

Junun: Poetics in the Discourse of Protest and Love

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Protest and Love by Rafika Zahr

ouni Arab Stages,

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nter Publications

When we think about the script of Fadhel Jaibi and Jalila Baccar's *Junun*, we have the impression that understanding the text based on what comes from the mouths of the actors provides nothing more than merely categorized chunks of narration and packed dialogues that represent stage directions necessary for the evolution of the performance. The play script works as if it were nothing more than a guide to the actors and director, when dialogue encourages functional images and scenic translation, and in which mere words on paper, when spoken, create their own *raison d'être* ... We are inclined toward this impression and we almost take it for granted that the play script, at least in so far as the authors' theatrical experience is concerned, is no more than that dramatic element related to what the creative adventure requires in its final weeks of labor, until it stands before us in its visual glory and with expressive energy.

However, this blind acceptance that the theatrical text is subordinate to the stage production was removed for the first time when the play *Familia* was published as an independent play script, renovating the theatrical work, enfolding the path of a journey toward a possible reading, pushing critical thinking ahead in order to reconsider our definition of the theatrical text, and its suggestive and interpretative function outside the traditional understanding of conventional theatrical writing in its "sacred coffins."

When such play scripts are presented to the public after going through the process of a stage creation, they confirm a dialectic new relationship that goes beyond the precedence of text over performance, or the opposite. This opens a new way in search of a new audience, when both the reader and the viewer unite and when the theatrical text forms in this context a common disparity, awaiting a new creative approach.

However, with the appearance of the script of *Junun* in its entirety, the adventure becomes more daring and is now equal to the directing experience of Jaïbi, which breaks the horizons of our expectations blazing out a new trail in order to raise questions with more fervor that can further test our undisputed ideas about the play and the process of stage interpretation.

The emergence of this play script fits in the strategy that Familia Theater Troupe wants pursue, to affirm the dynamics of the theatrical act outside the objective time of the performance history, its restricted conditions, and outside the slippery and ephemeral nature of the performance. The play script also reveals something of the concerns of the playwright Jalila Baccar, whose infinite compassion makes her this time

express how enduring research remains a preparation that is precedent to and not contingent on stereotypical concerns, and whose inquiring conscience raises questions of which do not end but continually restart in the form of “a generative” exercise fraught with visions and new poetic imagery. We have already sensed this when Jalila wrote the text *al-Bahth an Ayda (In Search of Aida)*, a unique mono-drama that demonstrate an eloquent dramatic style despite its concise and fluent, yet challenging subject... And because Jalila Baccar belongs to a dramatic school that does not repeat itself and is not devoted to a single and stereotypical discourse, her writing of *Junun* is different and surprising. She is able to combine multiple voices in the same structure and offer an elegant alternation and diversification in the dramatic presentation between the narrative and the poetic, in part because this dramatic text comes out of adaptation of another previous text. This makes it occupy a liminal position between a medical report at one level, and diary writing and a narrative story at another. This text is based on the *Diary of Discourse on Schizophrenia: Account of Psychoanalysis Without Sofa*, written by Néjia Zemni and published in France by Renaud-Bray in 1999.

In light of this challenging project that began with reading as struggle of the self and, then, as an act of controversial and dialectical participation with the world of “the other,” Baccar not only undertook the adaptation of another text, but she also took up the challenge of remaining within the circle of “the interpretation of the interpretation.” This guaranteed for *Junun* its constructive fervor and high dramatic poetics emanating from the writer’s emotional background and from her mature style, resulting from her artistic career and experience built up from the “New Theater” to “Familia.” Also, because Jalila—the actress and playwright—herself belongs to a specific generation; the generation of “the last Utopian circles,” this has stimulated her desire to depart from the text of Néjia Zemni who belongs to the same generation. Baccar is not unaware of the requirements of transforming an original and stable narrative text into a living dramatic text, necessitating strategies to make it selective and concise understood only by those who know about the theatre and its requirements, and are familiar with the language of theatre shows based on the use of theatrical signs and the rhetoric of performance. The efforts of the writer of *Junun* therefore were diverse and considerable in terms of the size and extent of all the obstacles—both those located in the original text and in the process of deciding what theatricalization required in order to express what was substantial to the story and leave out what was secondary, or to be considered as a digression from the nature of dramatic discourse and its requirements.

The following brief passage, from the Prologue to the play, provides a sample of how the narrative text has been converted into theatrical action and a powerful stage language:

The red curtain is lifted
Eight actors stand
One next to the other
In between them stand two microphones
After sometime
The actors begin moving
Their posture changes
Each of them embodies a character
Actress 1 advances and faces each of them
Relationships are established
Develop
They spread apart

Exit

Only She ... and N?n

I Want to Kill

Each actor stands in front of a microphone

She: How are you doing today

N?n: I want to kill

She: Who?

N?n: I grab a woman

Chop her head

Her hands

Her legs

cut down her belly

Empty the content of her stomach

Put out her extracts

Chop her off in pieces

Set her on fire

Take the ash

And hide it at home it under a tile

And feel relieved

***Rafika Zahrouni** is a freelance researcher and teacher located in Hammamet, Tunisia. Dr. Zahrouni received her B.A. in English Language and Literature from the faculty of letters and humanities in Sousse, Tunisia in 1999. She moved to the United States in 2005 to serve as a Fulbright Teaching Assistant in Arabic at Alfred University in New York. In 2008, she obtained her M.A. in French from Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri. She also achieved her doctorate in comparative literature at Washington. Most recently, she served as an Arabic language and culture instructor at the University of Colorado Boulder. In addition to her interest in teaching, Dr. Zahrouni is a scholar of contemporary Tunisian theatre, specializing in the examination and translation of the leading Tunisian company of Jalila Baccar and Fadhel Jaïbi, Familia.*

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