

# Youssef Ezeddin Eassa's Radio Dramas

## The Start of Radio Drama in Egypt



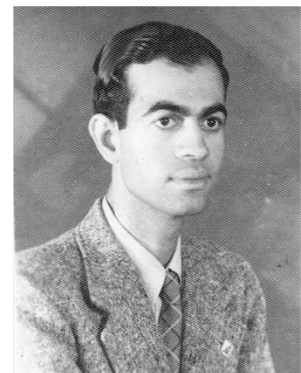
The radio drama that we know did not exist in Egypt or the Middle East before Youssef Ezeddin Eassa. The radio invention was first introduced to Egypt in 1934; while in other Arab countries it was rejected and considered as some kind of anti-religious invention. The fact that the radio was a speaking object was compared to the atheist worshipping of stones in the past; and was thus considered in some parts of the Middle East to be against religion.

On the other hand, Egypt, back then, was the most enlightened country in the Middle East. It was also occupied by Britain and the Radio Station was established there by the British Government. The Radio Corporation was run by the British at that time, and radio announcers were carefully selected Egyptians of high intellectual backgrounds. There were programs, songs and music, the news of course and some amateurish attempts of drama in the field. The radio authorities were always looking for good writers in order to establish Egyptian radio drama, but actually the Egyptian writers back then shrunk from writing for that field, preferring to take no risks with such a modern “toy” and preferred the old fashioned and conventional forms of writings; books, plays or magazine instalments. They were unable to see any connection between a modern work of technology and the writing of fiction.

### Eassa's Contribution to Radio Drama

Serious radio drama only started with Eassa when his play ‘The Wheel of Days’ was broadcast in 1940. He is considered a pioneer and a modernist for his courage to break old-fashioned concepts; spotting a connection between modern technology and writing, and for generously giving his talent to radio drama, enriching it with almost 400 pieces which were regarded by critics to be literary masterpieces:

***‘... among the works of Youssef Ezeddin Eassa are episodes that have astounded the radio microphones!’*** Abdul Fatah El Baroudy, Al Akhbar Newspaper, 9/1/76



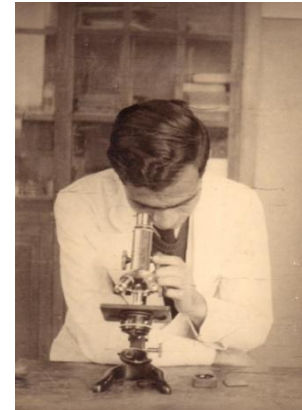
***‘... Dr. Youssef Ezeddin Eassa's writings are characterized by a special flavor, his dialogues bear a dramatic tune, revealing an intellectual background about art and about life.’*** Khairy Shalaby, writer and critic, The Radio & Television Magazine, 17/1/76

***'There would be nobody in the streets from 5:15 pm to 5:30 pm when Youssef Ezeddin Eassa's radio series were broadcast. People worshiped his episodes and stayed home to follow them.'*** Kamal Al Shenawy, prominent Egyptian movie star - Youssef Ezeddin Eassa's Anniversary Celebration at Syrian Club, (recorded), 1/11/ 2000

***'Youssef Ezeddin Eassa was the real master of outstanding ideas. He would just take a few smokes from his pipe and then come up with a masterpiece!'*** Hussien Gomeaa, stage director, Sidi Gaber Seminar, June, 2006.

Eassa's works have influenced many writers and encouraged other writers to write for the radio especially his psychological dramas as we shall find out further on.

Analysts have often wondered about Eassa's awesome energy; having practiced his talent in so many fields with great efficiency. Eassa, who broke the stereo type rules in novel, short stories, plays and founded a new school of writing style; who wrote over a hundred articles other than his analytical essays; who regularly attended cultural activities; who was an amazingly dedicated and highly esteemed professor of science; who encouraged art and cultural activities at university; he who did all that has also managed to create such a revolution in radio drama and be so prominent in that field and to lavish it with almost 400 episodes of original work. It is not only the amount of what he wrote that gave him the pioneering title, but it was more the quality and depth of his work besides the impact it left on people; most of it is unforgettable and is now considered as 'classics', still broadcast up to this present day, and followed by audiences throughout the Middle East with great admiration.



Like Eassa's published literary works, his dramas also had an immense fertility of imagination and he created a merge between fantasy, dreams, and our modern world of science to depict life in a very global outlook, touching every person regardless of their nationality, race or religion.

When Eassa wrote, he had new and unconventional ideas. He cared very much about the theme of the drama, and he touched depths by introducing a modern form of psychology and character-analysis to dramas. Such works had a profound influence on people who came to see matters of life from a different angle.

## **Eassa's Vision of Modern Drama**

Youssef Ezeddin Eassa was not a gambler when he invested his talent in the risky new-born radio invention. He was merely a modernist who saw a connection between art and science. The radio, he believed it to be, an awesome modern tool that would help create what he called, 'The Modern Theatre'.

There were other writers for the radio who started producing dramas during the late forties or perhaps a little earlier. Most of what they wrote though, was either traditional romance or detective drama; stuff for sheer entertainment. Some works were adaptations of famous fiction and sometimes stories were

taken from the old folklore. Those writers were not always the authors of the work, but merely script-writers of somebody else's idea. Eassa did not believe in that kind of writing to be The Modern Stage which he had in mind. According to him, the drama had to be written especially for the radio with all its details. The drama writer, he believed, is not a script writer; neither is he an author who would sell his story to a director asking him to find a script-writer to get the job done. The real radio drama writer, according to Eassa, is supposed to be master of the whole thing; not any different from a play writer, like for example Arthur Miller, Bernard Shaw or Becket, who wrote their work especially for the theatre - Miller actually wrote works especially for the radio too. The radio drama writer, Eassa believed, should be writing his ideas in radio drama form, together with all the stage directions, just as a theatre writer writes his plays especially for the stage. As a matter of fact, Eassa is almost the only Middle East writer who wrote every tiny detail in his dramas for the radio and he put very original and deep ideas in his themes that great critics said were unsurpassed. Moreover, he was granted a prestigious literary state prize for *'elevating the writings of radio drama to an elite form of literature....'* - Egyptian VIP Encyclopaedia. He did that because he took radio drama seriously; because he saw no contradiction between a scientific invention and a real work of art. ***'On the contrary'***, he said in a number of interviews, ***'Science makes art so much deeper and art makes science more interesting and a lot easier to understand.'*** Modern technology, he believed, is a means of spreading great works of art in a more advanced way to a greater number of audiences. Eassa created The Modern Stage and it took great courage to break old concepts and understandings to do so. ***'If Shakespeare were alive today'***, he said, ***'he would have written his works for the radio ...'*** The Radio and Television Magazine, 20-4-1997.

## The Spirit of Work

Eassa was always part of the drama team. He attended every single rehearsal even after he had moved to Alexandria. He would travel all the way to Cairo especially for that purpose, and he wrote every bit of stage direction; the background music and noises, voices growing fainter, getting louder, footsteps approaching... etc.; used the word 'music' as a stage writer would have used the word 'curtains'.

There were no special radio drama music composers back then, so Eassa selected his background or break-music from classical pieces; he would choose a particular tune and would select very specific musical lines that he felt would go with the meaning of the scene.



Eassa also created a teamwork spirit with the cast, encouraged actors by talking to them all about the drama and how much everybody's particular role meant for the whole work. At times he would act one of the parts himself in front of the actors to show them how he wanted certain lines to be acted and how specific words were to be pronounced. The cast usually enjoyed such moments and considered that very interesting and inspiring. His presence during rehearsals always aroused so much spirit in the actors; made them feel very involved in the work as a whole and were encouraged to be at their best and they actually excelled at their roles. In a recent television interview, in 1999, actress Karima Mokhtar, who starred his 31 episode famous drama *'Bitter Honey'* back in 1958, recalled her experience

with Eassa very well, saying: ***‘He would give us talks about the work so we would actually feel we lived the roles we were acting ... we were lucky to have people like him and we enjoyed playing our roles’***  
TV Program, ‘The Cultural Salon’, Channel 3, 1-11-1999.

Eassa continued to write for the radio until the mid and late seventies; together with escalating in his university career as a zoologist, and also producing other forms of very original writings; novels, short stories, stage plays and articles in weekly columns. He had an amazing energy and it was and still often wondered at how he ever found the time to perfect all such things together with his university career. Instead of resting, Eassa gave all his spare time to writing; he did not get enough sleep at night, believing that sleep was a waste of time. As much as he enjoyed his writing career, he also did his scientific duties with love and dedication.

## The Beginning

Eassa’s writing career for the Radio started as a coincidence (see Biography). Back then, in the 1930s, he was a young student at the Faculty of Science, taking part in all university cultural activities; already writing poetry, plays and short stories just for the joy of writing; he had never actually considered the idea of becoming a famous writer.

