

Four Plays from Syria
Sa'dallah Wannous

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Why do so few people know the name Sa'dallah Wannous? The breadth, complexity and importance of his dramatic and critical contribution are certainly comparable to contemporaries such as Athol Fugard, Wole Soyinka, and Augusto Boal. Unlike theirs, however, his name is hardly registers outside a very small circle of theatre scholars and practitioners and scholars of Arab literature. His name is recognized by educated people in the Arab world principally because in 1996, shortly before his death, he was chosen as the first Arab playwright to give an address on World Theatre Day, and because his plays have been published, distributed and produced in a number of Arab countries. Some of his works have been published and produced in Germany and France, most notably *Rituals of Signs and Transformations*, which was staged in an extravagant production in 2013 at the Comédie-Française in Paris. In North America, Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere in Asia, however, he remains virtually unknown, although translations exist of some of his plays, including *The King is the King*, which is included in *Modern Arabic Drama*, edited by Roger Allen and Salma Jayyusi.

Wannous was born to a peasant family in 1941, in a small village near the Syrian port city of Tartous, a decade after Boal, nine years after Fugard, and seven after Soyinka. He came of age during the heady days of Arab nationalism: the Revolution of 1952, which ousted the notoriously corrupt King Farouk of Egypt, and eventually led to Gamal Abdel Nasser's ascent to power in 1954; the Suez Crisis of 1956, which was the only real Arab victory against Western and Israeli forces in the twentieth century; and the creation of the United Arab Republic in 1958, which joined Syria and Egypt into a single entity, a union that lasted until 1961.

After completing his baccalaureate in Syria in 1959, Wannous moved to Cairo, which was then the capital of Arab culture, where he studied journalism at Cairo University and came under the sway of the existentialist philosophy of Camus and Sartre, principally through the literary journal *Al-Adab (Belles Lettres)*, an influence that is apparent in his early attempts at drama and continued to mark his work throughout his career. Another significant influence was the renowned Egyptian writer and dramatist Tawfik al-Hakim, whose Kafkaesque parables are as notable for their absurdist forms

and philosophical underpinnings as for the nearly insurmountable technical obstacles to staging many of them. Other European influences on his early work appear to include Kafka, Brecht—although not in the systematic way the German dramatist's theories and style would affect his subsequent work—and certainly Ionesco, whose theatre, along with the theatre of the absurd, he would disavow in the 1970s as frivolous. Unlike Soyinka, Fugard, and Boal, all of whom worked as actors and directors in theatre companies early in their careers, Wannous began his as a journalist and social critic and as a writer who used the format of theatrical texts to dramatize social ills. Only later was he forced to confront the physical constraints of working with directors and actors in actual performance spaces and to consider the effect of his works upon live audiences in specific social circumstances. Another key aspect of Wannous's formation was his unstinting affinity for the working class, the downtrodden, and life's and history's losers. Like Boal, who memorialized his upbringing and its relationship to his work in his memoir *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics*, Wannous, as the child of rural peasantry who was drawn to a career unmasking demagogues and denouncing social inequities, was a paradigmatic example of a Gramscian organic intellectual who, like his Brazilian counterpart, would adopt and then later abandon a doctrinaire Marxist approach to both politics and the theatre.

Wannous returned to Syria from Cairo in 1963, two years after the dissolution of the United Arab Republic and a year before the coup that brought the Ba'ath Party and, seven years later, one of the coup's prominent members, Hafez al Assad, to power in Syria. He published two plays in *Al-Adab*, one of them, *Fusd Al-Dam (Jet of Blood)* (1963) is a parable about the dilemma confronting young Palestinian intellectuals in the pre-PLO period, in which an idealistic, young Palestinian searches for and eventually murders his passive, dissolute dopplegänger. The other, *Ma'asat Bayi' Al-Dibs-Al-Faqir (The Tragedy of the Poor Molasses Vendor)* (1964) is an allegory of the encounter between the naïve peasantry and the state security apparatus in which, à la Orwell, a friend of the vendor in the title—who is in fact a government spy whose name and identity shift throughout the play—literally puts words into the vendor's mouth, then uses his statements to indict him and deliver him into a hellish, totalitarian world of imprisonment and torture. Although Wannous and critics count these early plays among his

