but it's a slow-acting treatment."
"Taj: What do you mean?"
"The Stranger: I had to get rid of you. You're the only obstacle in my path with your alleged locusts. But you'll fall dead, and I'll get what I want without paying."[60]

The strangers exploited the locusts, buying them from the villagers at high prices until the farmers who sold their lands bought locusts with the money from their sold lands, while the strangers closed their other bank to the farmers... Just as Taj closed his door to his doctor after losing trust in him... The doctor conspired against Taj's life, putting lethal acids in his medicine.

"Taj: The strangers among you plot against you and covet what you own. The strangers didn't take the locusts but left them inside these walls, hiding within to resume their attack in the evening... It's a trick so when you think the locust attack is over, you remove your nets, and the locusts emerge from the West to eat your trees and turn them

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[56] How, A. (2010). *Critical theory* (T. Deeb, Trans., p. 44). National Center for Translation.

[57] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 383).

[58] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 398).

[59] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 399).

[60] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 408).

into farm ruins. Did you ask yourselves why they buy live locusts? They're preparing for you. They themselves are locusts. Don't neglect your duty to catch them. Return to your farms and tend to them."[61]

In this monologue, he reveals a subjective significance the author placed within the text—the locusts symbolizing the strangers and enemies from the West.

"The Stranger: I've come to you with comfortable deals. You have no food or restaurant for strangers offering hot meals... Locust burgers, canned locusts, fresh locusts, and the grand project is mobile locusts."[62]

The playwright concludes the play by giving multiple meanings to the locusts, transcending their basic significance to become polysemous. The subjective significance the playwright played with throughout the text unravels in the end—the Western interference in the daily life of the Arab citizen in the East. Everything coming from the West is mere false civilization—food and inventions.

In the play *"Al-Matahah"* (The Maze) by Malha Abdullah, the theatrical dialogue comes in an enigmatic, coded form, carrying subjective significance. Each character speaks on a different topic despite conversing together.

"International: Spring flowers are blooming."
"Man 1: Did you bring some food?"
"International: Just yesterday, we were listening to the music of wars."
"Man 2: I remember drowsiness hit me while swimming in the water."
"Man 1: You're insane."
"International: Be precise in observation—insane or idiot?"
"Man 1: What do you want?"
"International: A cup of hot tea, please!"
"Man 2: Make it two, and add more snacks."
"Man 1: Gold prices have risen. Did you know?"
"Man 2: Of course I know. The barrel price reached sixty dollars."[63]

In the preceding dialogue, some signs lose their meanings, while others contradict their meanings, like drowsiness while swimming. Flowers aren't edible, and snacks aren't eaten with hot tea. Gold replaces oil, and vice versa. This overlap and contradiction between terms create an enigmatic or coded dialogue with subjective, not social, significance, despite relying on cultural and social terms.

"(He spins the globe and takes out a flute, playing it. A snake coiled around an olive branch emerges from the globe. The International makes the snake dance in ecstasy)."[64]

Here, "International"—a name signifying non-belonging to a specific nation—borrows the significance of the Indian snake charmer who plays for the snake to emerge and dance. But it's a snake coiled around an olive branch, a symbol of global Zionism.

(The statues exit one after another, following dancing events.)

"Everyone starts dancing, each performing their own dance. A statue moves, takes off its pants, and runs out of the room."[65]

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[61] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 427)

[62] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 430)

[63] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze*. In *Complete theatrical works, Vol. 2* (p. 359). Taif Literary Club.

[64] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (p. 359).

[65] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (pp. 360).

The statue loses its significance—from a rigid, motionless statue to a living, vibrant person dancing and running. The vendor also carries specific connotations and a unique lexicon, though he sells ice cream. It's ice cream with "melting degrees of trade towers flavor," ice cream with "gunpowder dust flavor," ice cream with "Guantanamo flavor"—expressing American nationality, where the trade towers are in New York, and Guantanamo is a prison in Cuba under American control. He changes his goods, referring to the machine gun as an airplane. The man in the text always talks about sex, ecstasy, nude dancing, rape, or harassment, referred to as "the man," not Man 1 or Man 2, who keep digging until a dancing girl emerges from the hole.

