



## Lighting the Torch of the Carnavalesque Amid the Heart of the Existential Darkness: The Politics in *al-Farafir* by Yusuf Idris

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### Abstract:

This paper aims at exploring the politics of the carnivalesque in Yusuf Idris's satirical play *al-Farafir* through the lens of the Carnavalesque concept propounded by Michael Bakhtin. It attempts to prove that the carnivalesque, besides being a terrain in which laughter is stimulated, is a serious weapon for launching satirical attacks on man's follies, venal tendencies and social institutions, a tool of subverting and defying abusive authority, conventional attitudes and disseminated ideologies, and a fertile terrain for black humor. In his black humorous, darkly farcical, satirical, existential and politically charged play *al-Farafir*, Idris presents us, in a black humorous vein and a comic guise, with a story about the relation between a Master ("Al Sayed" in Arabic) and his skinny, strange-looking servant dressed in a clownish suit (Farfoor) and the eternal struggle between life and death. The play highlights the discursive practices that a common Egyptian man (represented in the play as a servant, a slave, or Farfoor) faces in a dictatorial regime that aims at constructing a stereotypical subjugated identity of the commoners while supporting the power of the powerful and the exploiter, showing how power practices infiltrate society to construct discursive identities.

**Key words:** Idris, *al-Farafir*, Carnavalesque, Bakhtin

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This paper aims at exploring the politics of the carnivalesque in Yusuf Idris's satirical play *al-Farafir* through the lens of the Carnavalesque concept propounded by Michael Bakhtin. It attempts to prove that the carnivalesque, besides being a terrain in which laughter is stimulated, is a serious weapon for launching satirical attacks on man's follies, venal tendencies and social institutions, a tool of subverting and defying abusive authority, conventional attitudes and disseminated ideologies, and a fertile terrain for black humor. In his black humorous, darkly farcical, satirical, existential and politically charged play *al-Farafir*, Idris presents us, in a black humorous vein and a comic guise, with a story about the relation between a Master ("Al Sayed" in Arabic) and his skinny, strange-looking servant dressed in a clownish suit (Farfoor) and the eternal struggle between life and death. Although the rudimentary lines of the story could be found in some other literatures, it is a true Egyptian story that is meticulously committed to the Egyptian world of reality, integral to Egypt's unsettled political, social and cultural climate during the Sixties. In *al-Farafir*, as M. M. Badawi remarks, Idris, combining social and political criticism, is primarily interested in *homo politicus*; man is reduced merely to his political role, thereby becoming a caricature" (9).

### **Introduction**

In "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies", the cultural studies critic Tony Bennett elucidates the potentially political and subversive function of literature in raising consciousness in the audience or the reader by its power of resisting, dismantling and parodying the false ideologies disseminated by officialdom or the official culture along with its ideological institutions (i.e. ISAs "Ideological State Apparatuses", as the Marxist and Cultural critic Louis Althusser calls them) like the Church, the educational system and media:

The key instrument of politics here is criticism and its primary object is to modify the relationship between, for example, text and reader in such a way as to allow the texts in question to serve as the means for a politically transformative practice of the self into which the reader is inducted. . . . They might lead from the delusions of ideology to true consciousness and hence revolution . . . (24)

Egyptian drama and theatre had its superb age between the fifties and the early seventies; the government sustained dramatic works that helped address the socio-political circumstances of the Egyptian people before the Free Officers Revolution and the changes that occurred after it. The Egyptian social drama fell into three categories though this division is not absolute. The first category of dramatists tended to depict the socio-political climate in Egypt before 1952 and the causes that led the 1952 Revolution to erupt. The second category addressed the Revolution itself, reassessing it when it diverged from its promised goals. The third category dealt with other political and non-political social issues such as housing, military conscription, overcrowded flats, renting, overcrowded streets, the freedom of women, etc. To this last group belonged the Egyptian dramatist, Yusuf Idris, whose drama is both social and political.

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(\* ) The researcher has already read the play in its original Arabic version published by Hindawy Press in 2017 but depended here on the play's translation by Farouk Abdel Wahab that is included in *Modern Egyptian Drama: An Anthology*. Bakhtin's books *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World* are abbreviated in this study as *PDP* and *RHW* respectively

Idris is one of the most prolific Egyptian playwrights who wrote during the Sixties (the era of Nasserism). His name is mentioned along with his contemporaries like No'man Ashour, Saad Eldeen Wahba, Alfred Farag, Ali Salem, Salah Abdel Saboor, Abdel-Rahman El-Sharkawy, Mikhael Roman, Mahmoud Diab and Naguib Soroor. Egyptian critics take Idris to task for accentuating the evil side in his plays. Some critics tended to focus on amorality and absurdity in his plays, claiming that there is no serious purpose behind his plays. With reference to Idris's *al-Farafir*,

Egyptian critics take Idris to task for stressing the evil side in his plays. They say that Idris presents an amoral world in which there are no human values. It is absurd to talk about good or truth for the search for these qualities may lead one to self-destruction, as is the case of the doctor. Evil becomes the power dominating the world, and man has to accept it as such. It is a corrupt world in Farfur (servant) remains Farfúr, and truth loses any definitive meaning. (Gemei'an 172)

Idris condemned for the prevalence of vice, amorality and grotesque wicked created characters in his plays. However, to borrow, Bigsby's words in his defense of Orton's amoral, vicious and anarchic plays, one could say that "like Beckett's, Idris's theatre enforces "a sense of significant absence" of morality (moral vacuum) and this act of presenting amorality is in itself highly moral (17). Closely related to this is the primary purpose of satire. Abrams defines satire as:

[T]he literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. It differs from comic in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire 'derides'; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. (187)

The Egyptian playwrights of the sixties were interested in depicting the socio-political and economic scene of the Egyptian society during this paradoxical period of euphoria and political persecution. Censorship and political punishment, whether in the form of imprisonment or threat, played their role during the reign of Nasser; therefore those writers tended to depend much more on allusions, symbols, metaphors, epigrams and wit as alternative outlets to express themselves, their agonies, to criticize the hegemonic tyranny of Nasser's regime and to address other socio-political problems the Egyptian society faced during such a period. In this regard, Margret Litvin points out that the Sixties generation writers, feeling crippled by autocracy, were forced in a way or another to resort to indirectness or symbolism in their works to avoid confrontation and clash with authority; otherwise harsh consequences like virtual exile or incarceration in concentration camps would be their undesirable fate:

By the 1960s, with many leftists in prison and the regime showing increasing intolerance of dissent, playwrights and directors began to code their political suggestions in more subtle ways. In performance, actors conveyed political messages by inserting ab-libbed phrases or by directing certain lines or genres to the president's box. (Some plays worked on both literal and allegorical levels). In scripts, allegory replaced, or channeled the concerns of social realism. (48)

### **1.The Bakhtinian Carnavalesque**

The logic of the carnival was the world turned upside-down, the degradation of the sacred and grave, and the comic elevation of the lowly, the plebian and the uncouth. This style of grotesque combines a diversity of different elements to liberate viewers from the predominant view of the world, from established truths, redundant clichés, the conservative, and the commonplace (Bakhtin, *RHW* 5- 12). The carnival spirit offers the opportunity to enter a new order. It is liberating in the sense that it is a triumph over fear and artificial, official categories and rubrics. In other words, the carnivalesque has a political dimension in that the carnival tends to defy all what is official or taken for granted and remained unquestioned for years by the official culture that has for so long bred fear in the people through piety and

mysticism. The carnival plays with, parodies and mocks the language of the church, the officials and the magistrates. As such, parody, travesty and burlesque are main tools employed in the carnivalesque.