immature works, the latter play was staged in 1969 in Damascus, and one can certainly detect in these and other works written before 1967 many of the preoccupations that would mark his later plays: a view of theatrical texts as forms of political polemics; a repulsion with authoritarian regimes and authority figures, including those he knew best from the Arab world; an interrogation—albeit sympathetic at this point—of the idea of Arab nationalism and the concomitant plight of the Palestinians; a concern with the relationship between the distortion of language and the manipulation of identities and the implementation of abusive state power; a recognition that theatre is an especially appropriate medium for laying bare the Machiavellian machinations, amoral hypocrisy and profound cruelty of those in power; and, as mentioned above, an acute sensitivity to the plight of the peasantry and the proletariat.

In 1966, Wannous moved to Paris, where he studied at the Sorbonne. (As a twenty-year-old Soyinka, by comparison, had received a scholarship to the University of Leeds, where he studied with renowned Shakespeare scholar G. Wilson Knight and went on to work at the Royal Court Theatre. Similarly, in the early 1950s, Boal took courses at Columbia with John Gassner, who introduced him to the works of Brecht.) Wannous wrote no plays during this first sojourn in Paris, but he published articles and interviews with scholars and intellectuals in Paris for a number of Arab cultural and literary publications. According to Ali Naji al-'Anezi, the author of one of the few full-length studies in English of Wannous's life and work, an unpublished doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Sheffield in 2006, one of the most significant mentors during this period in Paris was Jean-Marie Serrault, a Brechtian theatre director who worked with French African and Caribbean directors such as Aimé Césaire, and directed plays by Pirandello, Genet, Ionesco, and the Algerian playwright Kateb Yacine.¹

¹ Ali Naji al-'Anezi, *An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, With Particular Emphasis on the Plays Written After the 1967 War* (University of Sheffield, UK, unpublished dissertation, 2006), 118. Background information provided here comes in part from this study. Other English-language sources consulted include: Roger Allen, "Arabic Drama in Theory and Practice: The Writing of Sa'dallah Wannous," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 15 (1984): 94-113; Eyad Houssami, ed, *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre* (London: Pluto Press, 2012). Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Robert Myers and Nada Saab, "Sufism and Shakespeare: The Poetics of Personal and Political Transformation in Sa'dallah Wannous's Tuqus al-Isharat wa-l-Tahawwulat," *Theatre Research International* 38 (Special Issue 2) (July 2013): 124-136; and Waheeb Nima, *A Study of the Dramatic Art of Sa'dallah Wannous and Bertolt Brecht with a Translation of Six Plays by Wannous into English* (Lancaster University, UK, 1993).

This first trip to Europe was cut short by the June 1967 war and Wannous's almost immediate recognition that one of the central elements in the Arabs' defeat was what he referred to as the complete breakdown in language.² This breakdown had been manifested most clearly in the flowery and wholly disingenuous proclamations of righteousness, victory, and power, most delivered on the radio, before and during the war by Arab leaders, especially by the icon of Arab nationalism, Nasser, whom Wannous had heretofore greatly admired and who had told a series of outright falsehoods to his fellow Arab leaders about mythical Egyptian victories so as to involve Jordan and Syria in a war which, from the beginning, had been a complete debacle. Wannous's response to this shocking defeat—a cataclysm not only militarily but intellectually for thinkers and artists who had espoused Arab nationalism—which he began to compose after returning to Paris in the autumn of 1967, was the first play in this collection: *Haflat Samar min ajl al-Khamis min Huzyran* (*The Evening Party for the Fifth of June*) (1968), the date referring to the day on which the ill-fated war began, in which Arab forces were humiliated on the battlefield and managed, largely due to inept leadership, to lose the Sinai, Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the entire Golan Heights in six days. *The Evening Party* is one of Wannous's most original and significant works, and the first to forthrightly denounce Arab regimes and leaders as those responsible for this disastrous defeat. It was a ferocious attack on the hypocrisy of Arab leaders, the complicity of official, regime-supported artists, the cheapness of folk performance as a means to theatrically inculcate patriotism, and the vacuity of official discourse. Moreover, it was a call to action and a rehearsal for "civil society," in Edward Ziter's description,³ that in its radically new form—especially within the context of Arab and Middle Eastern theatre—embodies and imagines, through an array of Brechtian and original strategies, a radically different post-1967 Syria defined by a democratic discourse that includes a variety of excluded voices within the society. It includes a false start, extreme examples of the *verfremdung* effect, metatheatre, and breaking the fourth wall, the planting of actors among the audience, an interlude

2 Al-'Anezi, 75.

3 Houssami, 26.

of folk dancing, a debate with an "authentic" peasant (also an actor), and a mass arrest of the audience.

