**Ikhlāṣī, Walīd (1935-)**



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

SUMMARY

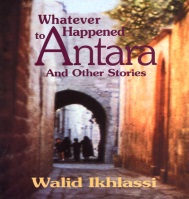
Walīd Ikhlāṣī has become known as one of Syria’s most productive dramatists and novelists. Since his first short story collection in 1963 he has produced over 50 pieces of work including novels, plays and short story collections. A well-known modernist and surrealist writer, he has introduced his own 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 Ikhlāṣī’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*ma ḥadatha li-‘Antara?* (What Happened to Antara?), shows his engagement with Arabic cultural heritage and the use of historical references in his work.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 Ikhlāṣī was born in 1935 in the province of Alexandretta in Syria, but the family soon moved to Aleppo. Ikhlāṣī 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 Ikhlāṣī’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: būrtrīh bi-alwān mu‘attaqa* (Aleppo: a Portrait in Matured Colours) (2006).

Ikhlāṣī 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 Ikhlāṣī 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 Ikhlāṣī’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 Ikhlāṣī’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 Ikhlāṣī’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 Ikhlāṣī’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 Ikhlāṣī 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. Ikhlāṣī’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.google.se/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CAcQjRw&url=http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/mes/center/titles/literature/Ikhlassi.php&ei=vBprVaTHA4GfsAHCsIHwDg&bvm=bv.94455598,d.bGg&psig=AFQjCNFME1R1Z3w5ZAMND4tCEQA707nWaA&ust=1433168947914362)

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

One of several translated works.

**Selected list of works**

Novels

Shita´ al-baḥr al-yābis (The Winter of the Dry Sea) 1965

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

aḥzān al-ramād (The Sorrows of Ashes) 1975

bayt al-khuld (The Eternal Home) 1982

bāb al-jamr (The Door of Embers) 1985

al-futūḥāt (The Victories) 2001

riḥlat al-safarjil (The Quince’s Travels) 2008

Short Story Collections

qiṣaṣ (Stories) 1963

zaman al-hijrāt al-qaṣīra (The Time of Short Migrations) 1970

al-‘ashāb al-sawda´ (The Black Herbs) 1980

ma ḥadatha li-‘Antara? (What Happened to Antara?) 1993

Ḥalab: būrtrīh bi-alwān mu‘attaqa (Aleppo: a Portrait in Matured Colours) 2006

Theatre Plays

al-‘ālam min qabl wa min b‘ad (The World Before and After) 1964

al-ṣirāṭ (The Path) 1976

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

hadhā al-nahr al-majnūn (This Crazy River) 1980

´ūdīb (Oedipus) 1981

ḥufra (A Hole) 1999

bi-intiẓār al-maṭar (Waiting for the Rain) 2012

**Further reading**

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

-. (1988) ‘The Sociopolitical and Cultural Ambience of Walid Ikhlasi’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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