"They dig. A girl in her twenties, wearing dancing clothes, emerges. Everyone cheers. She dances, and the men dance with her."[66]

The girl feels her chin and asks, "Aren't there any real men here?"

Globalization's features appear in the overlapping of places through the characters' disconnected dialogue—characters lacking natural, flowing communication.

"International: Stand on the other side to balance the ship; Peshawar's elephants will capsize it."
"Man 1: June Shiraz is out of order."
"The Girl: Does emotional integration work?"
"The Vendor: Mustard gas with Jamaluddin Al-Afghani's hat."
"The Man: I thought my high heels were what punctured the ozone layer!"[67]

The corpse emerges from the hole headless, searching for its head to complete its research.

"The Corpse: Excuse me, have you seen my head walking out of here?"
"Man 1: From deconstruction to postmodernism."[68]

The absurdity of a headless corpse searching for its head—a corpse without a head, i.e., without thought—symbolizes every person incapable of action or thought. Thus, it's linked to contemporary philosophies like deconstruction or postmodernism—schools characterized by strangeness and contradictions.

"Men in white coats enter, each holding a whip. A large iron cage descends from the ceiling, enclosing everyone inside. One of the white coats grabs the bourgeois and plays circus-like music. Everyone performs a dance taming wild beasts, ending with the white coats withdrawing and the cage rising, while the group members stand on their seats."[69]

The descent of the prison from above to imprison the characters who converse among themselves symbolizes the silencing of tongues and the suppression of thought in this society or social structure.

"The Corpse: Thus, the world has now become flat."[70]

With these words, the corpse concludes *"The Maze"* and *"The World Is Flat"* by Thomas Friedman that is a theoretical book on globalization, seeing the world as one-dimensional, with no borders between countries—a small village without time or place.

In the last sentence, the playwright presents the corpse searching for its head, replacing the head with the globe, offering the key to the enigmatic code or jargon specific to the text, carrying subjective significance accompanied

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[66] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (pp. 363).

[67] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (pp. 373).

[68] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (pp. 381).

[69] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (pp. 385).

[70] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (pp. 391).

by social significances stemming from globalization's thought, the fragmentation of time and space, and the intertwining of civilizations and Masonic thought currents. In the end, it's all characters suffering from mental illness inside a psychiatric hospital.

Second Section: Description (Description of Place)

There is no doubt that the dramatic space forms a unique significance in every theatrical text the author carefully chooses, meticulously detailing its elements and meanings.

"Theater intrudes on these behavioral codes regarding space to the extent that they play a dynamic and vital role in organizing and creating boundaries between the spectator and the performer."[71]

In the play *"The Maze"*, Malha Abdullah presents a psychiatric hospital, only revealing it at the end of the text.

"Scene: An old museum where golden statues and antique artifacts are scattered... Dim light flows from the sole window high on the wall. The floor is carpeted with rare rugs. On one side, a desk holds a globe engraved with the world map. Air flows through the window between the statues, creating music emanating from the statues themselves, as if playing a magnificent symphony dispelling the silence and solemnity of the place. In the center, two men in their forties dig the ground near the statues, despite the precious rugs. The more they dig, the more the music flows harmoniously through the standing statues, delighting the two men."[72]

Choosing the museum—a place gathering archaeological treasures and antiques—signifies value and importance. It is a well-guarded place, symbolizing the glorification and sanctification of the past. The golden statues evoke the wealth and grandeur of the place, while the high window suggests a prison or cell. Dim light indicates weak vision and ambiguity, despite the evident wealth and terms of affluence—precious rugs, golden statues, artifacts. The globe in the place gives a sense of the universality of the issue the theatrical text presents. Digging inside the museum is strange, done despite the rugs, indicating illogicality or irrationality, linked to the flowing music—what the men do is a kind of shaping in space, while music shapes in time, signifying the dissolution of times or places as features of deconstruction or the intertwining of different arts or forms, as in postmodernism. The mixing of different materials—gold, rugs, models, pottery, wood, or metal—symbolizes gathering contradictions in one place. The playwright begins with the museum but ends with the place as a mental and psychiatric hospital— indicating that the world, with its civilizations, monuments, and artifacts, needs a return to mental and psychological clarity. It's a world where mental obsession has spread—statues flee the place one after another, artifacts and rugs disappear, and all traces of the past with its civilization vanish, leaving the present with its madness and fragmented ideas.