As the audience is seated and waits for the action to begin, the curtain is up but there are no actors on stage, only a billboard alluding to the 1967 defeat of Arab countries by "Israel, one of the most troublesome and dangerous of the imperialist states." The billboard, reminiscent of both Piscator and Lenin, ends with a call to look into the mirror, to reflect upon the defeat, and answer the questions, "Who are we? And why?" For an intentionally protracted period, nothing happens. Wannous describes this interval as follows: "The time passes ... There is no signal that the play is about to start. The ... chaotic murmur ... increases ... Whistling sounds can be heard ... spectators are laughing and some turn their heads ... spectators ... complain impatiently. They utter various statements." The first words uttered are by spectators, that is, actors posing as spectators. Obviously, this moment is the first clue about the radical departure Wannous's play represents from previous drama in the Arab world. The audience is not only the target of the work, which has as a principal goal politicizing them, the audience is integral to the work, indistinguishable from the actors from the inception of the performance. *Al-jumhur*, the audience or the public, is, as Roger Allen has written, "the starting point for theatre" in Wannous's formulation.⁴

Finally, the "corpulent" director, whom Wannous explains in his opening note is, as is common practice in Syria in the 1960s, also the director of the theatre in which the play takes place, enters through the theatre and takes the stage, and explains, disconcerted, in a long-winded, disjointed disquisition that promises the "entire truth" but rambles along praising the non-political nature of Tawfik al-Hakim's works and defending the absurdities of official culture, that the play the audience has come to see, *The Whistling of Spirits*, will not be shown this evening because the playwright, 'Abdulghani, has at the last minute forbidden its presentation. Of course, there has been no mention of any such play in the playbill or the publicity for the piece the audience is attending, only *The Evening Party for the Fifth of June*, and when the director later describes the play within a

4 Allen, 96.

play, it turns out to be a jingoistic apologia for a senseless slaughter of Syrian soldiers. Having been annihilated by enemy fighter planes, they have, nonetheless, fought bravely, and the enemy, as the director ironically puts it in his description of this preposterous piece of propaganda, will only occupy Arab land over their dead bodies.

Shortly after the director's explanation begins, a scene of a meeting between the director and playwright at which *Whistling* was conceived and that took place at an office in the theatre is dramatized—complete with portraits of Molière and Beckett—but it is quickly interrupted by the “real” playwright, ‘Abdulghani, who emerges from the audience to play himself. The director explains his conception for the play the audience will not be seeing tonight as members of the acting company act out scenes from it, while the playwright makes sarcastic remarks and dismantles the euphemisms the director uses to describe the catastrophic defeat while audience members—i.e. actors planted in the audience, playing spectators—interject with comments and objections. ‘Abdulghani informs the audience that he has prohibited the presentation of this play written by him and conceived by the director because his own words on the page give off the foul stench of “the vaginas of whores,” although, he says, other playwrights go on using these same words just as they did before the war and claim not to notice the smell.

The director explains that, in lieu of *The Whistling of the Spirits*, the audience will be offered a show of traditional folk dancing, but as music stands are being arranged on the stage, the director is interrupted by an “actual” displaced peasant from the Golan Heights, ‘Abdulrahman, who modestly but emphatically demands to know which particular village in the Golan is being dramatized, to the dismay of the director, who abhors audience participation in the theatre. *The Whistling of the Spirits* is, of course, never fully realized on stage, although it is rigorously explained and critiqued, and the play ends in the arrest of audience and performers. To describe the form of this piece Wannous chooses the Arabic words *haflat samar*, which have been variously translated as “party,” “soirée,” or, as they are here, “evening party.” Whatever words one chooses, it should be clear that the tone set by describing a dramatic work about a recent military and cultural catastrophe in terms suggestive of a vaudeville or a fiesta is, in addition to its formal implications, bitterly ironic.