The carnivalesque laughter “presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of the power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts”, remarks Bakhtin (*RHW* 92). People's laughter, unlike the official seriousness that has been based on giving commandments and prohibitions and ordering humility and submission, creates a second realm in which people freely communicate, abuse and friendly beat each other. These acts of free communication, abuse and beating bring a new reality that is radically different from all what is officially consolidated. That is to say, the official truth is mocked by bringing a new truth during the Carnivalesque square.

People's laughter, being an enemy to official seriousness, brings truths in the form of clowning, abusing and eradicating barriers or hierarchies among the people. Therefore, for Bakhtin, laughter is a tool of liberation from ideology, distorted facts, or what is officially restrictive and repressive by giving a voice to all people and by liquidating all distinctions:

Laughter is essentially not an external but an interior form of truth; it cannot be transformed into seriousness without destroying and distorting the very contents of the truth which it unveils. . . . Laughter showed the world anew in its gayest and most sober aspects. . . . That is why laughter could never become an instrument to oppress and blind the people. It always remained a free weapon in their hands. (Bakhtin, *RHW* 94)

While the official feasts sponsored by the state bred fear of nature and the cosmos, the Carnivalesque subdues cosmic fear by laughter: "Cosmic terror is the heritage of man's ancient impotence in the presence of nature. Folk culture did not know this fear and overcome it through laughter, through lending a bodily substance to nature and the cosmos. . . . Official culture, often used and even cultivated this fear in order to humiliate and oppress man" (*RHW* 336).

For Bakhtin, the carnival is the location of exercising freedom without censors: it is “the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play acted form, a new mode of interrelating between individuals, counter-posed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life” (*PDP* 251). Laughter essentially liberates the individual “not only from external censorship but first of all from the great internal censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power” (*RHW* 94). Laughter, due to its unofficial nature, is a tool to create individual and collective consciousness, unveiling masked truths and false ideologies that are disseminated to increase the power of the powerful and the subjugation of the powerless: “laughter could never become an instrument to oppress and blind the people. It always remained a weapon in their hands” (*RHW* 94). It has “a deep philosophical meaning” and “one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man” (*RHW* 66). Shedding light on its importance as a serious tool of raising consciousness, Bakhtin remarks that laughter “boldly unveiled the truth about both [fear inspired by the mystery of the world and by power]. It resisted praise, flattery, hypocrisy” (*RHW* 92).

Carnival is a street theatre, a theater without footlights, enacted in the out-of- doors, with profanities commonly used in the toppling of all that is held consecrated. Bakhtin states: "Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators" (*PDP* 122). The basic principle of the carnival is the blurring of distances; the boundaries between performers and audience are effaced. Footlights "would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance" (*RHW* 7). Carnival is not a theatrical performance that has actors performing specific roles. Clowns and fools "were not actors playing their parts on a stage . . . but remained fools and clowns always and everywhere" (*RHW* 8). The carnival participant is both actor and spectator, losing his individuality .

Bakhtin specifies four categories of carnival. First, distance between others is suspended. Hierarchical barriers dissolve as "free and familiar contact among people" dominates. Bakhtin illustrates that carnival is a suspension of all that is consecrated by tradition: a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (*RHW* 10). Second, eccentricity reigns. The latent sides of human nature express themselves in "concretely sensuous" form. Third, "*carnivalistic mesalliances*" abound. Carnival weds the "sacred with the profane," the "lofty with the low," the "great with the insignificant," and the 'wise with the stupid" (*PDP* 123). Fourth is the category of profanation. All these categories can be found in the marketplace atmosphere "in which the exalted and the lowly, the sacred and the profane are leveled and are drawn into the same dance", as Bakhtin explains (*RHW* 160). It is noteworthy to point out that the marketplace played a central role in the development of the carnival.

In her work on the 'female grotesque', Mary Russo emphasizes the rebellious and the revolutionary nature of the carnival spirit: "carnival and the carnivalesque suggest a redeployment of culture, knowledge and pleasure. . . . carnival refuses to surrender the critical and cultural tools of the dominant class, . . . carnival can be seen, above all, as a site of insurgency" (17). Stallybrass and White see the carnival-grotesque as the penetration of the low into the high culture:

Higher discourses are normally associated with powerful socio-economic groups at the centre of cultural power, it is they which generally gain authority to designate what is to be taken as high and low in the society. This is what Raymond Williams calls the 'inherent dominative mode' and it has the prestige and access to power which enables it to create the dominant definitions of superior and inferior. Of course the 'low' (defined as such by the high precisely to confirm itself as 'high') may well see things differently and attempt to impose a counter-view through an inverted hierarchy. (4)

The manifestation or the aesthetic expression of the grotesque, the carnival, is of an ambivalent nature: it destroys and upholds; it "asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (*RHW* 12). It "celebrates its masses, professes its faith, celebrates marriages and funerals, writes its epitaphs, elects kings and bishops" (*RHW* 88). This doubling works against the grain of traditional feasts which are closed, finished and absolute, stressing, instead, the universality and freedom of the carnival.

## **2. Yusuf Idris, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht: Between the Absurd and the Epic Traditions**

Despite its inspiration from diverse theatrical tendencies, *Al-Farafir* is a new experiment, showing Idris's abilities to exploit western techniques but with an enriching Egyptian content and flavor. It mixes absurdism, surrealism and expressionism, especially in its bare, nightmarish setting and in its grotesque characters that are nameless designations as Farfoor, The Master, The Author, Spectator I, Spectator II, Spectator III, Spectator IV, Lady (Master's Wife), Spectator V, Second Lady, Spectator VI, Woman (Farfoor's Wife), Woman Spectator (Liberty), etc.

Idris sought inspiration from the Egyptian indigenous locale and village festivals in which villagers gather to ad-lib entertainments that involve farcical or vaudevillian actions, singing, dancing, clowning and masquerading (all these are absurd and surrealistic features). In other words, while he borrows, Idris colors his play with socio-political and cultural Egyptian issues and folk language and tradition. Burt points out that although Idris depended on various literary European trends in *Al-Farafir*, such a work, among others, remains original and is solidly rooted in an Egyptian soil in which genres as "shadow plays, puppet theatre, *maqamat*, and *samir* entertainment traditions" are planted. She goes on shedding light on the play's socio-political nature, pointing out that

Idris mounts a remarkable critique of authoritarian political power, oppressive social structures, and individual complacency. Unlike his earlier pieces, which celebrate the (perhaps unrealistic) hope for revolutionary transformation of Egypt, *Al-Farafir* is a satire caught between the fatalistic and the absurd

that employs innovative (in the Egyptian context) techniques for the use of theater space, planted actors in the audience, and metadramatic discourse on the role of author, character, and actor in the theater. (50-51)

Technically, Idris' *al-Farafir* is a mosaic of the Absurd Theatre and the Epic Theatre traditions. At least after the first reading of Idris's *al-Farafir*, it is inescapable to mention Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht along with Idris at least briefly before investigating the politics of the carnivalesque in such a play. This is in fact "the anxiety of influence" as Harold Bloom calls it (in that context the researcher means the western literary influence on Idris's writings).