These ideas, expressed by Malha Abdullah in *"The Maze"*, chose the name "maze" because a maze is a game human play to escape by solving its problem. Here, the maze is the human's confusion between past and present, old and new, or clinging to traditions versus modernization ideas. The same issue and problem appear in *"Citizen Despite Himself"* by the same playwright, Malha Abdullah.

"Scene: A dim cellar in a modest rural house. Mr. Taj, an elderly man with a slightly hunched back, sits on a swivel chair, holding a long cucumber in his hand. He leans his arm on a small bar where some wine bottles are placed. Behind the bar, Lareen appears, wearing a loose white dress, her hair and chest adorned with shiny accessories. Taj holds ice tongs, tapping them on the bottles, creating different sounds."[73]

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[71] Aston, A., & Savona, G. (1996). *Theatre and Signs* (M. Meseelhi, Trans., p. 159). Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre.

[72] Abdullah, M. (2023). *The Maze* (p. 355).

[73] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 354).

The dramatic space here is a dim cellar in a modest rural house. The cellar, a place underground like a basement, is typically used to store supplies or secret activities. "Rural" denotes connection to agricultural land, distancing from urban life. The bar and wine symbolize unconsciousness or loss of will—an individual voluntarily acts to numb their mind. The playwright chose spring as the dramatic time for the event—when flowers bloom and crops flourish—hence Taj holds a cucumber, symbolizing harvest. He's good-hearted like the cucumber, which is watery inside, and straight like the cucumber despite his hunched back. He holds ice tongs to create sounds resembling music in their variety. The differing sounds are an auditory equivalent to the differing characters around him. The tongs signify the ability to choose and select.

In the play *"The Village Sheds its Cloak"* by Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, the text states:

"Scene: A side of an old village... Located in the desert… The right side suggests moving sand dunes covering part of semi-demolished mud houses... Neglected trees... Earthen ground... A yard with stones... Trash... Wood... Iron... Neglect is evident. The left side shows the village's depth…. A semi-dark side."[74]

Choosing the village—a return to rural society or the society of origins or the past—represents the first agricultural society and inception, symbolizing a return to roots and natural life. The scene evokes awe—sand swallowing the village... Moving sand symbolizes instability, whether dunes shifting with wind or sand waves like a sea beneath the characters... Neglected trees suggest lifelessness. The village in the desert implies it's an oasis, but a dead one with no life, making it desolate like ruins inhabited by ghosts and jinn—houses demolished, trees neglected, the village dark—outside the framework of enlightenment and knowledge, living in the darkness of intellectual ignorance.

The general significance of the scene is that the village's change, erasure, and extinction by wind and sand movement—rapid change—make the village lose its roots, reflecting on origins and constants from which the individual came.

In *"State of Anxiety"* by Fahd Raddah Al-Harthy, the dramatic space is an empty area with only a white cloth and some hanging ropes tying the backstage to the acting area, as if the characters move like marionettes or are controlled by other forces.

"Scene: The background is a white space the director estimates as suitable for the theater's shape. Preferably, the white is cloth, one and a half meters high, not covering the entire backdrop. The remaining space is entirely empty, except for ropes hanging from the top of the stage."[75]

The writer is driven by his personal inclinations to shape the visual imagery, conceptualizing the Mise-en-scène or planning the theatrical movement, thereby preempting the vision and interpretation of whoever undertakes the play's direction. They also impose his own perspective on the visual representation of the theatrical text by envisioning the scenery and its execution—as outlined in their theatrical directives:

"A group of actors enters from both sides of the stage, accompanied by a suitable effect. The bodies form their way toward the center, freezing briefly upon arrival, then reforming and descending to pick up the ropes, beginning to pull their chairs. The chairs roll until reaching the actors, then move away amid a series of visual formations... The scene returns to form several group photographic shots of the cast."[76]

From the above, it's clear there's no independent description of the scene or dramatic space, separate from the director/author's mind, making the text lose one of its fundamental significances as a place for events.