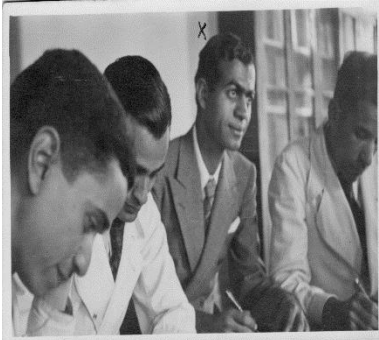


Moreover, he took part in acting on the university stage, directed plays and was fond of playing his violin, sometimes in the lab and composing his own melodies. His writings were highly admired by his colleagues and professors and his plays were actually performed in the Cairo University Theatre, and published in the University Magazine along with his short stories, poems and sometimes even his jokes. When the famous Mohamad Fatehy - Head of the Radio Station - happened by accident to read Eassa’s play “The Wheel of Days” which was performed on the university stage in 1935, and published in the University Magazine in 1940, he was actually fascinated by the novelty of the idea. He was also amazed at how such a very deep theme was handled by Eassa as an amusing short comedy, yet bearing philosophical and noble meanings. The play was radio broadcast in 1940 with Eassa’s permission, just the way it had been written at first.



It was written in colloquial dialect, and back then there were no professional radio drama actors. Dramas were acted by people from the Opera House, or by some radio announcers who had a love for acting, sometimes interested post graduates of the English Department in Cairo. Among those were Hafez Abdul Wahab, a radio announcer and later Head of the Alexandria Radio Station; Abdul Hamid Yunis, a famous radio announcer then as well, who afterwards became an analyst and a writer. Later they were joined by Safeya Al Mohandes, one of the first female announcers for the radio in Egypt and later a leading radio anchor. Mohamad Fatehy, who was a graduate of the English Literature Department himself and no doubt had a tremendous taste for art, did the drama-

directing and sometimes took part in the acting when necessary. Radio drama actually started as a team of interested people from different places; they all had one thing in common, and that was their belief in drama and the idea of presenting it through the newly introduced invention called 'radio'.



Eassa's *'THE WHEEL OF DAYS'* was a big success. It was not just an entertaining drama; it was a piece of literature; its idea was non-conventional, original and highly symbolic, written in a very fluent style and has influenced many writers of various genres who used the idea in later years as an adaptation of Eassa's and it is just as modern today as it had been back in 1935 when it was written for the university stage.

It is significant to note that back then Eassa had not ever listened to any radio dramas himself; the whole 'radio' thing was new to him just as it was to the public. He was not imitating anybody, nor had he travelled anywhere by then, neither had he known anything about the writing techniques for the radio. This is actually one of the outstanding things about Eassa; his talent was very spontaneous and strong and he had a great ability to imagine the needs of audiences who learn about a story through listening. He knew how to grab people and make them actually sit next to the radio and visualize every bit of what they hear.

Moreover, it should be noted that Eassa always rejected writing any kind of work that seemed similar to any idea he had read, or seen, or even heard about. He was only motivated to write when he felt that the idea was completely new, and he was always proud of being himself. Mohamad Fatehy believed Eassa had a very special gift; that he had the ability to create ideas out of nothing and that he had a talent for imagination.

Amongst Mohamad Fatehy's quoted sayings about the dramas of Youssef Ezeddin Eassa is: ***'The works of Youssef Ezeddin Eassa are pieces of outstanding quality, and nothing that has ever been written for radio drama compares to what he writes. They're characterized by an originality of ideas and a variability of themes. There is a beauty in their structure; they are unique and highly creative.'*** Mohamad Fatehy, 'The Radio Magazine', 1948, quoted by announcer A. Abdul Rashid, radio 3<sup>rd</sup> program, 'With Writers', 4/16/1983



Mohamad Fatehy, kept asking Eassa for more radio dramas, encouraging this young man to write for that field. Eassa, a young man back then, naturally was happy with such encouragements and he actually put a great deal of his energy, his visions as a thinker into such dramas. Such writings gave him immense pleasure although he went through great trouble to find the time to write, being a young scholar of science who had his MA and PhD ahead of him together with a university career of zoology. His life was a marriage between art and science.

The pay for his writings was little, as the radio corporation was still new and most of its people worked because they enjoyed and encouraged such work. He actually paid for his many trips to Cairo after he had settled in Alexandria, so he really was not making money from his writings. Eassa's only motive for writing was enjoying to do so, besides the fact that he had found writing for that field of radio drama to be greatly challenging; **'... writing for the radio', he said, 'is much more difficult than any other form of writing... it requires more imagination, for the writer has to bear in mind that the audience can neither see nor read and is totally depending on dialogue to follow the events of the play. It yet makes writing for that field more challenging....'** From Radio Program, "Invitation for Al Sohour", 25-5-1985, Al Barnammeg Al Aam Channel

Eassa was actually making a tremendous change in society with his writings; a change of which he was not aware of back then. He was including radio drama as a new form of literature that can play the same role of books and theatre. He was giving birth to a new form of writing by simply putting his talent into it, he was going into people's homes with his intellect and insight; making a difference in people's understanding and indirectly modernizing old fashioned and primitive concepts. He was changing a stereo typed ideology and elevating the radio dramas to be on equal footing with published forms of writing.

**"The Radio is like a mirror" said Eassa, '...it either shows the beauty or the ugliness of whatever stands in front of it. It is a means of displaying whatever we wish to display; it is no different from books ... books could be displaying either valuable contents or cheap ones. The case is the same with radio drama.** (Same former reference)

The radio authorities saw in Eassa, with his original and global ideas, a means of creating the modern intellectual radio audience and he was to be their man who would break into that field. Therefore, they tried very hard not to get him drawn away into book-form writings; they needed writers like him for radio drama. They gave him no break, and continuously asked him for more work, even after he had chosen to leave Cairo for Alexandria; it was always the Cairo main radio station that pursued him. On the other hand Eassa saw radio to be an even more intellectual means of receiving art than the theatre, for it is only in radio drama that the text becomes the real 'hero' of the work.

Among Eassa's most famous quotes is; **"... Our modern age has created radio, a great invention and is the best means of communicating great works of art to people. It is even better than theatre drama, because a play could either fail or hit for matters other than the dramatic content, like the beauty or popularity of an actress or actor for example; the grandness or ugliness of stage scenery, according to the different tastes of the audiences. On the other hand, the real hero in a radio drama is the story and nothing else. The listener imagines his own stage, scenery and characters according to his own tastes of beauty. Radio drama derives its success from its content and nothing else. It depends upon the core of work"** (Same former reference)

As previously mentioned, few writers back then would consider writing for the radio, believing that writing something that would be alive only during the short period of its broadcast was not worthwhile. However, they were wrong because good work is bound to break the rules; most of Eassa's works were kept in archives and considered classics and they are still broadcast up till now; their dialogues are studied at The Drama Institute as best written scripts. He was also able to give radio writings a fine cultural prestige as both, a classical and a modern form of literary writings.



Youssef Ezeddin Eassa was the only Egyptian to be granted The State Prize of Letters for his radio and television dramas; that was in 1974. The High State Prize Authorities declared that Eassa was awarded the Prize for **“... elevating the standard of radio drama to an elite form of literary writing.”** Eassa has also obtained another High Literary State Award, the highest award in Egypt, in 1986 for his published works.

As much as radio drama as an elite literary form started with him, it kind of ended with him. Naturally, there were other writers later who wrote some beautiful radio pieces, like the poet Taher Abou Fasha, for example who started long after Eassa had. Abou Fasha wrote 'The Arabian Nights' for the radio and continued to do so for many years in the sixties for the month of Ramadan. Never has 'The Arabian Nights' been handled more beautifully, with stories which he had written himself in alliteration, maintaining the old atmosphere of the original story. However, the original idea of the Arabian Nights remains to be borrowed from the Old Persian folklore and although he wrote other dramas for the radio, yet The Arabian Nights was Taher Abu Fasha's one big drama hit, the rest merely entertaining pieces that did not live to be famous. Later in the eighties, names like Wahid Hamed actually did some very well-written radio dramas, yet were still light episodes of action, love and comedy, mostly to entertain people during the month of Ramadan in particular; then he then shifted to television drama and later wrote some movie scripts. However, those writers are considered Eassa's students, who found the radio to be worth writing for. They yet did not continue to write other radio dramas and did not provide more variability of themes, perhaps because they did not actually see the Modern Theatre the way Eassa did. Actually no other writer was able to offer the radio dramas the depth and prestige Eassa had given it, besides providing it with generous amounts of unforgettable pieces of work.