In *al-Farafir*, Idris, as a satirist, presents the disturbing Egyptian reality with clear signs of optimism, decisively calling for radical change (political reform and social change), that is, to put an end to the human exploitation of one another and corruption prevalent across society. And this is the true end of satire as Dryden says: "the true end of satire is the amendment of vice by correction". However, in this play, Idris appears to be more black humorist than a satirist. While the satirist attacks the visible objects (man and man's institutions), the black humorist turns his dagger within. The black humorist, like a prophet, is an insightful observer who digs deep into the core of things and questions the cozy securities and verities. For a black humorist like Idris, it is better die laughing than to lead your miserable life crying. In this way, Idris as a black humorist is approximate to absurd dramatists who are searching for meaning in meaninglessness. Moreover, the main protagonists of the play, the Master and the Slave who are waiting for the Author, remind one of the two bums Estragon and Vladimir who are waiting for Godot – who maybe standing for God, a symbol of Hope, one of the many things people wait for life to alleviate their agony and daily struggle, a symbol of Jesus Christ, Divine Saviour, or some authority that assured protection for these two homeless men— or of Pozzo the cruel master and Lucky the pathetic slave in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

One may add that as *Waiting for Godot* is a tragi-comedy into two acts as its subtitle says, *al-Farafir* could be subtitled as a tragi-comedy in two acts due to the fact that although it tragically depicts two characters the Master and Farfoor as being locked in an existential conundrum, the play is comic through these two characters' use of bizarre puns, repetitions, non sequiturs, clowning, farcical chasing and singing. Moreover, like Estragon and Vladimir, Farfoor and his master argue, make up and contemplate suicide. But while there are no killing and suicide in Beckett's play, they exist in Idris's play.

The settings of Beckett's and Idris's plays convey an absurdist mood through the bare landscape in which both plays take place. But instead of the tree that could symbolize the tree on which Jesus Christ was crucified in Beckett's play, we have a chair that symbolizes the authority throne of the Master in Idris's play. The bareness of the stage symbolizes the meaninglessness of life and the fruitlessness of civilization. The stage directions of Idris's *Al-Farafir* say: "(The stage is completely empty for a rostrum on which are microphones, a water pitcher and a glass. At the rostrum a very elegantly dressed man who looks very much the "intellectual". He is tall and wears a pair of impressive eyeglasses . . .)" (352). Needless to say, Idris' play is set in no definite time and space.

Comically, instead of having two strangers like Pozzo and Lucky, a master and a slave, who meet Estragon and Vladimir, in Idris's play the Master and Farfoor meet two ladies who are sent by the Author to be wives of the Master and a third woman who gets married to Farfoor. However, the powerful and the cruel Pozzo in his relation to Lucky could be likened to the woman who gets married to Farfoor for the simple reason that afterwards Farfoor and his Master swap their roles and finally become equal, searching for freedom in a world that is absent of freedom. Only cruelty, savagery and oppression are there. There is no outlet from this macabre, oppressive, suppressive, and mad world.

There are multiple aspects of similarity between the German playwright Bertolt Brecht and the Egyptian dramatist Yusuf Idris, especially after reading the latter's play *al-Farafir*. Like Brecht, Idris aims at creating a theatre that could achieve something— a theatre that could challenge and make an audience

think. Both Brecht and Idris loathe the theatre of realism and do not devote their theatres to the life of the bourgeoisie class. Nor do both interpret the real world as it is: they discuss it in a philosophically dialectical way for illuminating the audience about its realities and for uncovering its false ideologies. They see theatre as having a didactic function: a social and a political message the spectator must benefit from. They also encourage the spectator not to accept reality as it is; rather, they want him/her to discuss it on a rational and a philosophical basis. Moreover, Idris employs a character (The Author) who is speaking directly to the audience, erasing the barrier between the actors and the audience, making a focus on the story rather than on the characters, using symbols, props and music and achieving the alienation effect (making the audience intellectually involved, that is, to think about why any event takes place, rather than accepting it as it is). More importantly, Idris endorses Brecht's thinking that "There is no play and no theatrical performance which does not in some way or another affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience. Art is never without consequences" (qtd. in Storey 5). All these aspects undeniably make Idris' theatre as political as Brecht's.

### **3. *Al-Farafir* as a Carnavalesque Play with a Socio-political and Cultural Agenda**

The carnivalesque is characterized by discrediting official discourse and its figures in the sense that it mocks all that has been for so long taken as for granted and elevated. It also juxtaposes the sacred with the profane. By this, the carnivalesque has Aristophanic and Juvenalian satiric tones. Aristophanes' plays, among them are *Frogs*, *Clouds* and *Lysistrata*, are filled with satire on myths and political figures. Juvenalian satire is featured by being "savage indignation, the bitter condemnation of venal and stupid humanity" as Andrew Stott remarks (150). Although Desiderius Erasmus could be likened with Juvenal, there is an essential difference between them that lies in the fact that Erasmus tries to play the role of the fool. In this respect, John Lepage points out that

In the preface to the *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus admires More, he suggests, for being a student of all things yet sometimes playing the fool. He defends the subject of his work, folly, in turn identifying himself with the fool and, by implication, with the laughter of Democritus: "Unlike Juvenal, I made no effort to rake in the sewer of hidden crimes; my aim was to ridicule absurdities, not catalogues sins" . . . (65)

Like Erasmus' satire, Idris' oscillates between bitter indignation and benign observations. However, it acquires an existential dimension that is not overtly predominant in Erasmus' satire. Idris' dramatic and fictional works, like Franz Kafka's fictional works (*Metamorphosis* is an example of the absurd situation in which man like Gregor Samsa finds himself, being ridiculed and finally excluded) deal principally with the crisis of man who is disoriented in an absurd, meaningless world, where the pure truth has disappeared and where distressed people feel alienated and have lost faith in being able to find, something that might calm their agony, existential fears and metaphysical distress. Commenting on how Idris's dramatic career underwent radical changes in terms of the cultural context from realism to surrealism, Dorota Rudnicka-Kassem points out that

The picture of life has become more difficult to grasp and understand: the setting and characters appear to be more indistinct and universal, an atmosphere of existential pessimism prevails and the symbolic representation of moral and political themes supersedes the former outward description and brisk action. This second group of stories and novels, and especially works written during the late 1960s and the early 1970s, presents us with a surrealistic sketch of Egyptian life; Idris portrays the events from many different perspectives and it appears as if he adds a fourth dimension to the scenes. Furthermore, the new means of expression, such as the stream of consciousness, symbols, surrealistic visions and extensive use of monologues makes it easier for the author to explain things which are sometimes beyond the grasp of our common understanding. (31)

There are three basic carnivalesque aspects of juxtaposition that could be drawn between Idris's *al-Farafir* and Erasmus' prose political satire *Praise of the Folly* (1509), especially in terms of classical allusions, vehement satire and the characterizations of the servant (Farfoor) and the Folly. In Erasmus' essay, before praising herself, Folly displays as a goddess, progeny of the god of wealth Plutus, and the nymph Freshness, being brought up by two nymphs, Inebriation and Ignorance. Her truthful mates are Philautia, Kolakia, Lethe, Misoponia, among others. Farfoor and his master make allusions to historical and political figures: they have children whose names are Alexander, Napoleon, Mussolini, and Hitler. All the allusions given by Folly and Farfoor are negative; however, they differ in their intensity.