In the play *"Night of Loneliness"*, Abbas Al-Hayek presents the dramatic space in a summarized form.

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[74] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 12).

[75] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 258).

[76] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 258).

"Scene: A spotlight focuses on Al-Sayyid sitting on a chair, holding his cigar, a cloud of smoke rising above his head. On the ground, the servant lies covered with a white sheet."[77]

From the scene's description, Al-Sayyid sits on a chair—the chair symbolizing elevated status over those sitting on the ground. The chair could be a seat of power, implying control and dominance. He smokes a cigar, which carries multiple meanings—some authoritative, others not—its smoke rising above his head, while the servant's corpse lies covered on the ground, symbolizing futility. The cigar signifies extinction and erosion, smoke implies coma or cloudiness obscuring vision, and smoke ends in dissipation. The covered corpse signifies its end or death—all under a spotlight, emphasizing this image. These symbols carry social or emblematic meanings.

As we have seen, authors' use of dramatic space and its symbolism and significance varies. Still, each dramatic space gives subjective significance within each text as a structural and dramatic unit, separate from others, regardless of the general significance of the scene's terms.

Third Section: Narration
"Philosophers of history have shown that narration is not merely an impressionistic substitute for reliable statistics but a method of understanding the past with its logical basis." Narration has four aspects: "Descriptive narration, Summarized narration, Performative narration, and Embodied narration."[78]
Descriptive narration relies on stimulating imagination by envisioning an image through the narrator's description or describing certain expressions, reactions, or a theatrical scene within stage directions or additional text.
Summarized narration is when the narrator summarizes actions, as in popular biographies, for example.
Performative narration concerns the external lines of past action from the narrator's perspective, placing the action in the focus of possibility through the awareness of a contemporary, astonished recipient, for whom a single meaning multiplies.

Embodied narration attends to the internal details of action, interacting with the immediate temporal and spatial context and motives based on the unity of necessity and possibility for the recipient. Perhaps embodied narration is closest to this type of drama. However, narration in the selected models revolves around narrating that suffering and ruminating on the self-emanating from the character's depths—"internal action."

This is what we find, for example, in *"Night of Loneliness"* by Abbas Al-Hayek, represented in the characters of "Al-Sayyid and the Servant," where external action recedes. Each presents a monologue closer to monodrama because practicing external action in monodrama makes it more powerful. The characters of Al-Sayyid and the Servant, for instance, perform acting within acting—an act of reminiscing.

"Al-Sayyid: (Stands center stage, reminiscing) I remember yesterday you mocked your hunched back, mocked the white hair filling your black face. (Imitates the servant, bending as he did) Do you see, my master, how my face has become? Two colors, no third—black and white. Even my beard has lost all its blackness... Sometimes I look at my face, ravaged by wrinkles, and find no escape from my strange appearance except laughter. (Returns to his original character) And you look at me with glances that betray the weight of age."[79] This is in the first part of the text whereas in the second part, there's performative narration.

"The Servant: Since I was a child, I've dreamed of sitting like you on this couch or the chair by the balcony, waiting for a cup of tea at seven in the evening, just like you... I wish this moment you'd bring me the cup of tea, and I'd see in you my defeat—the defeat of a wretched slave as you see me, a slave, not a servant, bound by the curse of

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[77] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 10).

[78] Wallace, M. (1998). *Modern Narrative Theory* (H. Jasim, Trans.). National Center for Translation. *(Introduction)*

[79] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 11).

his slavery! (Finds a cigarette box nearby, takes a cigarette, and lights it, coughing again) Even the cigarette I so longed to try like you, you never allowed me. How could a wretched slave smoke like the masters?!"[80]

In the play *"Citizen Despite Himself"*, we find descriptive narration in Taj's dialogue about his daughter climbing the mountain and her dress tearing.

"Taj: Here she is climbing the hill. Listen! Damn these stones... The stones rolled under her feet until her dress tore... Here she stands at the door adjusting her clothes... Listen, her hair tie fell... Listen, she's combing those silky strands with her hands."
"The Doctor: Beautiful imagination!"
"Taj: Not imagination. Her hair is taut like the strings of a qanun. When her fingers play between its strands, I hear music... Please open the door for her."[81]

Lareen describes this state as transparency unique to the citizen. Or in *"Jarrah bin Sati"* by Sami Al-Jamaan, where he directs the reader to internal reactions or expressions within the character.

