

For Immediate Release



AUB to premiere English production of Saadallah Wannous's play, Rituals of Signs and Transformations

Beirut, Lebanon- 29/11/2013 - The American University of Beirut will premiere the first English production of *Tuqus al-Isharat wa-l-Tahawwulat* (Rituals of Signs and Transformations), a play by Syrian playwright Saadallah Wannous, at Babel Theater on December 6, 7, 8, 8:30pm. Free entry, but reservations are mandatory.

For reservations, please contact: tuqqus@gmail.com. For further information, please contact: rm33@aub.edu.lb.

Produced by AUB and Robert Myers, and directed by Sahar Assaf, the world premiere of the English version of the play is based on a translation by Robert Myers and Nada Saab, commissioned by Silk Road Rising Theatre in Chicago and the MacArthur Foundation. The play was produced with the assistance of AUB English students. A staged reading of the play will take place in March 2014 at Silk Road Rising and at the Segal Theatre Center at CUNY Graduate Center in New York, which is also publishing the AUB translation as part of a collection on Wannous's plays.

Saadallah Wannous (1941-1997) is the most significant Syrian playwright of the 20th century and, along with Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Alfred Farag, one of the most important playwrights from the Arab world during this period. His plays include *Evening Party for the Fifth of June*, *The Adventure of Mamluk Jaber's Head*, *The King is the King*, *The Rape*, and *The Drunken Days*. He is recognized especially for having used theatre—like Brecht, Boal, Fugard, Soyinka and others—to address charged social and political questions. In 1996, the year before his death, he was chosen by UNESCO as the first playwright from the Arab world to give the address for World Theatre Day.

Tuqus al-Isharat wa-l-Tahawwulat (Rituals of Signs and Transformations) was written by Wannous in 1994, after he had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. According to Wannous's prologue, the play takes as its point of departure the historian Fakhri al-Barudi's account of an incident in the 1880s in Damascus in which two clerics were involved in a feud that split the city into two factions. One was the Mufti, the chief religious legal authority, also referred to in the play as Sheik Qassim, and the Naqib-Al Ashraf, also referred to as Sir Abdallah, the leader of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. When the chief of police arrested the Naqib while he was engaged in lovemaking with his mistress in his semi-private garden, the Mufti concocted a scheme to save the Naqib's reputation. For Wannous, this historical account is—as so many real and mythical tales are for other playwrights—merely a point of departure for creating a complex dramatic universe. In the prologue, Wannous explicitly warns us that the characters in the play should not be seen as types who represent their ranks or social positions. In fact, one prevalent theme in the play is the quest of characters to elude the roles imposed upon them by a traditional society. At the

center of the story is Mu'mina, the wife of the Naqib, who, by taking control of her own destiny and embarking on a path of forbidden sensuality, transforms both herself and those around her.

As Wannous writes in the prologue, the problems the play raises are “current and ever recurrent.”

Robert Myers is the author of over a dozen plays that have been produced in New York, Washington, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities in the U.S. Sahar Assaf (Director) is a theatre actress and director who completed her Fulbright fellowship in Theatre Studies at Central Washington University, in the U.S. She is the co-founder of Beirut 8.30 Theatre Company and teaches acting and directing at AUB. Her latest appearance on stage as an actress was in *Come Back to Bed, Love* directed by Lina Abyad at Babel Theatre in December 2012. She recently co-directed *From the Bottom of my Brain* with Zeina Daccache, a play performed by the residents of Al Fanar Psychiatric Hospital at Madina Theatre in July 2013.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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