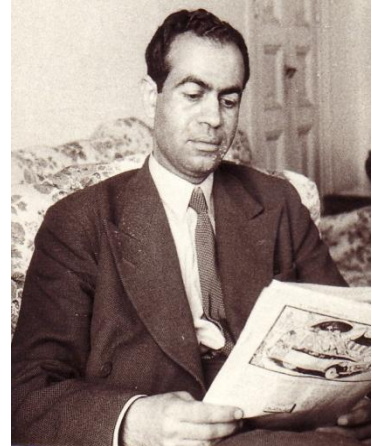
It is interesting to know that Eassa did not make drafts; he wrote spontaneously and usually in a hurry. He almost always had the theme, with all its details, ready in his head; writing it down took so little time. He sent his scripts in his own handwriting which was always very clear. He made only one copy in pencil

at first, with very little corrections, then wrote another copy in pen ready to get published or sent to the radio. In his writings, he was never interested in irrelevant details; every word was right in place, not a single word could be omitted; but every word had a significant part in the work as a whole. Nothing was written to either make the work longer or shorter; the whole structure was very well balanced. There was perfect harmony in his work, just as if he were writing musical notes. It is very difficult to believe that he actually wrote them so quickly and at the same time producing pieces of such perfect work.

## Some Examples of Eassa's Early Radio Dramas

Early radio dramas were not serial episodes, but, like 'Wheel of Days', they were just one drama episode for an evening entertainment, very much like going to the theatre. They were usually broadcast on Thursdays or Fridays as a weekend treat. It was much later, in 1955, that serial drama was introduced when he wrote 'Enemy of Mankind' in thirty three episodes.

Eassa always had something new that he wished to express and it was usually deep; his drama writing was a work of literature of high standard written especially for the radio. However, Eassa's deep themes were also rich with a fluffy magical style that made his works thrilling and entertaining as much as meaningful and deep. The selections below show such depth and beauty as much as his variability of ideas; he never liked to repeat the same theme twice.



Among his most famous single episodes that were broadcast during the forties "The World of Donkeys". The story was revolutionary back in the early forties, (it is very significant to remember the date; how early he had written such an idea which was back then the first of its kind) highly imaginative and written in symbols with a touch of science fiction. Eassa is also considered to be a leading figure in the art of 'Arabic Science Fiction'. However, his kind of science fiction was '*a new form of world fiction ...*' according to Science Fiction Critic, Dr. Youssef Al Sharouni, '**it's even more than the traditional Science Fiction. There's an element of philosophy; it's closer to Philosophical Fiction**'. From book, 'Science Fiction in the Arab World', 2002. Moreover, it was and still is not usual for animals to be heroes and appear in symbols in Arabic adult fiction. There was of course the children's book 'Kalila wa Demna' with animals as heroes, but it is Persian and not Arabic and animals were used for other reasons. In Eassa's story, it is through the 'donkeys' that he indirectly criticizes the psychology of humans; portraying human viciousness and false pride that would eventually lead to a comically tragic downfall.



During the same time that Eassa had written 'World of Donkeys', he published a short story called 'Butterfly Dreaming'. Mohamad Fatehy wished to take the story for radio drama despite the fact that it had not been written in drama form, saying: ***'Eassa prefers to uses dialogues in the story to be completely objective. I can use it as a radio drama without having to change a thing!'*** Eassa really had the ability to absolutely disappear from the narrative as a writer; he preferred to render rather than to state. It was broadcast, 1943. In 'Butterfly Dreaming' we see Eassa's love for peace on earth. He shows man through another creature; through the eyes of 'the other' represented by the animals. The wonderful achievements of man are seen from a different angle; Eassa is sarcastic and he uses his imagination together with science, dreams and symbols. It would also be interesting to know that when Eassa wrote 'Butterfly Dreaming', he was working on his M.A. and his thesis was about 'Butterflies'. He



was also writing beautiful songs for the radio about butterflies; his favourite characters in poetry. There was a conflict inside him between the artist and the scientist. Is he the man in the story who walks into the animal kingdom, catching its beautiful butterflies to dissect them for the sake of knowledge? Fond as he was of knowledge and learning, he could not help but wonder whether the knowledge that had created guns and bombs for terminating the lives of mankind, was worth killing the graceful butterfly. The story was also written during the start of World War Two and it naturally shows how Eassa felt about the idea of war. As a man of a peace and anti-violence, the idea of man killing man was something that he could never understand, with all his insight and philosophy.



Another drama of Eassa written during the forties was, 'Lovers of Fantasy'.

It is through fantasy that Eassa shows us how ugly our world could become, if we live without ever hoping that our dreams would come true. It is only through the cruelty of mankind that dreams fail to happen.



'Violet Rays' written in the early forties is highly symbolic and imaginative with touches of science fiction or as analyst Richard Woffenden in *Middle East Times* called it, ***'science friction'***. The play displays the weaknesses in the human nature; wrong choices that are the result of unfair and perhaps unkind evaluations, based on superficial matters, leaving out the core. It is actually about life and choices; love is only used as a symbol.

'Why Winter Never Came' is even a more imaginative and symbolic story, written during the same period, but it deals with a different theme. The heroes are quite strange; they are not human beings neither are they animals..

'Why Winter Never Came' reflects Eassa's sense of humour together with his belief in peace as he actually imagines the four seasons sitting together. . They are given a human touch as they appear personified. We see a perfect world where there is a wonderful connection between nature and man.

In Eassa's 'The Poor Lilly, there is a great deal of character- analysis The Lilly and her feelings; the jealousy of her surroundings, are all used as a symbol to illustrate an idea that we do see appearing a lot in Eassa's work. The idea of the artist who lives and dies in a community that does not appreciate the beauty of his art. Such an idea that he wrote in the forties is also still there in his last short story, 'The Grand Hall', no doubt handled very differently, about the man who deserves the Grand Award but never finds his way to the Grand Hall where the ceremony is to be held. The jealousy of those who are less in rank try to take his place by misleading his path so he would never find The Grand Hall.

As previously mentioned, during the 1940s and onwards, up to mid 1950s, radio dramas were written as a single episode drama. The serial-form was not known yet in the Middle-East. Such pieces were usually broadcast on Thursday or Friday nights as a weekend treat. Youssef Ezeddin wrote so many single episode beautiful dramas during that period, variable in themes, yet all had one thing in common; a daring new idea with imagination, symbol to tackle reality. He is also credited for being the first writer to introduce a new form of science fiction to the Arabic Literature, which was to be later referred to by science fiction critic, Youssef El Sharouny as '**... a more profound kind of Science fiction**', TV program, The Host, 29-9-2003, and amazingly he was doing so through the radio.

Eassa spontaneously understood that in radio drama he would be addressing people of all different sectors and classes, and that his works should be understood on different levels. He had the ability to maintain a perfect balance between the depths he touched and the very grabbing simplicity of style, and beauty of approach. Therefore, his works were highly admired by people starting from the average layman, up to the most selective intellectual audience.

Eassa's world of writing had a tremendous effect upon society. His dramas made people more



meditative and reflective. Matters of daily life that had been taken for granted before, were looked upon with a different eye. Radio was practically an everyday thing inside everybody's home, so life was beginning to be seen from a new perspective and perhaps that was why his works still live on. He managed to enrich the receiver indirectly with new meanings that had a role in broadening mentalities and creating a more creative society, by giving life, touches of art. In his world, art and life actually became one thing. However, back then, Eassa's works were more famous than his name; people still were more

interested in hearing drama than finding out about who had written it. It was not before the fifties, when people found out that most of the dramas that had a special flavour were written by Youssef Ezeddin Eassa and were surprised to know that he had a scientific career together with writing.



By the late-forties radio was 'King of the Media' and radio drama had already become a well-established form. Famous movie stars were then beginning to seek roles for radio drama and there were professional and prominent Drama directors by then who came back to Egypt after studying in Europe.

The first professional radio director to direct Eassa's works was Al Sayed Bedeir - one of Egypt's eminent directors and drama pioneers, later Head of drama directors in the main Egyptian radio station. The drama was 'The Weeping Geniuses', which starred Faten Hamama - very famous Egyptian movie-star - sometime in the mid 1940s. Faten Hamama later married famous Movie Star, Omar Al Sherif.

The play is about a genius in the writing field. He is such a great genius; way beyond his time in thought, and so, people fail to recognize his genius. He dies young, poor and unrecognized. Two Hundred years later, people begin to figure out his amazing talent and they build him a statue in the main square. A young girl falls in love with this wonderful writer and figure who is no longer alive. She refuses to marry, because nobody's character compares to that of his very great figure. She dies young and she and the genius meet in the other world where all the dead are gathered. There, she recognizes him at once, and tells him how famous and appreciated he has become. Listening to her, the genius weeps with joy and sorrow; joy for the recognition and appreciation that finally happens and sorrow for his geniuses that had only brought him suffering during his lifetime.

It is interesting to know that Eassa recalled his meeting with Movie Star, Faten Hamama who starred the drama, during their first rehearsal. She told him that she loved the play because the theme was original and very meaningful. He asked her opinion about the story being considered for movie-making. After some thought Faten Hamama said, **'No, I don't think it would be fit for the cinema'. 'Well why not?'** asked Eassa. **'The idea', she said, 'is too good for movie goers; they probably wouldn't understand it and then, you would be the genius who'd be weeping!'** Cairo Main Radio Station Studio, 1946, narrated by Eassa in his series of articles, 'With Thought and Imagination', Al Ahram, 1978.