"Jarrah, in his forties, suffers from psychological wear and tear and people's avoidance. He feels objectified because he holds precious things he cannot possess."[82]

In the play *"Al-Ikleel"* (The Crown) by Shadi Ashour, the author says in stage directions:

"They push toward him clothes soaked in blood as if they're the ticket price."[83]

This descriptive narration lies in the narrative sentence ("as if they're the ticket price"), containing the author's internal expression, unseen by the theatrical audience but only by the reader. The transition between outside and inside the carriage blends external and internal spaces within the frame, resembling cinematic technique in transition—also a technique of descriptive narration. Also, in the same play, the shrouding scene they perform to faint and wake up, each feeling the other's face (each takes a newspaper to read the news).

In the play *"Death of the Author"* by Sami Al-Jamaan, the storyteller is used as an external voice at the text's beginning: *"Then came the year 1997, in which many events occurred."*[84] Using the storyteller here as one of the phenomena in Arab theater relies on narration—he tells or narrates stories, leaving the audience's imagination to complete the mental image, like the folk narrator with the Rababa in folk biographies or the "sanduk al-dunya" (world box) performer—he also mimics and narrates events, describing how the audience received the news of the author's death and his theatrical characters.

Another use of narration is in the author's directions in the second scene at the cemetery wall, a year after the author's death. *"(With some caution, the following scene occurs at the cemetery wall between the Crier, the Audience, and the Storyteller)."*[85]

The phrase "with some caution" describes the characters' internal expression or the scene's general mood. The three parties of the relationship are chosen: the Storyteller, the Crier, and the Audience—the performer, the recipient, and the media medium.

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[80] Al-Hayek, A. (2025). *The Night of Loneliness* (p. 24).

[81] Abdullah, M. (2023). *Citizen Despite Himself* (p. 366).

[82] Al-Jumaan, S. (2003). *Jarrah bin Sati* (p. 19).

[83] Ashour, S. (n.d.). *The Crown* (p. 21).

[84] Al-Jumaan, S. (2009). *Death of the Author* (p. 14).

[85] Al-Jumaan, S. (2009). *Death of the Author* (p. 18).

The same use of describing feelings and reactions within characters appears in the third scene. The group around the author's grave appears sad, singing mournful songs in his lament until the policeman hears and comes to arrest them for breaking the law, gathering and weeping in cemeteries. While everyone fears the policeman, Hanzala recognizes him—they'd met before in the play *"Hanzala"*, where the policeman took a bribe from Hanzala to smuggle him. But now he's repented and accuses the group of a charge. The theft and trafficking of corpses, the deliberate burial of a murdered individual with premeditation, or the planning of a criminal act in this isolated location—all raise serious concerns, including the possibility of terrorism. He proceeds with the arrests solely as part of his duty; the investigation itself does not fall within his responsibilities.

Sami Al-Jamaan uses narration through a character's monologue to summarize events, times, or transitions in time and place, as in Al-Qabbani's speech. *"Al-Qabbani: When Sheikh Saeed heard of my departure from the text to attend our master the author's funeral... he doubted my going. He even declared in his religious circle that I'd resolved to a new conspiracy—perhaps leaving to form a new theatrical troupe like before, spreading promiscuity, debauchery, and immorality among people. Al-Ghabra deluded himself with this, turning the world upside down. I walked Damascus's alleys while boys excelled in stoning me with all kinds of rocks, shoes, and filth. I couldn't escape except with the help of Mahmoud, Anwar, Abdel Rahim, and other colleagues in the text. May God forgive you, Sheikh Saeed... For your deed that ruined my life, slaughtered my project, and forced me out of the city of the text, heartbroken... will slaughtered."*[86]

In *"State of Anxiety"* by Fahd Raddah Al-Harthy, narration appears in the text's introduction, where the author reveals the anxiety plaguing people in this era. *"People in our current era live in a whirlwind of overlaps between various things. Many details are lost, and others emerge, making distances so close they stick together, yet so far apart as the meeting of opposites."*[87]

The subjective significance emerges from the author's perception of globalization's concept and the contradictions between close things, causing anxiety. Undoubtedly, the dissolution of time, erosion of distances, and intertwining of times and places have made spatiotemporal states replace natural times and places.