In an interview given shortly before his death, Wannous was quite explicit that he wrote the play as a means to “change history,” but the response he received to the play when it was produced in Beirut in 1970 and at the al-Hamra Theatre in Damascus in 1971, dismayed Wannous.⁵ Although the play did provoke a few impromptu interjections in Damascus and inspired members of the Beirut audience to take to the stage at the end of the performance and demand to be armed, the audience by and large remained passive, and, instead of inciting powerful political reactions from critics, the play was generally praised but not seen as revolutionary. Especially galling to Wannous were those like Adonis, the renowned Syrian poet who had exiled himself to Lebanon in the 1950s after being released from prison in Syria for political offenses, who focused on the play's innovative form, as if its ostensibly revolutionary motive and content simply offered an occasion for formal experimentation.

Since the play did not provoke the response Wannous had hoped for—active, meaningful intervention by the audience in overturning the existing political order—he viewed it as a “failure,” a characterization some critics have unquestioningly accepted, as if the play were little more than a cultural curiosity from a bygone era. What they have minimized is the extent to which Wannous, as Adonis correctly observed, had created a form that was new, and radically new in the context of Arab theatre, that appropriated and modified a variety of Western artistic forms, including street theatre, the so-called “happenings” of the 1960s that straddled the art and theatrical worlds and pre-figured performance art, agit-prop, and other forms of revolutionary theatre that both mirrored political action and intentionally sought to raise the consciousness of the audience by provoking them into action. One obvious example is *US*, a sort of theatrical sit-in and consciousness-raising session against the Vietnam War performed at Royal Shakespeare in 1967, directed by Peter Brooks. Another is the performances in Paris by the Living Theatre in 1967 and 1968, during the period Wannous was conceiving of and composing *The Evening Party*, of the ur-drama of political theatre, *Antigone*, and *Paradise Now*, in which audience members were encouraged, even compelled, to participate in the

⁵ Al-'Anezi, 119.

performance. Wannous apparently attended these performances by the Living Theatre and, as an anti-imperialist cultural journalist, playwright, and an ardent admirer of the theories and theatre of Peter Brook, he must have known about the production of *US*. Moreover, during Wannous's first visits to Paris, the city, especially the Sorbonne, was a center of worldwide radical political activity that did spill out into the streets, most notably in the uprising of May 1968.

Al-'Anezi suggests that Wannous misjudged his Syrian audience, which was largely elite, bourgeois, and urban, and not predisposed to upset a social order that, economically, if not necessarily politically, was largely beneficial to them. The lack of substantial reaction in Damascus may also have reflected the docility engendered by a police state. Moreover, the polite but dismissive response to the play by a number of critics and playwrights, many of whom depended for their livelihoods upon state sponsorship, was no doubt due to the fact that the representation of the sold-out artist and intellectual who obsequiously serves the state and gleefully offers up facile fare guaranteed not to disturb the status quo was too close for comfort. Regardless of its lack of immediate efficacy in effecting swift political change, however, the work remains a daring and stunningly innovative intervention in political and cultural discourse in the Arab world. Those who recognize the significance of Wannous's life and *oeuvre* have come to see the play as a precursor of later political events in Syria and the region and every bit as significant as better known contemporaneous works by the Living Theatre and others.

Obviously, the principal European influence for *The Evening Party*, and for the other plays Wannous would write during the 1970s, which he dubbed *Masrah al-tasyis*, theatre of politicization, in an essay entitled "Manifestos for a New Arab Theatre," was Bertolt Brecht.⁶ Like many theatre artists in the 1960s and afterward in Europe and the U.S. and, especially, in post-colonial countries and the so-called developing world, the theatre and theories of Brecht provided the template for creating theatrical pieces and groups focused on political and social transformation. Fugard,

⁶ The essay originally appeared in 1970 in *Al-Ma'rifa (Knowledge)*, and was published in a collection of essays by Wannous in 1988, which is named after this essay.

