

NISSIM ALONI AND HANOCH LEVIN BETWEEN ATHENS AND JERUSALEM

Nurith Yaari
Department of Theatre Arts
Tel Aviv University

In Hanoch Levin's last play, *the Crybabies*, the plot takes place in a hospital room, in Calcutta, during the dying of one terminal patient. Three dying men share one bed in this hospital room: the Experienced Dying Man, the New Dying Man and the Feeble Old Man. Their medical staff consists of a Head Doctor, an Assistant Doctor, an Elderly Nurse, a Young Nurse, an Orderly and two Cleaners. With the aim of entertaining the patients and in order to lighten their suffering the medical staff presents a Greek tragedy: *The Torments and Death of Agamemnon*. A similar framing of the dramatic action in a technique of "a play within a play" is presented in the opening scene of Nissim Aloni's *Eddy King*. The actor who plays the role of Eddy King, comes on stage, and opens the performance by situating the plot: "The story of Eddy King. An old story, a new one. Night, in December, our times. Brooklyn: New York." (1.1) In the background an Acordion's music is heard.

Myth, according to Walter Burkert is a "traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance." It is, "traditional tale applied; and its relevance and seriousness stem largely from its application." I would like to retain two elements from Burkert's definition: first the fact that the myth contains collective importance and second the fact that by its application it gains relevance and seriousness. I believe that these two elements can help us define our need to re-create the Biblical stories, re-enact the Greek myths and re-stage the Greek tragedies, using them as our myth of the creation and evolution of Western theatre, art, and culture.

In this paper I have chosen to focus on the plays and performances of Nissim Aloni and Hanoch Levin. Aloni's plays: *Most Cruel is the King* (1953), *The American Princess* (1962), *Aunt Lisa* (1969) and *Eddy King* (1975); and Levin's plays *The Sorrows of Job* (1981), *The Great Whore of Babylon* (1982), *The Lost Women of troy* (1984) *Everybody wants to Live* (1985) *Beheading* (1994) and *the Crybabies* (1999) demonstrate their quest for the identity of the Israeli Contemporary theatre through two main reflections: Greek Tragedy and the Biblical tradition - its tales, symbols and archetypes.

In a TV program concerning the history of the Israeli theatre Moshe Shamir accused Nissim Aloni of being an "escapist", of betraying the real task of the Israeli playwright, meaning "the portrayal of the great political-historical moments". This accusation reveals not only Shamir's opinion about Aloni's drama after 1960 but also defines a split in the midst of the nascent Jewish Israeli theatre: between the playwrights who see their role in depicting present, contemporary affairs and those "escapists" who believe that theatre is the place to uncover existential patterns through myths and metaphors. Today, when most of Israeli culture is but a faint "reproduction" of the Israeli Media, the theatrical spectacles of Aloni and Levin present a never ending challenge to the Israeli theatre.