To conclude, narration, with its multiple levels and types, is often used in novels. In theater, however, narration is limited unless dramatic dialogue is more effective. Playwrights resort to narration only out of artistic necessity, which is the approach of contemporary Saudi playwrights.

Fourth Section: Intertextuality

"The idea of intertextuality is fundamentally linked to postmodern theorists. The term intertextuality refers to the diverse connections in form and content that link a given text to other texts. According to this idea, every text exists through its relationship to other texts, though it's rare to acknowledge what a text owes to others. Generally, texts owe more to other texts than to their actual authors or creators."[88]

Through our presentation of selected Saudi theatrical works, this term becomes evident in some written plays. In *"Jarrah bin Sati"* by Sami Al-Jamaan, there is intertextuality with the play *"The Darkness"* by J. L. Galloway in choosing the dramatic space—the sea, the harbor, and the lighthouse. Both plays depict human adaptability to darkness and solitude, away from life's pleasures. Each author is a lighthouse illuminating and offering knowledge and awareness to a society suffering from darkness or loss—whether Irish society in Galloway's work or Saudi society in Al-Jamaan's. The characters resist intense darkness at night by lighting gas lamps.

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[86] Al-Jumaan, S. (2009). *Death of the Author* (p. 23).

[87] Al-Harthy, F. R. (2009). *State of Anxiety* (p. 257).

[88] Chandler, D. (2002). *Dictionary of key terms in semiotics* (p. 94).

Both plays, as we see, portray lighthouse or harbor workers in an era where modern communication tools weren't widespread. Thus, the two workers can't communicate with anyone while in the lighthouse, nor do they know precisely when another ship might come to rescue them, as in *"The Darkness"*, or the ship arriving at the harbor to bring life to it in *"Jarrah bin Sati."* The characters in both plays are overcome by sad feelings for the past, which they recall and long for.

Cole in the play *"The Darkness"* wants to smash all the lighthouse lamps, plunging the place into darkness, then throw himself into the air to swim in the darkness, hoping to escape it. He cannot stay in this place and wants Morgan accused of throwing him into the sea to be hanged and die after him.

The author intended to say at the play's end: Those living in darkness are no different from the dead—death is another darkness one enters, but it's a darkness without the harshness Morgan suffered with his sensitive feelings in this isolated place, waiting. Similarly, Jarrah bin Sati sits in this harbor for fifty years, waiting for his wedding joy, hiding his bride's wedding dress in his box, taking it out to look at and putting it back. The lighthouse or harbor for both authors is a place where others gather—in *"The Darkness"*, two workers wait to replace each other, while in *"Jarrah bin Sati"*, characters covet his place, colonizing it, blocking it from the sea, and seizing his land and place. The harbor is on land, while the lighthouse extends on a peninsula into the sea or is on an isolated island—this is an agreement on isolation between the two authors—isolation of place or psychological isolation.

The characters in both texts are linked to the sea—love and hate, fear and desire. The sea in both cases evokes anticipation and caution, fear of the unknown. In Abbas Al-Hayek's *"Night of Loneliness"*, there's intertextuality with *"A Harsh Sermon Against a Seated Man"* by Gabriel García Márquez, a monodrama where a wife delivers a harsh sermon to her husband's corpse seated on a chair before her. In *"Night of Loneliness"*, Al-Sayyid delivers a long sermon to the servant's corpse lying beside his chair on a lonely night. Abbas Al-Hayek employed monodrama technique[89] in writing—whether in the play's first or second part. The first part presents a monodrama for Al-Sayyid's character, and the second for the Servant's character, eliminating the dialogue element. Both characters reminisce about their memories with the other—Al-Sayyid or the Servant—like the wife in Márquez's work. In *"Al-Ikleel"* by Shadi Ashour, there's intertextuality between the Third Man's character and the gravedigger in *"Hamlet"* by William Shakespeare.