What is significant about Faten Hamama's words is that she was actually confirming that Eassa's radio drama is a much more elevated form of writing; hinting that movie goers are more interested in mass culture while the radio audiences are of a much finer level; more appreciative for literary works. Faten Hamama has always been credited for her reason, good judgement together with her greatness as an actress who remains to be a great star up to this present day.

In 1943, Youssef Ezeddin Eassa was already living in Alexandria where he had met artist Salah Taher, who was later to be a very famous world artist. Today, some of his paintings hang in the White House. A strong friendship grew between him and Eassa and one day Taher wanted to make a painting of Eassa's portrait. In a few days the painting was finished and Eassa took the tram home placing the wrapped painting on his lap. He noticed then that a tramway conductor kept going back and forth with his eye on *the* painting. Eassa simply asked him if he would like to see it. Eagerly the tramway man welcomed the idea and after Eassa unwrapped the painting, the tramway conductor's face lit up as he went on admiring and analysing the painting like *an* art critic. He told



Eassa, *'I'm an artist sir, but my misfortunate destiny has made me a tramway conductor.'* Touched by the man's story, the idea of Sikosita was already being composed in Eassa's head on the spur or the moment. (*right is the painting that has inspired Sikosita, Eassa in his university robe.*)

The title, 'Sikosita' is an imaginary name to an imaginary country imagined by Eassa. 'Sikosita' is actually a masterpiece, written in the 1943 and radio broadcast in 1946, but is pretty much about the modern time in which we live today. Critics and readers have often expressed their astonishment at the fact that the story had been written in the forties. 'Sikosita' was a stroke of genius and Eassa knew that.

'Sikosita' was directed by Al Sayed Bedir, and it was among a number of Eassa's works that had been stolen by other writers a number of times, but Eassa managed to protect it from such vicious attacks.

Eassa wrote 'Sikosita' in later years for the stage, then as a short story and it actually fitted perfectly in every form of writing. However, the 'Sikosita' we have today is the short story form. The story, is actually a reality that is told in Eassa's famous dream and fantasy symbolic style.

Eassa wrote so many more radio drama episodes during the forties and fifties; the above mentioned works are only very few examples. His style during that period proved how far imagination can be the best and most accurate means of expressing and for seeing reality. It gave the meaning of 'realism' a completely different understanding. **'Reality'**, he often said, ***'is the reality of the content and not of the event.'***

## **Youssef Ezeddin Eassa's Poems Selected as Songs for the Radio**

It was also during the 1940s that Eassa's poems were selected by the Radio Corporation to be sung by famous singers of the time, among them was Abdul Halim Hafez's – very famous and popular singer - first famous song, "Al Koronfel" or "Carnations", written in colloquial Arabic, its music composed by Ali Farag - a leading composer of the time.

Al Koronfel is still listened to with great admiration today. Makram Honein, Egyptian Painter and one of Editors in Chief of Al Ahram Newspaper then, said: ***'It's really amazing how Youssef Ezeddin Eassa wrote his lyric 'Carnation'. It is through his talent that he makes a little thing like a carnation seem to be as awesome as the highest mountain in the world!'*** TV program, 'The Cultural Salon', 13-11-2003, Channel Two.

Al Koronfel is the only existing song, but it is not the only song that Eassa wrote. He actually wrote for the radio a big number of songs and they were all sung and composed by famous names but sometime after the revolution 1952, so much of the songs were erased from the radio because discs were re-used for economical purposes. Most of the old songs that remained were parts of movies. Al Koronfel happened to survive because it was among Abdul Halim Hafez's belongings on his private disc, found after his death. Eassa also wrote 'After Sunset', an operetta for the radio upon Mohamad Fatehy's request which was highly admired by great music analysts of the time.



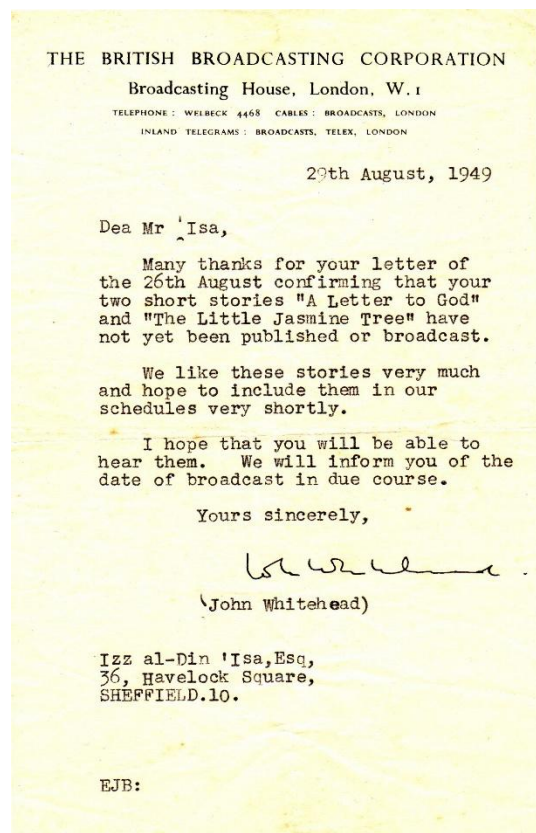
Back then, Eassa did not have a recorder so he only listened to his work without keeping recordings. It was only after 1955 that he had his own recorder and was able to record his dramas. The home-recording system was still primitive, though. He had to put the radio next to the recorder and then press 'microphone'. The sound naturally was not as clear as recordings are today; besides any kind of background noise at home could be recorded as well. However all the recordings he was able to record on such old tapes are still there in his living room and occupy a whole shelf in his library and could still be heard on his recorder.

## Writing for Children

In 1942, Eassa was asked by director Mohamad Mahmoud Shaaban to write something for children. In answer to his request, Eassa wrote a huge amount of works under the title, "Crystal, the Magical Princess" or "Bannora, Al Amira Al Masahoura". It was a weekly story that had one heroin, 'Crystal', and each story was a single episode about one of her adventures. It was a tale of fantasy that bridged fiction and simplified sciences, giving children a very indirect but rich background of general knowledge together with a lot of child entertainment. With those episodes, he was the only Egyptian writer - perhaps the only Arab as well - who was not specialized in child fiction but yet contributed to this field and managed to create a child modern culture and learning through fun, using the radio as his tool.

## England, Writing for the BBC

In 1948, Youssef Ezeddin Eassa went to England, Sheffield University for his Zoology PH.D., where he stayed for three years. During his stay there, he wrote a number of radio dramas and short stories for the BBC Third Program. Among such works are, "A Letter to God" and "The Little Jasmine Tree". They were read out in narrative-form and the dialogue parts were acted. There were also BBC single piece-dramas like his later very famous drama, "In a Drop of Water", which he had actually started writing in 1947, before going to England. He also wrote "This World", "The Republic of the Idiots", 'Man in Ice', and others. His works were highly acclaimed in England and the BBC always sent him a 'Thank You' letter, to show their appreciation for his talent.



## Back to Egypt, 1951

Back to Egypt in the early fifties, after obtaining his PH.D in zoology, he was again pursued by radio authorities to write more dramas for the Egyptian radio. The fifties was even a richer period for Eassa's radio dramas. His writings flowed in tens and twenties and he introduced the psychological drama, the philosophical drama, the historical drama and many other forms that inspired many writers to follow his footsteps. Although he had wanted to stop writing for the radio then, and to focus on book form, he was continuously contacted by the people from the Cairo Radio Corporation who came to Alexandria especially to convince him to write for the radio. As a person, Eassa was a generous host and he never turned down anybody who came to his home just for that purpose. Therefore, he continued to pour out enormous amounts of his talent for radio drama, creating one masterpiece after another.