The second important aspects lies in that after praising herself, Folly scathingly lampoons those who think deeply and all human professions such as grammarians, poets, rhetoricians, philosophers, doctors, lawyers, monks, friars, etc. When the Master asks Farfoor which profession he is going to select, Farfoor tells him that he works as a master so there is no need to look for any other profession. However, the Master remains unconvinced. He continues in asking Farfoor to select a certain profession for him. Through Farfoor does the playwright attacks certain professions as the capitalists, nationalists, intellectuals, artists, football players, singers, lawyers, prosecutors, accountant, doctors, etc. The satiric dialogue shows to what extent Farfoor has scathing observations about such professions and how his humor is acerbic:

MASTER: No. if I am a Master, I must have a job. Listen, Farfoor, choose a very respectable job for me, Boy. Something modern.

FARFOOR: How about being a national capitalist?

MASTER: Don't you have anything better?

FARFOOR. I do. Would you like to be an intellectual?

MASTER: What do your intellectuals do?

FARFOOR: They do nothing.

MASTER: How come?

FARFOOR: This question clearly proves that you are not an intellectual.

MASTER: What else is there?

FARFOOR: Would you like to be an artist?

MASTER: Artist in what? What do I do?

FARFOOR: An artist with no art.

MASTER: Is there such a thing?

FARFOOR: Ohoo...We have a lot of those. They're all over. (*He reaches inside his clothes and takes out his hand closed.*) Would you like a handful? How about being a singer?

MASTER: What do I do as a singer?

FARFOOR: You say ""Ah" for thirty or forty years. (368)

In this dialogue that is filled with social satire, Farfur discredits most of the jobs and professions. The dialogue is ironic in the sense that it sheds light on the discrepancy between those who work in different professions and what they actually do: discrepancy between appearance and reality, showing triviality, complacency and corruption. Posts that necessitate proficiency are occupied by worthless people while the pay of ordinary jobs is very low and the work requires much more hours. Continuing to launch satire on professions like lawyers, accounts and physicians, Farfoor tells his Master that most of those who have jobs and get well paid are not skillful in their subject matters nor in their careers; they lack necessary qualifications that make them deserve social positions:

FARFOOR: Well, you can work as a physician.

MASTER: No, I don't know anything about medicine.

FARFOOR: Do you think physicians do? . . .

FARFOOR: How about a traffic policeman?

MASTER: What does he do?

FARFOOR: He is a poor man like the rest of us who do not have cars, yet all day long he orders around those who do have cars...

MASTER: How about a conductor? Please, a conductor.

FARFOOR: Do you know how to swim?

MASTER: Swim where?

FARFOOR: In your sweat.

MASTER: Is that necessary? (374)

Despite the funny answers and jokes given by Farfoor, we do not want to laugh. The simple reason for not laughing is that this dialogue is filled with a smirking derisive laughter that subverts our daily complacency and says with frankness and realism "This is your real trouble". Therefore we become more upset than tranquilized. This argument in its internal meaning is not hilarious for the simple reason that it unveils and decomposes the existing problems, and the representation of the Egyptian reality of the Sixties as it is presented here is exasperating and upsetting. The government is corrupt, the intellectuals forced into silence, and people with power and money live off the sweat of those who are weak and poor. The Master demands a respectable job for himself. The author, speaking from behind the mask of Farfur, says plainly that under the circumstances presently existing in Egypt, he is unable to fulfill his request. According to him a decent occupation does not exist. Rudnicka-Kassem points out that this dialogue about corrupt professions shows that "the government posts are filled with the wrong people" and that "the justice system is corrupt" (112).

The third aspect has to do with folly as the ultimate wisdom, that is, the scapegoats and the wise fool figures of the Folly and Farfoor speak in wit and sarcasm. Through the comic figure of the Folly does Erasmus's satire become somewhat benign or tolerant, rather than savagely stinging. Sometimes Folly utters the opposite of what Erasmus believes. She ridicules fools to explain for which reasons this folly is advantageous. She delivers astonishing or itchy truths about the way the world goes. The Folly is created to produce a humor marked by tolerance. Although Erasmus' satire is deconstructive as it attacks everything in its way, it is moderated by the Folly figure.

As Idris cannot criticize the government, its officials and institutions flagrantly, he resorts to playfulness through the invention of the clownish, yet philosophic, figure Farfoor to avoid censorship and punishment, especially during the reign of Abdel Nasser that is notorious for prosecuting and imprisoning, if not killing, of politically engaged artists and common citizens who opposed his dreamy nationalistic projects. Rudnicka-Kassem points out that

In order to uncover the dark reality of the existing Egyptian situation during the 1960s, criticize the political, social and cultural order of the country and present some kind of solution and direction, Idris "discovered" for his play an unusual and fascinating personality. He created the character of Farfur, a modern Egyptian jester. This funny looking individual, a wag who smoothly combines charm with a sharp tongue; a clown, who through laughter, seeks to create a new philosophy for mankind, enabled the author to speak plainly and sarcastically about all the Egyptian forbidden matters and hidden ills. (110)

Dina Amin illustrates that although the period of the Sixties witnessed prolific writings, writers like Idris, Salem, among others, resorted to insinuation, rather than criticizing overtly:

The period that followed the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 was euphoric with enthusiasm as the expectations of the population as well as that of the intelligentsia were soaring high. No sooner however, did the optimism escalate that it receded as Gamal Abdel Nasser who started off as an advocate for freedom and democracy turned into a despot . . . Attempts at criticism were met with censorship on all fronts. After a number of writers and artists were imprisoned for their political views, some writers opted to stay silent, some conformed and some went around censorship by using symbolism and metaphor. (26)

Thus, the light-hearted and shrewd servant Farfoor, like the harlequin in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, is employed as the voice of the playwright or a satiric foil for Idris's venomous satirical tips, as revolutionary tool for creating consciousness and unveiling bitter realities, or as a voice for the subaltern or the poor Egyptian people. Farfoor has all the qualities by which the folk Farfoor is characterized: satire and wit. "In the tradition of the serious clown Farfoor is both hilariously funny and sensitively pathetic, almost to the point of tragedy" (Boullata 346). In begging his Master to give him directions, Farfoor could be a representation of the Egyptian people in general while the Master is a metaphor of Nasser, especially in terms of the relation between submission and cruelty both figures represent respectively. Witherspoon and Ayyad remark that "The Farfoor or Everyman represented a jester, clown or "aragoz", standing for the conscience of the people" (186). Emily Sibly points out that Farfoor functions as "the gadfly who serves a social function for the community engaged in the performance" (47). His ironic and satiric representations are didactic, eventually promoting a degree of social change and political reform, stimulating "moral conduct, heightening awareness of social responsibilities, and drawing attention to instances of failure among members of the community" (Sibley 47).

