

An Examination of Kuwaiti Theatre

Shahd Alshammari

Abstract

Kuwait is one of the most prospering countries in the Middle East. Much research has been conducted on its cultural scene. This paper considers its pioneering playwrights, their works, and their involvement in depicting Kuwaiti society. Close attention will be paid to the theatre's origins and advancements through analyzing a selection of important plays.

Kuwaiti theatrical origins began in 1933, when the Kuwaiti pioneer Abdulaziz Al-Rasheed wrote and directed the first play in the Gulf on the stage. Roughly speaking, there are two stages of the development of Kuwaiti theatre, the improvisation and experimentation phase. and the founding of the National Theatre in the early 1960s. Several theatre groups were established in the 1960's: including the Public Theater Group (1957), the Arab Theater Group (1961), the Arabian Gulf Theater Group (1963) and the Kuwaiti Theater Group (1964). These groups were the local effort of Kuwaiti playwrights who were influenced by the theatre movement in Egypt. This paper discusses the origins and productions of Kuwaiti theatre and their influence on society. A few texts will be examined to portray the shifting attitudes towards social norms, women, and minorities ([Arab Theatre Institute](#)).

The Arab Theatre Group was established in 1963 and consisted of Kuwaiti Saqr Al-Rushood (Kuwaiti director) and Abulaziz Al-Surayyi (Kuwaiti playwright) worked together to set up this local group. They recruited many Kuwaiti actors and actresses and began working on socializing the theatre and its role in influencing society. Women were included in the group, such as Hayfa Adel ([2018](#)), who played an important role in a few of Abulaziz Al-Surayyi's plays. This helped the audience begin to accept the inclusion of women onstage. With the rapid urbanization of Kuwait came a plethora of changes that affected the socioeconomic sphere and the private and public domain. Women's representation on stage began to shift in the 1970's with the inclusion of Arab and Kuwaiti actresses.

Important names include Zaki Talimat, the Egyptian director and writer who arrived to Kuwait in the 1960's to help with setting up the theatre, Saqr Al-Rashoud, Kuwaiti director who produced excellent plays throughout his career, Abdulaziz Al-Surayyi, who continues to write today, his latest being an adaption of Arthur Miller's *The Price*, and Awatif al-Badr, who began the move into Children's theatre. All of these names will be considered in terms of their literary merit and influence on the rise of Kuwaiti theatre culturally and historically.

Many plays written by Abulaziz Al-Surayyi include an image of the lost Kuwaiti hero, a man who is on a mission of self-discovery. Even today, when discussing the potential of Kuwaiti youth, Al-Surayyi's play 'Da'a al-Dik' (1971) is mentioned to allude to 'lost youth' ([Al-Bassam, 2011, Alqabas news](#)). Lost youth are products of a hybrid culture that does not accommodate their presence nor does it allow them room to explore their creative potential.

To conclude, many high-quality Kuwaiti plays and fiction remain unexplored. Perhaps it is time to exert some anthological effort towards emancipating such narrative voices.

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