## Serial Dramas, Their Making and Their Effect Upon Society

In 1955, Youssef Ezeddin Eassa wrote the first episode in serial-form in Egypt and the Middle East, when Al Sayed Bedir asked him to write something that would start at the beginning of the month and to be continued in daily episodes until the end of the same month. It had to be very interesting so people would be motivated to continue to follow it every day. Eassa said he would try and think of something. Actually the minute he stepped outside the Radio Station building, he saw the moon- crescent in the sky, and immediately the idea of the new drama was composed inside his head. It was to be called 'Enemy of Mankind'. (Right, Eassa with cast revising script)



'Enemy of Mankind' was a fabulous hit which fascinated people to the full and the name Youssef Ezeddin Eassa then became **'the most famous name in the writing field'**. Ismail Al Sheikhha, *Radio & TV. Dramas PH.D discussion, 1-10-2003*. The drama was in 34 episodes, daily broadcast from 5.15 to 5.30 pm. A lot had been said about the 15 minutes of its broadcast; perhaps the quotation of stage director, Prof. Hussein Gomeaa, summarizes what was and is still mostly said about it:

***"Youssef Ezeddin Eassa is guilty of the crime of bringing the country to a standstill during the time of Enemy of Mankind's broadcast. Streets would be empty and motion would stop. The Movie-shows, from three to six p.m. had to close because there were no audiences, for the show coincided with the time of Enemy of Mankind's; people were all at home listening to Eassa's drama.."***

*"Jedda Literary Cultural Club, 15-3-1986."*

'Enemy of Mankind' was based on psychology. It was the first work of art in the Middle East to use psycho analysis and Eassa's style of handling psychology was new; very different from any other world writers who had touched that field. ***'.. Eassa has touched depths in the human nature and has***

***uncovered all its drifts and strives that have bewildered those who have dedicated their lives to the study of psychology.'***

*Prof. Helmy Salam, Editor of 'Al Fagr' magazine, 'Al Fagr', 27/7/75*

The story, written back then, pioneers in its sympathetic scientific analysis. It looks with an eye of mercy towards people whom society has always been shrinking from and unfairly stamping them as cold-blooded without finding out the reason behind their behavior. There is an attempt at understanding causes behind human violence, and the excellent psycho analysis presented in the story, portrays Eassa's own understanding towards man. As a person, Eassa, who had survived World War 2, was a man of peace and always found violence to be shocking and cruel. He was never able to understand the logic behind war; the idea of man killing his own kind was too mean. It was not only peace between countries that he cared about but also the inner peace that exists inside man towards his fellow men. He never gave up on the good in man; he believed that understanding where anger comes from is the key to creating social and world peace.



Listening to the story, people were unconsciously shrinking from their own cruelties as a society, beginning to look at one another as human beings. Moreover, the psychological analysis in the story gave the science of psychology a charming appeal and it did change so much about people's previous knowledge and beliefs about this field which had been regarded as madness. 'Enemy of Mankind' influenced so many works later on; psycho analysis became very fashionable in radio and television drama, fiction as well.

Requests came in dozens for Youssef Ezeddin Eassa to write other one-month serials. He wrote a number of beautiful serial dramas then; all are still very much remembered and re-broadcast as 'Radio-Masterpieces' until today. "The Wandering Mamlouk" or "Al Mamlouk Al Shared", 1956; "Storms" 1957; "Bitter Honey" 1958; "The Missing Day" 1960; which was written in 180 episodes. Much later then in 1973 was, 'Blame Not Autumn'. All such episodes were daily broadcast at 5.15, and again they continued to empty streets for a quarter of an hour and even simple laymen who had no radios at home would gather at cafes just to listen to the Eassa episodes on the café radio.

Eassa still attended every single rehearsal, wrote every tiny detail in his dramas, and travelled all the way to Cairo to submit his work by hand. He would be giving the director the first ten episodes, attending rehearsals while he would still be writing the rest of the episodes at the same time. He normally wrote at night, kept on working until dawn, giving him just enough time to catch the early morning train and rush to the Cairo Radio Station.



At the same time he was the very committed and dedicated zoology professor at the university who researched, supervised research, prepared his lectures with great interest, together with encouraging cultural and creative activities at university and happily spending time with his students who adored him. He actually played a vital role in creating a solid university cultural life. *(Above, Eassa – seated far back laughing with his students during rehearsal)*

He was also an intellect who attended art and cultural events, gave and attended talks. Moreover, he was Head of the Fiction Club, Editor of a number of cultural magazines and encouraged young people by writing about their work. It is amazing to really try to imagine how Eassa made the time for all that with pleasure and great interest, together of course with his writing career in book form.

“The Wandering Mamluk”, 1956, was a historical drama commissioned by the Minister of Culture, Tharwat Okasha back then.

The Minister of Culture was very fond of the Goergie Zidan story and wanted Eassa to write it for the radio. But Eassa did not wish to write a drama that had been previously tackled by another writer in book form. Moreover, Eassa was not interested in writing historical novels of that kind; he preferred to create new ideas out of his own imagination but the Minister of Culture insisted upon his request. Eassa, therefore, said that if he were to write the story, he would be writing a very different version with completely different events except for the historical facts, and the Minister was happy with the idea.



The drama starred very famous and popular movie stars then; Ahmad Mazhar, Samiha Ayoub, Amina Rizk, and was directed by Anwar Al Meshry; one very famous director and pioneer in radio drama.

Eassa’s drama hits continued. ‘Storms’ or ‘Awasef’, was the name of the following serial, 1957. A story of character where every single person in the story is deeply analyzed, portraying the different sides of human nature.

‘Storms’ was about the storms that exist inside the human mind, when the subconscious can no longer store more agonies. The storm inside one’s mind then grows wilder and results in a mental collapse which takes different forms according to every man’s capacity. **“The cruelest of all storms”** said Eassa, **“is that which lies within the soul.”** *(Above is an article announcing the coming of ‘Storms’ . Up is director Mohamad Tawfik, below are Movie Stars Kamal El Shenawy & Abbas Fares).*

Although there is never any melodrama in Eassa’s works, ‘Storms’ was yet a very moving drama; Eassa even once admitted that he was in tears a number of times, while he





was writing some of its events. The moving scenes come gently with no exaggeration whatsoever, and perhaps that is why they touch people even more today. It was recalled by a critic who once phoned Eassa, during the time when storms was being broadcast asking if he could come by and re-listen to the recording of a particular part of 'Storms'. Eassa received him of course, with his usual hospitality. They had tea together, and then they sat and listened to the part which the critic had wished to hear.



*'Tears,'* said the critic, *'shone in Eassa's eyes'.* *'It seems,'* said Eassa, *'that I was cruel on Soheir...'* Touched, the critic wrote an article about that event under the title, 'Was Cruel on Sohier, but Wept for Her!'

The drama-script of 'Storms' is still studied up till now at the Egyptian Drama Institute as a perfect example of drama dialogue.

One of the interesting things about 'Storms' that shows how much Eassa's dramas had touched people, was something narrated by his wife, 'Soaad' on a TV program sometime after his passing away. It was a phone call that Eassa received after the thirty one episodes had been broadcast. It was a call from somebody who wished to see him in person and so Eassa invited him over for tea. Eassa and his wife received their guest; a young and pleasant man who told them why he wanted to come and meet Eassa: he had also been hearing voices just like the heroin, but he said that after hearing the whole 31 episodes with all the wonderful therapy, he was cured and he stopped hearing those voices that had been haunting him. He had come all the way from Asyout (south of Egypt) to thank Eassa in person for writing 'Storms'. *Narrated by Mrs. Eassa, TV program, 'From The History of the Nation', 29-11- 1999, channel 5*



'Storms' starred Egypt's most famous movie star Kamal Al Shenawi, Ihsan El Kalaawy who beautifully played Soheir, Abbas Fares who mastered at the father's role. Storms was directed by Mohamad Tawfik; a giant name in the directing career of radio drama - **PH.D** from England - who directed many of Eassa's dramas during the fifties and later became a movie and TV actor.

'Storms' had even a deeper influence upon other writers in different fields 'Storms' was not the last serial hit, other beautiful serial dramas were to follow. In 1958 Eassa wrote what many people consider a legendary masterpiece; 'Bitter Honey' or, 'Al Assal Al Murr' - perhaps the most famous drama ever written. A totally original, idea, very grabbing yet very deep; a drama with very liberal ideologies and political indications, all portrayed in symbols through a very mysterious love story. The story also analyses the real meanings of happiness, tackles the thin line between love and dictatorship and deals

with the idea of 'the other', something that is nowadays looked upon as a modern and significant world theme.

Honey, in the story, is a symbol of happiness. Could happiness be enforced? Eassa tells us a story about how sweet happiness can sometimes have a bitter taste if locked up and sheltered from life in a so called 'perfect world' so that sadness would not come in and spoil it. In the story happiness lives in a closed community, protected by great walls that hide the truth because the truth might coincide with happiness. The walls also hide 'the other' whose existence might also create a threat to the sheltered perfect world. The outside world is described as horrifying, and those who have built the walls believe that part of happiness is to never find out about what lies beyond. The struggle for happiness does not exist because happiness is assumed to be already existing within the perfect world of love and protection.

However, happiness, as Eassa indicates cannot exist without knowing what sadness is all about. Happiness is not in being surrounded by a beautiful life, but it lies in dreaming about accomplishing what one sees as a wish. Man's struggle for happiness in life is the ultimate joy because it is part of man's instinct and also part of man's satisfaction. There is excitement and pleasure in man's strive to find the truth. The strong link between happiness and suffering, freedom as well are presented in the story. Man's freedom cannot and should not be denied, not even for the sake of preventing man from suffering. Moreover, man is drawn to suffering through his love for adventure; man has a strong desire to experience and explore. According to Eassa, the truth should not be banned nor hidden even it sometimes brings pain and suffering because there can be no real happiness without experiencing pain. Depriving man of having moments of sorrow; is like forbidding him to dream and that, Eassa believed to be, the cruelest thing on earth. Dreaming is man's real joy and ***'even if dreams don't come true, it is still a beautiful thing to dream; that is why life goes on despite failures and frustrations. Failures and frustrations only motivate man to continue to dream and hope....'***



The story is a critique of fanaticism, mottos and slogan-brainwashing under the name of care and concern.