for example, named his first theatre company in Port Elizabeth the Circle, after the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and his best-known and most successful work, *Master Harold and the Boys*, although ostensibly autobiographical, is quite explicitly a *lehrstück*. Although Shakespeare and the Greeks appear to be Soyinka's principal European interlocutors, he adapted *Threepenny Opera* to a Nigerian context as *Opera Wonyosi*, acted in a Nigerian production of *Good Woman of Setzuan*, traveled the country researching indigenous popular theatre, especially Yoruba theatre, and praised Brecht's as "the truly modern dramatist who has perpetuated the morality/parable as a dramatic form."⁷ Moreover, in spite of the fact that he was not a Marxist and abhorred the lockstep leftism of post-colonial Africa represented by movements such as *négritude* (much as Wannous later came to reject doctrinaire versions of Marxism and Arab nationalism), his cultural and political work were clearly of a piece. He was a vociferous opponent of various African dictators, and he spent over two years in jail for promoting peace talks as a means of resolving the 1970 Nigerian civil war with Biafra. Likewise, Boal was arrested on a São Paulo street in 1971 after a performance at Arena Theatre of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, which he had directed, and was imprisoned, tortured, and went into exile until the end of military government in Brazil. His "theatre of the oppressed," with its goals of class awareness, consciousness-raising through critical analysis, improvisation based on direct experience, breakdown of barriers between audience and performers and collective creation codified Brecht's theories and theatre within a third world, or post-colonial, context.

Although Wannous was never arrested or jailed for his writings—which has led some to speculate, probably incorrectly, that he was offered increased latitude because he, like Hafez al-Assad, was an Alawite—he and his work received close scrutiny from early on in his career as a playwright. As Wannous says, he was called into police headquarters for an interrogation, and the production of a number of his plays was delayed or banned outright.⁸ For example, the censors

⁷ James Gibbs, "Wole Soyinka," in *Twentieth Century Caribbean and Black African Writers, second series* (Detroit, London: Bruccoli Clark Layman), 304.

⁸ Al-'Anezi, 132.

visited the dress rehearsal of *Mughamarat Ra's al Mamluk Jaber* (*The Adventure of the Mamluk Jaber's Head*) (1971) in Damascus, also in the present collection, and apparently perceiving it as a political allegory critical of the Assad regime, banned it outright. (The play was not produced until the 1980s, when it was directed in Damascus by the young Iraqi director Jawad al-Assadi. Ironically, the censors, who, in 1971, were suddenly working in the government of Assad, who had become the country's leader in 1970, allowed a production of *The Evenging Party* to be substituted for *Mamluk Jaber*, apparently because the former was perceived as a critique of the previous, pre-Assad regime.) *Mamluk Jaber* was also produced in the G.D.R., i.e. East Germany, and although Wannous was apparently pleased both with the production and the response there, he later suggested that the work had been sent to another Eastern bloc country as proof of the supposed cultural liberality of the Assad regime.

When Wannous returned to Paris after what he considered the unsuccessful response to *The Evening Party*, he spoke with his mentor, Serrault, who offered the following advice: "You, the Arabs, can contribute to world theatre by breaking away from the inflexible forms of the European models—which restrain our mobility and disable our thinking—in order to invent new theatrical forms and styles."⁹ Serrault emphasized the role of folk tales, especially ones dramatizing the battles with feudal societies of the dispossessed against powerful and corrupt officials. It is worth noting that Soyinka, who would go on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, wrote one of his best-known plays, *Death and the King's Horseman*, which draws heavily on Yoruba culture, in part as a response to being housed in the department of anthropology during an invited visit to Cambridge in 1973. At about the same time he wrote in *Myth, Literature and the African World* of the "need for the distinct aesthetics of Africa and Europe to cross-fertilize one another."¹⁰

As should be clear, Serrault's message was one Wannous was already predisposed, because of his class, artistic sensibility,