"The Third: Then why did our shoes commit suicide, leaving us barefoot? (Turns the shoes upside down, searching) I know shoes. (Takes one) This is a scholar's shoe, mixed with gunpowder's smell, so writers refused to drink wine from his cup... (Takes another) This is a spy's shoe—its stench foul, but fingerprints erased from its surface, leaving a prostitute's prints."[90]

Here, the influence of *"Hamlet"* is evident—the gravedigger digging and unearthing skulls and speaking about them. But here, the author replaces them with shoes. If skulls carried the brain holding thought, shoes carry the entire body and denote social status—elevation above the ground, protecting feet from stumbling and dirt. Thus, those coming to death remove their shoes, losing their status and protection.

In *"The Village Sheds Its Cloak"* by Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, there is also intertextuality. The intertextuality here is in naming all characters Ahmad (the First, the Second, the Third), similar to *"The Earthly Comedy"* by Yusuf Idris (Muhammad the First, the Second, the Third). There's also intertextuality with the ghost scene in *"Hamlet"* (Shakespeare) in not discerning whether it's a ghost or reality.

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[89] *Monodrama*, from a linguistic perspective, means a single act, performance, or artistic deed, whether performed by one or multiple people. Webster's Dictionary (88th ed., 1994). Lebanon Library. "Monodrama is designed to be performed by a single actor. Examples include *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1961) by Samuel Beckett. The term may also refer to a dramatization of the inner workings of the mind, or a solo musical drama." *(See: Encyclopaedia Britannica).*

[90] Ashour, S. (n.d.). *The Crown* (p. 39).

"Ahmad the Second: Let's return to the car. We've started seeing ghosts."
"Ahmad the First: Maybe not a ghost, but resembling one."
"Ahmad the Third: You mean... what we see now resembles Father?!"[91]

This text also intertexts with *"Endgame"* by Samuel Beckett, where characters sink into the sand in *"The Village Sheds Its Cloak."*

In *"Death of the Author"*, Sami Al-Jamaan summons Wannous's characters to build drama around the author's death, intertexting with *"Six Characters in Search of an Author"* by Pirandello. *"The idea of intertextuality raises many issues about textual boundaries—where does a text begin and end?"*[92]

CONCLUSION

Saudi playwrights have successfully employed language to convey nuanced significance based on linguistic formation in their plays. Society's influence is evident in Saudi playwrights' works as social significances addressing issues like women's empowerment in the workforce, gender mixing, employment, and others.

Saudi playwrights critique certain ideas and ideologies clashing over fifty years in the Kingdom, showing how each faction tried to impose its dominance and control over Saudi citizens' social life. Saudi playwrights resorted to estrangement or distancing in the philosophical sense to escape political censorship on creativity. Themes took on a Western character, using estrangement as a cloak to escape political and social reality. Some turned to fantasy or earlier playwrights of different nationalities. Playwrights focused on subjective significance in some works, making their individuality apparent. Other works were marked by subjective semantic significance, developing their own systems and codes.

Attention to dramatic space as stage directions in describing theatrical scenes diminished due to the overlapping role of author-directors, making texts lack dramatic independence and becoming tied to their writer-directors. Most playwrights flattened characters, avoiding embodiment, sometimes resorting to stereotypes or stock characters to evade sculpting and carving characters, possibly due to religious beliefs rejecting embodiment. The theme of social isolation was strongly present in selected Saudi theatrical works—whether in lost communication ability, gender segregation, or constant fear of the other as unknown or ambiguous.

These were the most prominent results of this brief research. It's worth noting that Saudi theatrical discourse needs deeper and broader studies examining the mutual relationship and influence between theatrical texts and society, as well as the impact of experimentation in the postmodern era on the somewhat fragmented identity of Saudi theatrical discourse.

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[91] Al-Suqaabi, A. (2016). *The Village Sheds its Cloak* (p. 18.).

[92] Chandler, D. (n.d.). *Muʿjam al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-Asāsiyya fī ʿIlm al-ʿAlāmāt: al-Sīmiyūṭīqā* [*Dictionary of Basic Terms in Semiotics*] (p. 94).

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