The story written in 1957, broadcast 1958, predicted the fall of closed communities one day. Eassa's prediction actually happened when the wall of Berlin fell, in the early nineties. People then did break the wall and went dashing out towards 'the other', all curious as Sawsan was, to be free to explore a life that existed behind a wall; a life they were forbidden to know about.



Eassa was very brave to write such a story back then when so many places in the world and especially in the Middle East were actually closed societies that looked with suspicion towards 'the other' and for that reason truths were untold. The story had other indications though; banning is not only political and social but is also an attitude that exists in people's heads; in conventional mentalities

that believe freedom to be a threat and barriers to be great solutions. Bitter Honey had very liberal and challenging ideas written in a closed community that saw the world from a one-sided angle. 'Bitter Honey' made a wonderful success and great impact and it was understood on different levels according to the receiver's own experience and intelligence.

'Bitter Honey' starred Movie Star, Kamal El Shenawi who played 'Hisham'. Zouzou Madi played the mother; quite a difficult but unforgettable role. The role of 17 year old Sawsan who had never seen a man was played by 'Karima Mokhtar' who had the sweetest voice one could possibly imagine; it was brilliant of the director Mohamad Tawfik to select her for the role. Sawsan's character was captivating, she is, as Eassa describes her in his novel, **'Sawsan only needed a pair of wings to be an angel' from Bitter Honey**. However, the character feels very real and undergoes many developments as the story continues. Talented Mohamad Tawfik, who directed 'Bitter Honey', loved every bit of the drama. It has been said that after reading the first 10 episodes of Bitter Honey, he was speechless, and when he saw Eassa - (narrated by Al Sayed Bedir) – he smiled, fell to his knees and kissed his hands. Later in the early 1960s, when the drama was taken for the television, Tawfik expressed his wish to play the role of Sawsan's father and he actually excelled at the role which required a lot of sensitivity and talent.

The drama enchanted people. Egypt's greatest singer and star Om Kolthum was said to postpone her afternoon rehearsals in order to listen to 'Bitter Honey'. Actress Karima Mokhtar who played Sawsan said: **'the name 'Sawsan' became very popular then, and during the time of its broadcast, most mothers who had baby girls, called them 'Sawsan'**. TV Program, 'The Cultural Salon', Channel 3, 1-11-1999.

It is interesting to know how the idea of 'Bitter Honey' was inspired to Eassa. Later, in a radio program, 'A Visit to Somebody's Library', 1973, Eassa said about it: **'I was invited by a neighbor who was also a colleague to his place for tea; the man lived alone and was happy to have a neighbor for a friendly chat. As I walked into the apartment, I noticed that at the entrance there was a little baby coat hanging on the wall ... Knowing that my colleague had neither a wife nor children, I inquired about the baby coat. My host told me that it belonged to his son. He said that he woke up one morning to find that his wife had left him and taken his son away. The child was a year old then, and he never saw him again.'** When I asked how long had the coat been hanging there, he said: **'For more than five years... I never had the heart to remove it.'** As my guest spoke, the whole story was being composed inside my head with all its details. The story came to my mind as a complete work; I could actually visualize the scenes before writing them... Although there is nothing direct to relate the Bitter Honey to the story of my colleague, it was yet like the spark that comes out when a trigger fires a bullet ... one thing has nothing to do with the other yet one is a result of the other..' 'Pioneers', TV Program 1992 channel 5, '...

The name 'Bitter Honey' has always been considered by critics and audiences to be a very attractive name, bearing two contrasts. As a matter of fact Eassa cared very much about his titles. The title 'Bitter Honey', inspired writers to later use almost similar titles such as 'Bitter Grapes', 'Bitter Sugar', 'Honey and Tears' and so many others in dramas, books and movies.

## Movies

Eassa's radio drama hits continued. During the fifties, together with his serial dramas, he also wrote numerous other radio dramas in non-serial form; just one drama piece for an evening such as "Joy of the Angels", "The Statue", "Us and Destiny", which later was transformed into a movie under the name "A Voice from the Past", in 1955. 'A Voice from the Past' was directed by one of the greatest movie directors, Atef Salem, starring very famous and popular movie stars, Ahmad Ramzey and Iman. Critics said that the real hero of the Movie was the story and it was given the title of 'Best Story in Egyptian Movies'. (Above, 'A Voice from the Past' poster.)



The movie is one of the land marks in the Egyptian movie history, still watched with great admiration. Later, the story unfortunately was taken by different other writers and made into several movies with different scripts and titles. Shamefully none of those writers mentioned that it was based on Eassa's story, and simply attributed the idea to themselves. This very fact however, shows how great an impact Eassa's works had upon writers who treated his work as a legendary source, like evergreen folklore. The idea of the story is very vital for it is still made into modern movies; some of them today are American Movies proving how his works crossed time and place.



*Day of signing contracts, Ahmad Ramzey, Iman and Eassa*

*In photo are stars 'Iman' and 'Ahmad Ramzey' together with Director Atef Salem (in his winter coat). Eassa and his wife on the left.*

Right, magazine announcing 'Voice from the past', Selected as best film..... In picture is Famous Movie Star, 'Iman' who starred the the film. Iman was also credited for her role. Critics said it was her best for she did have a significant and positively dramatic effect upon the hero who is supposed to have had a

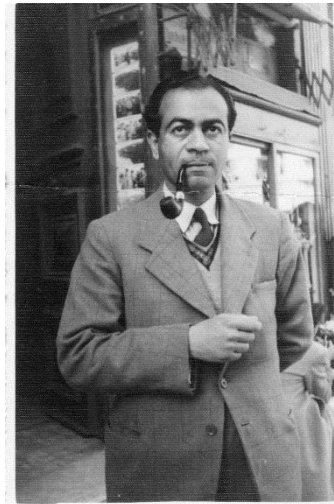


shattered attitude in the story due to a vision which he had seen in childhood. She was not just playing a pretty girl which was the case in most of her movies, but she was a girl with character and presented a modern educated young woman in every meaning of the word. Critics have also said that she even looked her prettiest in 'Voice from the Past'.

## Other Kinds of Dramas,

### 'The Untitled'

During the fifties, Eassa wrote a number of single-episode dramas written in a program-form which was called, "The Untitled". The idea of the program was totally new. There were five famous radio drama directors back then, "Mohamad Tawfik", "Ahmad Kamel Morsy", "Youssef Hattab", "Mahmoud El Sabaa", and "Salah Ezeddin" and they all wanted to direct Eassa's work. The Radio Station manager suggested that Eassa would write one single drama of five acts, once a month. Each of the five directors then would be directing one act in the same drama piece; in other words each single drama would be directed by all five directors. The five directors welcomed the idea as the whole thing would be like a competition between them, and they all really excelled at the part they directed. It was also suggested by Eassa that the story would have no title and listeners would be asked



to suggest a title and to send them to the Radio Station. There would be a winner's name for Best Title chosen, announced the month after, before the new "Untitled" program started. It was a great success; a new form of drama where the audiences were actually taking part by choosing a title. What is very original about "Untitled" was the way Eassa wrote it. The program would start with the listener hearing what seemed to be a casual dialogue between the five directors; talking about the story, pretending to be making it on the spot, saying for example: ***"Oh tonight Eassa has written something very difficult to direct; who's going to do the first act?"***

***"You start it Hattab, and then maybe Morsi would take over. But don't you both leave me in an awkward position!"***

***“Well, I don’t know. It’s hard to start, let me see what I can do, Salah.”***

Then the first act would start, it would go on for about five minutes, then we would hear the directors again, in their casual conversation. One would say:

***- “Hey, what have you done Morsi?! And how on earth would I find my way out of this mess!”***

***- “Well, I don’t know. Perhaps Tawfik can do something.”***

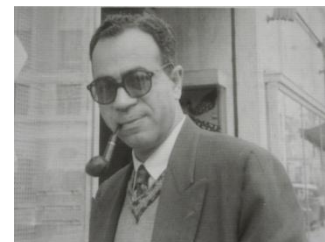
***- “That’s not fair! You create a disaster and then say ‘continue Tawfik’! Well God help me! “***

Then the second act would continue. Directors would stop after every act and argue about events, pretending they didn’t know what was to follow and sometimes Eassa would join in the conversation and pretend to be writing the events on air. Those conversations between directors seemed spontaneous and on the spur of the moment, but actually every single word and expression was written by Eassa, to make it clear which director was directing what act. He also gave it a sense of humour, making it look like the directors were actually in charge of the events of his very own IThe ‘Untitled Program’ was very successful, giving



the directors a chance to act during their dialogue period, besides doing a team work together; all directing one story, once a month. The Untitled dramas were given their titles by the winners, amongst them was; “A Prayer”, “Breaking News”, “A Candle Burning”, “The Peak of Happiness”, “Rules of the Jungle”, “The One Man”.. Etc. The Radio Station was receiving huge amounts of mail from different Arabic Speaking Middle East countries. Amongst the very interesting letters that came was from a Saudi listener after “A Candle Burning” was broadcast. The heroin was called ‘Laila’, who suffers in life. The letter said addressing Eassa: ‘How could you do that to Laila, you ruthless, stone-hearted writer! Tell me where she is and I’m ready to marry her at once...’ Laila was actually a fictitious character out of Eassa’s imagination, symbolizing human grief, but the character seemed so real that one could almost feel she were alive.

