

Ikhlaṣī, Walīd وليد اخلاصي (1935-)



<http://www.syrianstory.com/walide.htm>

SUMMARY

Walīd Ikhlaṣī has become known as one of Syria's most productive dramatists and novelists. Since his first short story collection in 1963 he has produced over 50 pieces of work including novels, plays and short story collections. A well-known modernist and surrealist writer, he has introduced his own distinctive style in his writing for the theatre and in his fiction. He has also been involved in work with the Arab Writer's Union and in the editorial committees of several Syrian literary magazines, and influenced the cultural scene in Syria and the Arab world. Among Ikhlaṣī's many plays *al-ṣirāṭ* (The Path) is often brought out as an example of his seemingly action-less plays which on closer examination are filled with sharp criticism of the social and political Syrian landscape. His short story collection, *ma ḥadatha li-'Antara?* (What Happened to Antara?), shows his engagement with Arabic cultural heritage and the use of historical references in his work.

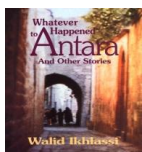
MAIN ENTRY

Walīd Ikhlaṣī was born in 1935 in the province of Alexandretta in Syria, but the family soon moved to Aleppo. Ikhlaṣī completed his university education in Egypt, returning to Aleppo in 1960 with a degree in agriculture after six years in Alexandria. On his return, he worked as a lecturer at the agricultural university in Aleppo and as an official at the Ministry of the Economy. He later took up a job within the cotton industry. The history and culture of Aleppo seep into most of Ikhlaṣī's fiction, whether he writes on historical events or the everyday life of the city's inhabitants. He is sometimes seen as the Aleppo's unofficial historian. Particularly clear examples of this appear in his novel *bāb al-jamr* (The Door of Embers) from 1985 and in the short story collection *Ḥalab: būtrih bi-alwān mu'attaqa* (Aleppo: a Portrait in Matured Colours) (2006).

Ikhlaṣī grew up in a period of nationalist struggle for a free Syria, something which has profoundly influenced his writing. He refuses to be connected to a single literary form, preferring the freedom of using different genres for different purposes. His search for freedom has also led to the creation of new techniques in order to break free from the domineering styles in theatre and fiction. In all of his works Ikhlaṣī is concerned with the common citizens' search for identity and their struggle to make sense of the world. In his play *'ūdīb* (Oedipus) (1981) he uses myth to argue that modern science can never help human beings to truly understand themselves. *Oedipus* is also an interesting example of Ikhlaṣī's way of recreating mythical stories to serve his purposes rather than building his play on the original structure of the myth. His concern with the common citizen also appears in *al-futūḥāt* (The Victories) from 2001, where he engages with the everyday life of a group of mundane characters. The

detailed description of life's daily routine, whether in novels, short stories or plays, is, however, soon broken by unexpected, often absurd acts or events. This combination of social realism and absurd and surrealist touches has become Ikhlaṣī's hallmark. The realistic background narrative, sometimes connected to contemporary political events, is thwarted by unbelievable happenings. The usage of symbolism, mythical and historical references, allegories and the absurd makes Ikhlaṣī's fiction and plays challenging reading open for a multitude of interpretations among which a fierce critique of social and political phenomena often appear. Examples of his engagement with society appear in his novel *aḥḍān al-sayyida al-jamīla* (The Lap of a Beautiful Lady) (1969), where he criticizes the state of the Syrian intellectuals and their impossible situation, and in *aḥzān al-ramād* (The Sorrows of Ashes) (1975), where he describes the emigration from villages to towns which Syria witnessed during the twentieth century. One of the themes of the *The Sorrows of Ashes* is the crushed dreams and feelings of alienation a villager is confronted with when starting his new life in town. Despite some of Ikhlaṣī's work being described as comedies or tragicomedies the overall feeling in his work is frustration, alienation and disillusionment. Reoccurring topics are power, oppression and domination in both private and public life.

In addition to his own fiction Ikhlaṣī is a regular contributor to *al-mawqif al-'adabī*, the journal of the Arab Writers' Union, and other periodicals. He was also instrumental in the founding of the Cinematic Club in Aleppo and the People's Theatre, later the Nationalist Theatre, in the same city. Ikhlaṣī's fiction has been translated into several languages, among them English, Russian, French and Italian, and he has been awarded several prizes for his fiction and plays, including prize of the Arab Writers' Union in 1990.



<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/mes/center/titles/literature/Ikhlassi.php>

Ändrad föltkod

One of several translated works.

Selected list of works

Novels

Shita' al-baḥr al-yābis شتاء البحر اليابس (The Winter of the Dry Sea) 1965

aḥḍān al-sayyida al-jamīla أحضان السيدة الجميلة (The Lap of a Beautiful Lady) 1969

aḥzān al-ramād أحزان الرماد (The Sorrows of Ashes) 1975

bayt al-khuld بيت الخلود (The Eternal Home) 1982

bāb al-jamr باب الجمر (The Door of Embers) 1985

al-futūḥāt الفتوحات (The Victories) 2001

riḥlat al-safarjil رحلة السفرجل (The Quince's Travels) 2008

Short Story Collections

qiṣaṣ قصص (Stories) 1963

zaman al-hijrā al-qaṣīra زمن الهجرة القصيرة (The Time of Short Migrations) 1970

al-'ashāb al-sawda' الأعشاب السوداء (The Black Herbs) 1980

ma ḥadatha li-'Antara? ما حدث لعنترة؟ (What Happened to Antara?) 1993

Ḥalab: būtrīh bi-alwān mu'attaqa حلب: بورتريه بألوان معتقة (Aleppo: a Portrait in Matured Colours) 2006

Theatre Plays

al-'ālam min qabl wa min b'ad العالم من قبل ومن بعد (The World Before and After) 1964

al-ṣirāṭ الصراط (The Path) 1976

mawt al-ḥalzūn موت الحزن (The Death of the Snail) 1976

hadhā al-nahr al-majnūn هذا النهر المجنون (This Crazy River) 1980

'ūdīb أديب (Oedipus) 1981

ḥufra حفرة (A Hole) 1999

bi-intizār al-maṭar بانتظار المطر (Waiting for the Rain) 2012

Further reading

Gouryh, A. (1984) 'The Fictional World of Walid Ikhlasī', *World Literature Today* 58 (1): 23-27.

-. (1988) 'The Sociopolitical and Cultural Ambience of Walid Ikhlasī's Drama', *World Literature Today* 62 (1): 50-55.

Hopwood, D. (1988) *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society*, London: Unwin Hayman Ltd.

Jayyusi, S. K. and R. Allen. (eds.) (1995) *Modern Arabic Drama: an Anthology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

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