Free familiar interaction among participants is another important feature of the carnival square. People could feely abuse and beat each other friendly; they could deride and glorify the same person at the same moment. All the barriers that are based on rank, profession and authority are obliterated during the carnival. A second new life is born for all people, completely opposed to the official seriousness that is founded on distinctions, hierarchies and privileges:

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. Rank was especially evident during official feasts; everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling... and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality. On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. (*RHW* 10)

In Idris's play, eradicating the separating spatial and the official dimensions between the characters onstage and the audience is achieved at the very beginning of the play. The Author, upon his appearance onstage, appeals to the audience, telling them that it is not a play to be performed or watched in front of them while they remain, as usual, silent and non-respondent. Rather, it is a play that is going to be authored as if he were referring to improvisation in *commedia dell'arte*. Moreover, the audience is told that they must contribute in its composition and modification. Thus, the role of the actor and the audience is going to be cancelled in such a way as to get rid of their external selves and indulge in the actions of the play with their inner selves. This aims at liberating their subconscious and unconscious from the tyranny of their univocal reason, reminding us of Nietzsche's Dionysus who is the god of unification and collectivity (the total eclipse of the self or of the Apollonian individuating aspect). The Author also tells the audience that there are roles written in the text of the play for the spectators. This means that the spectators have to share

in the action and intervene in the events. All these elements are commonly known to be features of Brecht's Epic Theatre whose primary aim is to make the audience actively conscious or to be aware of what is happening (to be intellectually engaged), rather than being detached. This is achieved especially through the Author's direct address to the audience and through breaking the dramatic action and the fourth wall between performers and audience. By this, Idris achieves an important carnivalesque feature, as discussed by Bakhtin, with regard to erasing the borders that separate actors and spectators. This also proves that Idris, as an engagé, does not wish his audience to be emotionally involved. Here is part of the Author's long direct address to the audience at the very outset of the play:

AUTHOR: Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening. ... However, we are in a theatre, and a theatre is a celebration, a big meeting, a festival. It is a lot of people, human beings who have left their troubles outside and have come here to live together for two or three hours. It's a big family having a reunion and celebrating first, the reunion itself, and second, the fact that in the course of this reunion, it will dramatize, philosophize and ridicule itself frankly, impudently, and without any inhibitions. That is why in my play there are no distinctions between actors and spectators. You will do some acting, and the actors will do some spectating. Why not? If you know how to watch, you must know how to act. You say you don't know how to act? Come on, now! You act all the time: Who among you did not act to get his boss to give him a few days off? . . . (353)

Commenting on the epic form Idris adopts to awaken his audience, Rudnicka-Kassem explains that The dramatic form of the 1950s is replaced by an epic form, and there we may detect the influence of Brecht. . . . Therefore, he is not merely updating his drama but attempting to change the social function of his theatre. The author does not want to awaken our emotions. Instead, he induces us to develop critical reasoning and formulate an analysis of the events taking place in his drama. Idris wants his audience to see the action as already in the past in order to view it with the calm detachment evoked by his breaking the scenic illusion. (146)

More importantly, there are four aspects of the carnivalesque in the Author's speech to the audience. First, he calls the spectators to participate in the action of the play; this means that there will be no distinctions or commandments given them. Rather, they can freely participate. He says, "it will dramatize, philosophize and ridicule itself frankly, impudently, and without any inhibitions" (353). Secondly, he describes theatre as a festival or " a celebration, a big meeting, a festival" (353). This stressed Bakhtin's notion of collectivity which is central to the carnival square. Thirdly, the Author calls people to leave their daily life events aside for two or three hours. This calls to mind Bakhtin's notion that carnival is a "temporary liberation" or "suspension" of all what is official. Fourthly, the Author calls people to act, looking at the present, rather than the past. For Bakhtin, during the carnival period people look at the present, rather than the past. While official feasts stressed the past to worship the present, carnival created a second new life in which people freely communicate. Needless to say, the Author urges his spectators not to be afraid. Fear is associated with official feasts while carnival is people's triumphant laughter and a triumph over fear, over kings, over death, over all that restricts. Bakhtin points out that

Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it. The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted. But this true festive character was indestructible; it had to be tolerated and even legalized outside the official sphere and had to be turned over to the popular sphere of the marketplace. (*RHW* 9)

After the Author's departure, eliminating the distance between spectators and actors is also achieved through Farfoor. Farfoor addresses the female portion of the audience in the process of searching a wife for his Master. Humor is evident while selecting a wife. But when Farfoor's eye falls on a beautiful lady, social satire directed against greed becomes apparent. The first question the lady asks Farfoor is about how much the wealthy of his Master is. She is not concerned about the job of his Master but rather about his money. When Farfoor tells her that his Master is wealthy, she accepts without thinking twice. Idris, through the exchange between Farfoor and would-be wife of his Master, creates a comedy of manners: the discrepancy between appearance (sophistication in appearance and speech of the lady who preliminarily accepts to marry the Master) and reality (her greed and obsession with money and life of luxury). Ironically, the surname of the woman's family (Alhayif (The Sillies), connoting "triviality" or "worthlessness") reveals this lady's reality. That is to say, many women can be superficially elegant but veil their real hollow inner selves.

More importantly, as the carnivalesque is marked by mingling praise and abuse simultaneously, one could say that praise is directed to the lady's beauty but the name Alhayif is a form of abuse contrived by the playwright. Mockingly, Farfoor tells the lady that Alhayif family has a widespread fame; in every part of Egypt there are many family members who belong to Alhayif. This means that Egypt has many worthless people:

LADY : I won't budge one inch before I know what he does. . . . I don't care what he does. Does he have money?

FARFOOR: Sacks. Sacks and sacks.

LADY: Then, tentatively, I'll come. (*She leaves her seat and goes to the stage.*) What's his name, this Master of yours?

FARFOOR: As for names, you can give him any that you like.

LADY: Why? What family does he come from? I hope he doesn't have a bad name.

FARFOOR: It's neither good nor bad; he comes from the family of the Unnamable.

LADY : A very vulgar name, that. Anyway I am ready to give him my family. . . . The Sillies, it's a very famous family. Haven't you heard of it?

FARFOOR: Of course I have. It has branches everywhere. None are more abundant than the Silly ones. (394)

Music, being combined with the Author's direct address to the audience, is another carnivalesque feature. Folk music, derived from the Egyptian tradition, is evident after each part of the Author's direct address to the spectators:

With all appreciation for your noble feeling and your boundless joy...I see no reason for your laughter... (*Loud music, indicating the entrance of an actor, is heard. The Author points to where it comes from:*) Wait there, Farfur...I haven't quite finished. (*Addressing the audience again:*) Tonight, brothers and sisters, I 'd like to introduce the biggest, the greatest...(Music again. The author turns furiously towards the entrance...He remains silent for a moment... As soon as he turns around and tries to open his mouth, music is heard again. He turns quickly towards the door and says in despair:) Well then...no way. Find another author. (353)

The grotesque is a subcategory of comedy; it is marked by exaggeration, incongruity, displacement of order, attacking the pillars of logic, stability and decorum, merging the elevated with the profane, making the reader oscillate between amusement and fear, and having anti-heroes. Carnival is marked by curious, grotesque, not fully rounded, incomplete and irreverent characters and grotesque actions. Absurdist characters are shaped with grotesque, barely recognizable, rather than well-observed and motivated

characters in the well-developed drama. Al-Farafir has absurdist, grotesque characters. Those characters do not reveal any peculiarities or personalities about them in the sense that as we do not know anything about Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* except that the first two are tramps or homeless men and the other two are a master and slave, we do not know anything about Farfoor and his Master like their homes, their parents, the times to which they belong except that they are a Master and a servant.