In 1960, Eassa wrote his longest series, “The Missing Day” which lasted for three months. It was not only his longest serial drama, but also the longest serial drama on the Egyptian Radio Station.



'The Missing Day' is a social drama that takes place during the World War 2 displaying the suffering caused by war and how people managed to survive through difficult times. The Missing Day is supposed to be the missing day of peace; when wars in the world would cease to exist.

## Television Dramas

In 1961 Eassa, the zoology professor was selected to go to the U.S. for a year as a Fulbright Exchange Professor in Illinois and Berkeley Universities. 'The Missing Day', was broadcast during the time Eassa spent in the United States. Eassa stopped writing for the radio for some time. He was not very pleased with the radio contract-form, which stated that once something is given to the radio, the writer loses all his rights to use it in other forms of writing. He also wished to see his writings in book form, and decided that the radio was taking too much of his time and preventing him from writing other forms of fiction.

He was beginning to feel that the he was deprived of practicing his talent; that his head was being sold against his will. He started to write his first novel, 'The Man who Sold his Head' sometime in 1960, just before going to the United States and after he had finished writing 'The Missing Day'. However, drama was to continue to haunt Eassa, for something happened in 1960. The Television was introduced in Egypt then, and Eassa was asked by the TV Authorities then, who admired his work, to encourage the newly introduced invention with his writings, so Eassa could not turn them down and he gave them, 'The Man who sold his Head', after changing it from novel form into 7 series in television drama-form and that was the first Television Drama to be broadcast in Egypt and the Middle East.

Later, Eassa's radio classics were the first to appear as TV series, and they were directed by brilliant directors and acted by very famous and talented movie stars. 'The Enemy of Mankind' was the first to appear as a ten episode TV Series, and it was a great hit for television drama. Unfortunately it was directed in a special video method that has now become obsolete and for that reason, it is not broadcast anymore. It starred great actors though, like the very famous drama star, Saad Ardash who played the psychiatrist, Hussein Al Sherbini who played the poetic criminal and was directed by the Head of TV Directors then, the brilliant Nour Al Demerdash.

وخرجه مندوبات من ٧٠ دولة بمناسبة  
 السيد .! فال السنولون عن هذا  
 المؤثر ان مستوى الجمال فيه كان  
 اعلى من مستوى الجمال في انتخابات  
 ملكة جمال العالم !

الفتح « قصة الدكتور  
 ستيفن في علم سيخمان  
 جائزة لبطولة القصة  
 !

هد اليكسل ، مدير عام  
 لة للطباعة والنشر ، اتفق  
 يدت على نشر قصة  
 «نا» سلسلة بالقصة  
 مجلة « ارباب اوزيرفر »  
 عن الدار القومية للطباعة  
 مطاط تحتفل اليوم بلوزها  
 ، في الامن العام والنظام  
 خان ، وزير ولاية هونزا  
 في التوير القادم بنصوة  
 لاية .

امين على حياة جميع  
 ليات في مختلف الكليات  
 جمهورية العربية المتحدة ،  
 لعام الدراسي القادم ..  
 طالب ٢٥ قرشا سنويا  
 ل على بوليسمة نامين  
 والاصابات قيمتها الف  
 غ عند الطلبة في جامعاتنا

الثامن للشباب  
 يستغرق نقل مكتبة حقوق حسين  
 شمسي الى مبنى الجديد للكتبة شهرا  
 كاملا .. تعتبر هذه المكتبة من اصخم  
 المكتبات في جامعاتنا .

الفتى نجيب  
 بالاسكندرية من رو  
 صوت ، ومن ابطال  
 والصوت يوضوح  
 التجارب بنجاح كعب  
 اعان مدير معمل  
 في باكستان عن نجاح  
 اجريت لاستقطاب الة  
 حصلت « جوان  
 وهي في الثالثة جم  
 الطلاق بعد ان ثبت  
 التجاوس ، ان زوجها  
 على التردد على مه  
 معه !

الفنان عباس  
 الفاتحة نجمة ابراهيم  
 مسرحية « سر ال  
 في كتاب .. هذه  
 مثلتها فرقة « نجمة  
 بدا « ولهم فوزه  
 الثانية والسبعين  
 من تسيبتهام الى  
 مائة عمل ، على ا  
 بدا يمارس رايته  
 عدة ، هذه ل

فايزة احمد

يوسف عز الدين

فايزة احمد عادت امس من دمشق  
 .. امضت فايزة مع زوجها مطار  
 العايد مدة اسبوع هناك  
 عثرت سفارة ليرينا على مقر لها

الدكتور يوسف عز الدين ، انتهى  
 من كتابة تخطيطه التلفزيونية « الرجل  
 الذي باع راسه » .. سيقوم بمحضور  
 السام باخراجها في نهاية هذا

دو لبرانسور ، ظهر في  
 ا ، جاء به احمد بدرخان  
 بعد حضوره مهورجان  
 ساذ .. ال اذنه في حجر

'Storms' was the next television smash hit. Famous stars played the roles, such as the beautiful Laila Taher, and Youssef Shaaban. The psychologically sick heroine was played by Soheir Al Bably who played the role beautifully, and Hussein Reyad played the father; one of his best roles on the screen. The series also starred Rashwan Tawfik who played the music tutor. Another brilliant director, Ibrahim Al Shakankiri directed 'Storms'. Star, Laila Taher said about her role in Storms; ***'I wish I had played more parts in Eassa's works.'*** Ceremony Celebration of Youssef Ezeddin Eassa, November, 1, 2000 ART Channel.

'Storms' is still broadcast on TV among Classical Television Masterpieces of Drama.

'Bitter Honey', an even bigger smash hit, was to appear on television a year after, directed by Abdul Moneim Shoukry. It is probably the most memorable TV episode in the history of Egyptian and Middle East Television.

Abdul Moneim Shoukry wanted to choose a new face for the heroin's role; the character had to be very special, he wished to convince people that she had never seen a man in her life. For that role he introduced a new face whom nobody had seen before, and that was to be Shams Al Baroudy. Shams Al Baroudy had an extremely innocent kind of beauty and because the audiences had never seen her before, they were convinced that she had never seen a man before. Shams Al Baroudy became one of Egypt's most famous and beautiful stars later, but Bitter Honey is Shams Al Baroudy's most famous role in the history of her entire acting career.

The handsome Samir Sabry was chosen to play 'Hisham', the hero. He was a radio announcer back then and it was his first acting role; still to convince people that he was the first man in Sawsan's perfect world. Samir Sabry, who was later to become one of the most attractive and famous stars, said in 1994 said about his role in 'Bitter Honey in 1962': ***"I couldn't believe myself when I knew I'd be playing Youssef Ezeddin Eassa's 'Bitter Honey' which was a very famous radio episode a few years before. '... People now say that it's my best part. I think it is the beauty of the lines written by Youssef Ezeddin Eassa that made my part unforgettable...The dialogues flow with such artistic beauty... It was my first acting role... up till now, people still call me Hisham!"*** TV Program, 'Black&White', 1994

Like 'Storms', 'Bitter Honey' is still broadcast on TV, in black and white, among the most famous classics and watched all over the world through satellite channels.



## Back to the Radio

Although Eassa had actually stopped writing radio dramas and was beginning his publishing career in book-form, he was yet asked to write some programs for the radio which contributed to his role as a modernist and social reformer.

He wrote an everyday program simplifying science in the seventies called "Science and Life". He also helped to encourage the newly launched Radio Station in Alexandria, for which he wrote a number of single dramas under the name, "Pictures from Life" where he presented so many examples of man's evil subconscious thoughts and indecent behaviour that had been gotten used to, in a mocking caricature-like style. Eassa also wrote for the Cairo Main Station, 'Al Barnammeg Al Am', upon Al Sayed Bedir's request, a good number of single episodes called "Ma Yeegebnish" or "What I do not like", criticizing society in a most comic and sometimes moving style. Every episode was a separate one; the thing in common was the writer and the criticism of society. He was also asked by the Head of the Radio Station to write a special radio drama for the event of the Radio Golden Jubilee. For that purpose, Eassa wrote 'The Award', which he later re-wrote as a short story under the same title. Eassa's last phase was actually dedicated to writing his famous radio dramas in novel form to prevent such works from theft. He was the only writer who did that; most writers did the opposite, gave their books to script writers who transformed it into either radio drama or TV drama. Eassa said; ***'transferring books to drama is like making juice from fruits, but transferring drama to books is like making the juice into fruit again.'***



## Radio Serial Drama Once More

In 1972, Eassa was beginning to write his novel, "Blame not Autumn" when talented director Mohamad Sharkas asked him if he could 'please' write him something to direct, so he wrote "Blame Not Autumn" as a radio drama for him. It had an amazing and unpredicted success. In 1972, the television dramas were most popular and not so many people listened to the radio, but 'Blame Not Autumn' managed to grab people from television and to make them eagerly follow the thirty-one episodes until the very last word. Eassa received huge amounts of mail from his audiences who thought the world of his episode.