The costume of the Author is grotesquely ridiculous and funny. As the grotesque is characterized by distortion, caricature and incongruity with what is normal or expected, the Author's costume is a carnivalesque trait. One can notice incongruity or the principle of the opposite in his being dressed in elegant upper part clothes (an elegant jacket) and a comic lower part pants and shoes without socks that reveal his thin, long legs. Asymmetry or inconsistency in his physical appearance creates humor in us:

*(He leaves the rostrum and approaches the front of the stage. The audience discovers that despite the elegance of his upper half, he is wearing very short pants showing his long, wiry legs and his shoes with no socks. When everyone laughs:)* With all appreciation for your noble feeling and your boundless joy...I see no reason for your laughter. (354)

As Bakhtin explains, while the classical body is finished, unified, closed and coherent, the grotesque body is formless, incomplete, non-separable from the external world:

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. (*RHW* 26)

During the carnival, everyone is laughed at in the sense that even though who laugh at others is also mocked. Shedding light on the universality of the carnival, Bakhtin points out that laughter is "directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants" (*RHW* 11). While the Author is still addressing his spectators, he is rudely interrupted by Farfoor. When Farfoor enters the stage, the Author scolds him, telling him how he has entered without any prior permission. He asks Farfoor to go out till he presents him and his Master but Farfoor appears obstinate, refusing to go outside and asking the Author to go outside instead. But as carnival is characterized by equality between the participants, Farfoor tells the Author that he himself is going to introduce his Master, not the Author. Then Farfoor mocks the Author's ridiculous appearance:

AUTHOR: *(Turning around, sharply)* How dare you enter before I'm through, Farfoor? Who told you to enter? Now, as you came on, go off!

FARFOOR: Not likely, Smartie. You go off!

AUTHOR: Me?

FARFOOR: Of course, you! You're an author. You write out there. I am Farfoor, so I stay here.

AUTHOR: Shouldn't you wait until I introduce your Master to the audience?

FARFOOR: Never mind. I'll do that.

AUTHOR: Well, at least let me introduce you.

FARFOOR: You can't even introduce yourself. So how can you introduce me? And, by the way, what's that? *(Looking the Author over)* What's that you did to yourself? . . .

AUTHOR: What's wrong with my pants, huh? These are author's pants.

FARFOOR: Do authors usually do that?

AUTHOR: But of course: How else can they be authors? They must author everything. I authored this for myself. An original outfit. What's wrong with that?

FARFOOR: It's fantastic! If you'd only shorten them a little. (355)

Even the playwright ridicules himself through the ridiculous appearance of the Author. Everyone is mocked in the play, even its playwright. Clearly enough, Idris mocks or parodies himself as a writer. He depicts authors as being not neatly dressed. However, one could detect that authors, like philosophers are not interested in external matters but in the core of things. One could add that focusing on the lower part of the body of the Author calls Bakhtin's notion of degradation or the bodily lower stratum. "To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth" (Bakhtin, *RHW* 21). Friendly abuse, a characteristic of the carnivalesque square, is also noticed in the Author-Farfoor exchange. As Bakhtin explains, in carnival, "Verbal etiquette and discipline are relaxed and indecent words and expressions may be used" (*RHW* 16)

Striking people friendly is another carnivalesque feature. When Farfoor searches for a Master, he strikes the heads of those who are sitting in the front rows. The Author also strikes him on the head: "*Farfoor strikes the people in the front rows. He finds the Author standing there, still talking about the most splendid, most fantastic, biggest, etc., and strikes him on the head*" (355). Farfoor also hits the Author "*on his right side and he bends to the left*" (357). According to Bakhtin, "two friends may pat each other on the shoulder and even on the belly (a typical carnivalesque gesture)" (*RHW* 16).

As the carnivalesque is featured by fluctuation and shift. The Author, in his physical appearance and dramatic role, grows much more ridiculous and smaller. This culminates in his total disappearance, representing existentially the absence of God or nothingness. Badawi points out that Despite its prolixity and digressions, *al-Farafir* is a deeply disturbing play on the social, political, and metaphysical levels. Not only does the play tackles the themes of authority and freedom, the hierarchical structure of society, and the tendency of power to corrupt, but by the gradual shrinking into nothing of the Author, Idris hints at a world that is deserted by God in which men are left to their devices. (8)

The Author' unyielding and harsh way of speaking to Farfoor shifts to be lenient. Farfoor's rude manner of speaking to the Author reaches its apex as the following exchange about searching for a Master illustrates. One could also notice inversion as a carnivalesque feature: the Author becomes the one who begs Farfoor:

AUTHOR: I don't have time, Farfoor. I am very busy and have all kinds of appointments.

FARFOOR: Busy or not, it's not my business. It was you who lost him.

AUTHOR: Farfoor, my friend. I have a radio series that I haven't finished yet. You look for him.

FARFOOR: I look for him? I'll stay here and cross my legs until you find a master for me. (*He sits in the air as if in a seat and crosses his legs.*)

AUTHOR: (*Selecting another spectator*) Now what do you think of this one? I don't think you can find a better one.

FARFOOR: I told you I want a Master. A Master, a Master, A MASTER! Someone big and respectable: One that makes you want ... Wait. Let me remember where I saw him before. Oh, I see now! He's either the T.V. antenna or its spitting image.

AUTHOR: Well, there you are, Farfoor. I found him. (*He points to the Master who is fast asleep in his seat.*)

FARFOOR: Why is he (357)

Erasing boundaries, as a carnivalesque feature, is noticed in Farfoor's scolding of the Author and in beating the man who is going to be his master. Ayyad and Witherspoon and point out that Farfoor's acts of

beating a sleeping spectator who becomes his Master, of opposing his Master and of scolding the Author are acts that raise the problem of human freedom:

The Author tries to find a master for the Farfoor, but when he does, both he and the Master had a difficult time controlling the Farfoor. . . Like the circus clown, his antics confound his "superiors". He misbehaves, entering before he is supposed to, interrupting the Author (who takes on the role of the "straight man"), gallivanting around and teasing everyone to the point of exasperation; he wakes up a sleeping spectator by pounding a stick over his head. Then he makes demands on the Author reprimanding him for forgetting to write in the role of the Mistress.

By opposing his Master as well as the Author, the Farfoor reveals his need to be free, demonstrating the human dilemma of the Master. (188)

Farfoor is an important medium through which Idris communicates his ideas to the reader. As Rudnicka-Kassem remarks, "Idris creates a unique character for his drama, i.e., a clown-fool-type personality of Farfur and uses his mask to speak from behind it plainly and openly about important human concerns" (140). He is grotesquely shaped; he wears shabby clothes, moves unsteadily, and jumps like the clown. The Master's habit of sleeping is funny. The Master is able-bodied while Farfoor is very thin, reminding us of the gigantic and the dwarf figures of the grotesque. Both Farfoor and his master, in their grotesque shapes, undoubtedly remind us of Estragon and Vladimir who are in rags, bowler hats and oversized boots, bumbling and shuffling in a vaudevillian or a farcical manner.

The relationship between Farfoor and his master could be interpreted in terms of the capitalist ideology that is based on supporting the powerful (the powerful do not see themselves as exploiters) and subjugating the powerless (the subordinate do not see themselves as subjugated and exploited), that is to say, that of the relation between a middle class capitalist and a proletariat laborer from a Marxist perspective, between an exploiter and exploited, or between a master and a slave from a Hegelian dialectical idealism angle. In his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Carl Marx defines "dialectical materialism" (the economic forces that govern the relation between people) as follows, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness" (qtd. in Lukacs 18). It becomes clear that the relation between Farfoor and the Master sheds light on the existing social changes and the class struggle brought by the 1952 Revolution; thus social facts are registered and create a dramatic discourse that goes further beyond the textual analysis. The relation between the two (Farfoor and his Master) appears predestined. They have no free will in determining their social roles or destinies in society. This is evident when the Author specifies their socio-economic roles: one is a master while the other is a servant.

Farfoor is not an actor in the strict sense; rather, he resembles the fools and clowns of the Middle Ages. According to Bakhtin, clowns and fools remained clowns and fools everywhere they made their appearance; they are not actors performing their role onstage:

[They], impersonating Harlequin, Hanswurst, etc., . . . remained fools and clowns always and wherever they made their appearance. As such they represented a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time. They stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were, they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors. (*RHW* 8)

Farfoor's manner of speaking and acting spontaneously (cursing, criticizing, crying and rebelling) are all carnivalesque elements. More importantly, like Dionysus, the god that causes all subjectivity to fall into forgetfulness, Farfoor represents the greatest portion of the Egyptian people (the poor). Ayman El-Desouky points out that Farfoor represents the majority of the common Egyptian people like farmers, workers and poor urban people; thus Idris gives a voice to the marginal to speak about their agonies and criticize the government practices:

Farfoor [is] a natural crystallization of ordinary Egyptians—the mass majority of peasants, workers and the urban poor—and their collectively shared responses to their own social and political realities as they directly experience them. . . . Farfoor modes of self-enactment, which is simultaneously an enactment of the presentness of collective moods and conditions at any given moment, emerge spontaneously whenever there is a gathering. (100)

The three ladies that appear in the action of the play are grotesquely shaped. As for the Master's first wife whose family name is Alhayif (The Sillies), her language is sophisticated and her physical appearance is gorgeous but she is greedy. Appearance is incongruous with her reality. Then, she is grotesquely shaped in terms of sexuality. In fact, she is a grotesque exaggeration of the Restoration lady character Millament in William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) who insists on her right of privacy before getting married to Mirabell: "To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in" (278). In the following exchange, in addition to creating humor through the punning word *rag'i* (reactionary, the opposite of progressive), the funny names of the lady's friends that reveal their triviality, and the Master's habit of sleeping for a long time, the lady, by setting her conditions before consenting marriage to Farfoor's Master, uncovers her corrupt (sexual and reckless) nature. All this also sheds on the carnivalesque principle of degradation from the head to the lower bodily stratum: by "appendectomy" or "tonsilectomy" in the following exchange Idris indirectly refers to abortion or to the operation of hysterectomy (removing a woman's womb) by which this lady could practice vice freely:

LADY : Listen, garçon Farfoor, my freedom is very important to me. I don't like anybody to restrict it. Is your Master a reactionary man?

FARFOOR: I don't understand what "reactionary" means.

LADY: If he'd let me come home at 2 a.m. or later, he'd be progressive. Any time earlier, he'd be reactionary.

FARFOOR: Have no worry on that account, Lady. He sleeps all the time.

LADY: Would he allow me to keep my friends, the men, I mean?

FARFOOR: I'd be lying to you if I said I knew that.

LADY : It's such a modest request. My friend Kaki Qulqas insisted that she and her husband have her boy friend stay with them on the honeymoon.

FARFOOR: Well, she's right. . . . My Lady, even employees are kept on trial, for three months. How can you be divorced after one month? What if something or another had happened in the course of the month?

LADY : So what? One can always have an appendectomy or a tonsillectomy. (395)

Although the Master is supposed to be the one who is entitled to decide whether he is going to marry this lady or not, he appears hesitant and dependent. He asks Farfoor about his opinion; this represents a hint of inversion. Comically, Farfoor plays the role of a marriage officer. This calls Bakhtin's notion that carnival is a time of play and in it there is no restriction on actions and roles, even the master can be a servant and *vice versa*.

Transformation and inversion, as carnivalesque elements, are evident in the gradual decline of the Author's body and role as well as in the role switch between Farfoor and his Master, that is, changing power relations (reversing roles and finally becoming equal: "You've worked as a Master and I as a Farfoor, and it didn't work. We both worked as Farfoors, and it didn't work. How about if we invert it?", the Farfoor suggests to his Master (454). The degeneration of the Author's body (becoming smaller and smaller until being delivered in a bundle form) reminds us of Kafka's Gregor Samsa, in *Metamorphosis*, who is suddenly transformed into a bug and finally excluded. But while Samsa is suddenly transformed

into a gigantic bug, the process of transformation that occurred to the Author is gradual and into a downsized form. Samsa and the Author are grotesquely funny but there is an underlying serious issue of existential distress that lurks behind this dazzling comic surface. The aim of Kafka and Idris is the same—showing the degeneration of the modern Man, as opposed to the Darwinian notions of biological progression and evolution. The Master and Farfoor swap their roles as Estragon and Vladimir swap their hats with Lucky's hat; swapping of roles underlines the instability of identity or the identity crisis in the industrial, postmodern world. As identity is an answer to the question "Who am I? When the answer becomes fuzzy, identity crisis emerges. Even in Beckett's play, Pozzo is led by Lucky on a shorter leash in the second act while in the first act it is Pozzo the master who leads Lucky by a rope tied around his neck. This switch of roles reminds one of Bakhtin's notion that one of the feature of carnival is role reversal, or the inversion of social and gender roles and hierarchies (the famer can play the role of a king and the king can play that of a farmer). Commenting on the transformation in the Author's shape and the relation between Farfoor and his Master, Roger Allen points out that

They decide to resume their life together but not on the old basis: first, on an equal footing, both as servants; then they try switching the roles of Master and Servant; and then both as masters in an instantly created republic; then an empire of freedom in which each enjoys absolute freedom to do as he pleases. When all these attempted solutions fail, they resolve to turn back to the Author, who they are now told is back although they had assumed that he had gone forever. This time the author is delivered in the form of a bundle, looking like a newborn baby, which they untie only to find smaller and smaller bundles inside, until what remains is too small to be seen. (148)

Before declaring marriage, a second woman enters, interrupting the event. This second woman is a grotesque figure: she appears vulgar and blunt. She abuses and threatens the lady who was supposed to marry the Master. A quarrel occurs on who is going to be get married to him. Farfoor solves the problem by suggesting that both ladies will be get married to his Master. What is noticed is that the two women appeal to Farfoor but he has no voice; he must accept his inferior position as a servant. In addition, both ladies are set as opposites, calling the idea that the carnival-grotesque is an amalgamation of opposites. Both the first high-class, elegant lady and the second lower-class vulgar lady will be the wives of the Master.