'Blame not Autumn' was about Eassa's generation, depicting the social and cultural life in Egypt, especially university life starting from 1938, until the mid sixties. Some of the characters in the drama are real like Egyptian Poet Abdul Hamid El Dib whom Eassa called in his episodes, Abdul Hamid Gharib. There is also the character of Egyptian Esteemed Professor, Ali Mostafa Mosharafa, who was actually a very influential character in Eassa's life. Mosharafa was the first Egyptian Dean of the Faculty of Science

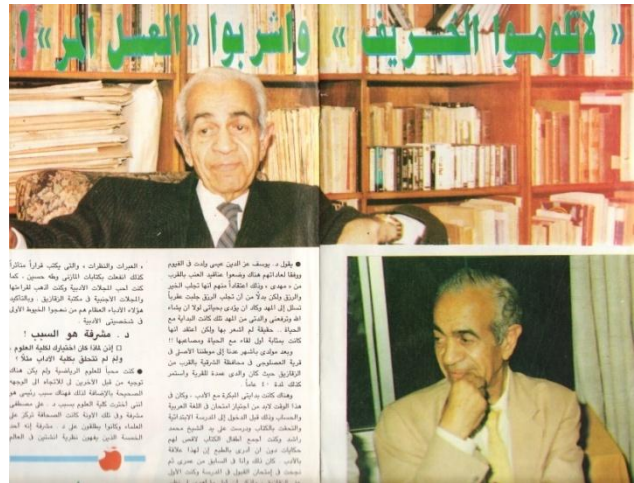
when Eassa was a student. He was among the very few people who understood Einstein's theory and he had met the latter in person. Eassa actually joined the Faculty of Science because he was very fond of Mosharafa as a figure; Eassa considered it awesome to be in the same place with him. Mosharafa was a physics professor, First Egyptian Dean of the Faculty of Science, Cairo University, who was educated in England, but at the same time was very fond of literature, poetry, art and music.

Eassa recalls a seminar at university when Ali Mostafa Mosharafa hosted our great Egyptian Writer Taha Hussein. The seminar was about '*Which is More Important for Mankind; Science of Literature.*' The amazing thing was that Mosharafa the scientist took the side of literature while Taha Hussein took the side of science. The evening was highlighted by an act performed by the students imitating Taha Hussein and Mosharafa. Eassa mimed Mosharafa; he did it so well that Mosharafa's wife, when going home, took Eassa's arm and said, '*Let's go home Ali!*'

When Mosharafa's character appeared in 'Blame Not Autumn', Eassa was attending rehearsals as usual and he did not like the way the actor played Mosharafa. Eassa stopped the recording and started imitating Mosharafa himself, to show the actor how Mosharafa's tone was like when he spoke, his expressions when he was angry and so on... 'Blame Not Autumn' remains to be a living document about Egypt, its history and its people from a different angle that other writers have exposed. Some critics described it as Eassa's biography although some of its events and characters are fictitious.

In 1974, Eassa obtained a High State Literary Award for his radio dramas other than, of course, the National State Award of first degree, which he was granted later in 1986 for his books and role in the world of fiction - *for his fiction see Biography, Inspire By & His Works.*

His writings in all fields have created a completely new school of writing style introducing a new type of surrealism, symbol and high imagination. Perhaps nobody had ever reduced matters of life to their abstract forms the way he had. To introduce this through radio was a challenge, but to introduce it to the Middle East, well that was actually more like going (above is an article about Eassa who says to young writers '*Drink the Bitter Honey and Blame Not Autumn*') to war. Introducing fine art through the radio is something which Eassa believed in. It was bridging a gap between science and art, technology and letters; believing that modern inventions and science give writing a deeper value and proving his point which he so often said: '**Art and Science complete one another**'



Among Eassa's many awards are: The Highest National State Award of Appreciation for Letters, 1975, The National State Award for Letters, 1987, The Badge of Sciences and Arts of First Degree, which he obtained twice, 1976 and again in 1988, The Badge of the Republic, 1983, The Golden Jubilee Award for Drama and the Silver Jubilee Award for Television, the Knighthood Award for Letters, 1999 and Best Man of Letters, 1998 -99.

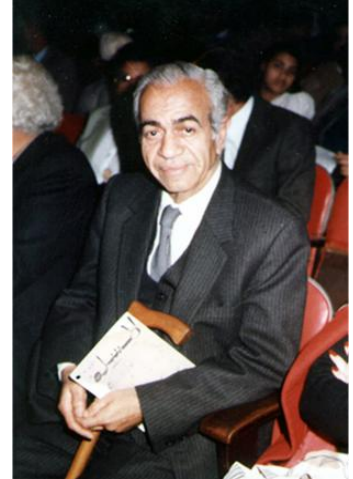
The happiest moments in life for Youssef Ezeddin Eassa were those of writing. He was completely in a different world then; a world of his own where he could see the characters inside his head like they were dictating the lines to him. Nevertheless, with all the joy that writing had given him, he suffered. Being what he was with all his insight, modern attitude and global outlook made it tough to survive in the third world. Eassa was also viciously attacked at first by rigid stereo-typed critics and flat writers who through lack of knowledge at the time, were unable to grasp the meaning of imagination and saw it to be a contradiction to what they called 'reality' or 'realism;'. There were also some writers who understood but pretended to follow the 'reality' tune, trying to undermine his writings out of fear he would be a tough competitor to cope with, if he were to be thoroughly understood. Their attitude made the meaning of 'reality' continue to be dull and flat in Arabic Literature. It was only when Gabriel Garcia Marquis obtained the Nobel Prize for, '*... expressing reality through a legendry imaginative atmosphere... .*' that critics became aware of the value of Eassa's style, '***who had started writing something similar long before Marquis had.***' Saeid Salem, writer, September, 1992, **Pioneers** TV Program.

Moreover, when Franz Kafka's works were introduced to Egypt in the late seventies, after being banned during the fifties and sixties, these works made people in the East, especially Egypt, aware of how imagination is valued in the West and then they were ashamed of how there was some lack of understanding for Eassa with all his imagination. However, that only happened after Eassa had reached his seventies; he had waited and suffered for so long, just as his 'Poor Lily' did; it is amazing how he predicted his own destiny far back in the 1940ies'.

Another thing that Eassa suffered from in his country was again the attitude of writers and critics towards radio drama. Some of them tried to undermine the writings for the radio in general, claiming that it should not be considered literature just because it was through the radio regardless of its content. Other writers knew that Eassa's dramas in particular had changed the image of radio drama and had proved that it is fine literature - those writers, however, chose not to say that aloud. Again Eassa as a competitor, made many writers uncomfortable and they actually benefited from concealing facts about his talent. Moreover, when Eassa's published books of fiction hit the markets with his original ideas and style; many writers pretended they had not read them and when they spoke of him, they only referred to his 'radio dramas' believing it would be better for them if he remained frozen in that frame. Eassa was badly abused by so many half-intellecets who gave themselves the title of intellecets

and if he had been living in the West he would have naturally attained worldwide prestige like Kafka had. However, Kafka did suffer during his lifetime as well; it seems to be every great thinker's destiny.

No matter what, the truth cannot be hidden for long, as he said in his 'Bitter Honey'. Nowadays, there are PhDs beginning to explore his works of drama and not just his fictitious works, but ranking great works of radio drama with elite forms of letters, the last was about 'Blame Not Autumn' in particular, *Alexandria University, Ismail Al Sheikha, 1-10-2003*. The discussion received a degree of Excellence with Honours. Present at the discussion was Cairo Professor and editor of Al Ahram Cultural page, Prof. Abdul Aziz Sharaf who thought there should be a special thesis about all the radio works of Eassa and said it is unfair to rank Eassa with anybody else who had ever written radio drama. The fact also remains that Eassa was granted the National State award for Letters back in 1977 for his radio dramas and he was and is the only Egyptian writer who had been given such an award for radio and television dramas, giving his radio dramas in particular a very special prestige and ranking it above all other radio drama writings.



Youssef Ezeddin Eassa was indeed a pioneer for writing the way he felt and believed in, knowing that such writings would take time to be totally appreciated. Yet, he was honest and sincere; he could not be what he was not. Most writers find it easier to follow the current trend; it takes real talent to write with confidence the way Youssef Ezeddin Eassa wrote. *'Ideas come to me like tears... I have to write them down to be at peace.'* Youssef Ezeddin Eassa, the Radio and Television Magazine, 20-4-1997