The door is knocked to present us with an extremely grotesque figure of a lady whose role is to marry the ill-fated Farfoor. She appears such a ghastly looking creature and a male-like woman that Farfoor is ready to denounce his masculine gender or his manhood. Burt notes that the two candidates for the "master's wife vie, with Farfur's fiance(e) adding comic counterpoint, until the indecisive master decides to marry them both. Neither of the women wishes to cede to the other. So they exit, each on one of the master's arm, while Farfur is carried off by his fiance(e)" (52).

In carnival, as discussed before, inversion is a common element as people can abandon their roles to have new roles. Comically, Farfoor claims that he is a woman, rather than a man, as an attempt to escape his fate of marrying this horrible woman. This is the carnivalesque feature of reversing gender roles, that is, the masculinization of women (depicted in the lady who is supposed to marry Farfoor) and the feminization of men (it is safer for Farfoor to be a woman):

FARFOOR: What a day! God have mercy on us. What are you?

WOMAN: I am a woman, Farfoor, and a coquette too:

FARFOOR: No, no. I am the woman. I renounce all manhood if women are like you. Please, I am a woman. (403)

Before the Die-for-hire audience member appears onstage, the Master asks Farfoor to kill somebody to gain fifty piasters from their occupation as grave diggers. In fact, this sheds light on the bitter fact that after WWII, the dehumanization of man reached its apex to such a point that death and murdering became a normal daily life experience. Then the man volunteering to die appears, calling as if he were a commodity "Who needs to a kill a man?", symbolically connoting the capitalist system in which many workers appear as dead men after working for many hours and having three shifts in a single month. Such a capitalist system gains much more money at the expense of the sweat of the proletariat. The existential theme of the futility, meaninglessness and purposelessness of life predominates in this part of the play. In the process of the Master's killing of the man, Farfoor cries for saving the man from committing suicide at the hands of his Master and reminds us with the religious story of Abel and Cain and its symbolic dimension that gains a political dimension in the sense that during the rule of Abdel Nasser many Egyptian policemen killed their Egyptian brothers. A brother killing a brother is more terrifying than a colonizer kills a colonized or an atheist killing a Muslim:

FARFOOR: Are you an atheist or something?

MASTER: God bless you. Heh! (*He grabs the Man's neck.*)

FARFOOR: (*Jumping up and down, hysterically scared*) Oh Cain, why do you kill thy brother? The first sin. Have mercy on those on earth so He in Heaven may have mercy on you!

MASTER: Listen, Boy. If you don't shut up, I'll kill you first.

FARFOOR: (*Calling loudly*) People: Humanity: Men! Aren't you ashamed? Help, Brothers! How can you sit back and watch your brother in humanity being killed? Where are your values? Where's justice? (417)

Farfoor is employed here as a voice that condemns the savage power practices of Nasser's repressive regime against political dissents, unveiling the bitter reality of the abundant concentration camps built for silencing people.

Bakhtin sheds light on the ambivalent nature of carnival as a constructive and deconstructive power, pointing out that carnival is "ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (*RHW* 11-12). After the Master's killing the volunteering man, all the wives of the Master and Farfoor give birth to their babies. However, death in life appears when such wives give birth to babies whose names are associated with the historic events of genocide, the Holocaust, concentration camps and atrocity. In this respect, Burt points out that

In the second act, the master and Farfur meet again. In the meantime, Farfur and his progeny have had many masters each worse than the preceding; the master has bred a race of gravediggers, each more capable than the preceding of burying thousands at one fell swoop. The master mentions a series of historical personalities who have contributed to the deaths of thousands of other human beings: Thutmosis, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler. (52)

After the failure of all possible relationships between the Master and Farfoor whether they represent a master-servant, a servant-master, or two equal men relationships, a female spectator emerges, assuming the position of the Statue of Liberty. There is an empire where everyone enjoys liberty and psychic spontaneity without any possible restraints, where no one's self-esteem is no longer violated. However, in this empire, the population majority can tyrannize the individual. Disheartened and disappointed, Farfoor discards Liberty, and matters transfer into absurd "solutions" (Burt 54).

## **Conclusion**

In *Al-Farafir*, Idris addresses several socio-political issues in an absurdist, comic guise and a black humorous vein. Like the Greek, British and Egyptian predecessors like Aristophanes, Jonson and Al-Hakim, he uses comedy as a serious tool for launching satire on the stupid and the venal attitudes of humanity. He also addresses the issue of freedom in an absurdist and repressive community, using Farfoor as a voice to speak for the oppressed. This play acquires allegorical features: it could be read as an allegory of the oppressive regimes that confine one's freedom. The Master-Servant (or Slave) relation is addressed on absurdist, social and political levels. It also addresses the issue of the freedom of woman, associating it with the possibility of practicing vice. The play as a whole could be read in the light of comedy of manners. The carnivalesque is used in the play as a tool for satirizing abnormal tendencies and corrupting personal attitudes and social institutions.

**المستخلص:****الشعلة الكرنفالية في قلب العتمة الوجودية: الدلالات السياسية في مسرحية "الفرافير" ليوسف إدريس  
أحمد محمد علي الحسيني**

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الدلالات السياسية للكرنفالي في مسرحية يوسف إدريس الساخرة "الفرافير" وذلك من منظور مفهوم الكرنفال الذي طرحه مايكل باختين. يحاول البحث إثبات أن الكرنفال، إلى جانب كونه مجالاً يتم فيه إثارة الضحك، إلا أنه يعد سلاحاً خطيراً لشن هجمات ساخرة على حماقات الإنسان وميوله ونزواته الفاسدة وما أصاب المؤسسات الاجتماعية من فساد، وأداة لتخريب وتحدي السلطة التعسفية والمواقف التقليدية والأيديولوجيات المنتشرة. كما يعد أرضاً خصبة للفكاهة السوداء. في مسرحيته الفكاهية السوداء، في مسرحيته الفكاهية السوداء، الهزلية، الساخرة، الوجودية، باضماتاتها السياسية "الفرافير"، يقدم لنا إدريس، بأسلوب فكاهي أسود وبروح كوميدية، قصة عن العلاقة بين السيد ("السيد" بالعربية) وخادمه النحيف ذو المظهر الغريب مرتدياً بدلة المهرج (فرفور) والصراع الأدبي بين الحياة والموت. تسلط المسرحية الضوء على الممارسات الخطابية التي يواجهها أي مصري من العامة (مجسد في المسرحية كخادمًا أو عبدًا أو فرفور) في نظام ديكتاتوري يهدف إلى بناء هوية نمطية مقهورة لعامة الناس بينما يدعم قوة القوي والمستغل حيث تتغلل القوة في المجتمع لخلق هويات محددة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إدريس، الفرافير، الكرنفالي، باختين

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