⁹ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰ Margaret Drabble, Jenny Stringer, Daniel Hahn, eds., "Soyinka, Wole," in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199214921.001.0001/acref-9780199214921-e-5765>

and political preoccupations to hear and act upon. And indeed the plays that Wannous wrote in the 1970s are all hybrid forms that join Brechtian aesthetics and ideology with Eastern folk and literary forms. For example, *Al-Fil Ya Malik Al-Zaman* (*The King's Elephant*) (1969), is both folk tale and Brechtian parable about a peasant who leads a revolt after the king's beloved elephant goes on a rampage in the poor quarter of the city and tramples a boy to death. The peasant leader Zakariya organizes the peasants and leads them to an interview with the king, at which he is overcome by the king's aura of power and betrays his cohorts by telling the monarch that the people love the elephant so much that he should find the animal a consort. *Sahra ma 'Abu Khaleel Al-Qabani* (*An Evening with Abu Khaleel Al-Qabani*) (1972) is both tribute to and allegory about Wannous's precursor, the nineteenth-century founder of modern Syrian theatre, who was hounded by religious zealots for promoting immorality and whose theatre was burned down in 1884 after he staged productions with male and female actors on stage together. The piece simultaneously dramatizes scenes from an actual Qabani play, based on a tale in *One Thousand and One Nights*, and the historical story of the destruction of the theatre. One of Wannous's principal interests, manifested by placing a boisterous audience, played by actors, on stage, along with a barker who sometimes serves the function of narrator, is to emphasize the vitality of Arab and Syrian folk theatre of the nineteenth century, in which audience members would actively intervene in the performance. Another focus is both the reworking of material from Arabic and Eastern folk literature and history in a contemporary context and the appropriation, within a theatrical setting, of the form of the Eastern framed tale.

Al-Malik Huwa Al-Malik (*The King is the King*) (1977) is a parable about a bored monarch who decides to disguise himself as a common man and pick a peasant to play king for a day and is then stunned when the courtiers and even his spouse unquestioningly decide that the peasant, who has taken on all the regal trappings, is in fact the real king. Many observers have noticed that the play bears a close resemblance to *Mann ist Mann* (*Man is Man*), by Brecht, but in an essay in *Manifestos for a New Arab Theatre* Wannous explicitly denies the connection, writing: "There is no relation between the two stories unless Brecht himself based his play on The Story of

the Sleeper and the Waker."¹¹ Here, Wannous is referring to a tale in *One Thousand and One Nights* in which Haroun al-Rashid and his vizier go into the streets of Baghdad in disguise and meet a man who brags about what he could do if he were caliph, and as a prank the caliph and the vizier drug the commoner and take him to the palace, where he awakes to find himself absolute monarch. Wannous's work appears to borrow Brecht's mordant tone and preoccupation with the relationship between costume and class if not its narrative, but this melding of so-called Eastern and Western elements—something Wannous explicitly asserted did not exist as separate categories—had become so completely integrated in the transcultural plays he was producing by the mid-1970s that it is difficult to attempt to parse out which elements are European, or Western, and which come from the Arab and Islamic world.

Perhaps the most successful play in artistic terms from the 1970s is *The Adventure of the Mamluk Jaber's Head*, which is set in a coffee house and features a *hakawati*, a storyteller or *raconteur*, who also functions as kind of Brechtian narrator. As the *hakawati* engages in this ancient form of performance, the clients of the café, who want him to tell a happy folktale about Arab solidarity instead of the story of the savage betrayal of the slave Jaber, interrupt the narrator and comment on the action, often sarcastically. Simultaneously, actors on another part of the stage perform the story, which is obviously based in large part on the historical sacking of Baghdad by Hulagu Khan in 1258. Not only does the play echo the dizzying chapters of political treachery in Syria in the 1960s, when Hafez al-Assad rose from Air Force officer and Ba' th Party loyalist to leader of the country, it chooses as its focus what is one of the principal catastrophes of Islamic history, the destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate. Some historians attribute this catastrophe to the treachery of the caliph's vizier, al-'Alqami, which is also the name of the vizier in the play. Wannous employs a number of formal strategies, however, that subvert a straightforward reading of the play, including a framed-tale structure with competing performances, competing audiences, a melding of actor and audience on stage, actors doubling and tripling in roles, and his re-writing of this famous historical event in a new

¹¹ Nima, 187.

and unfamiliar way. As Brecht does in *Mother Courage*, Wannous tells the tale of the sacking of Baghdad from below, from the point of view of slaves and common men and women. Not surprisingly, the slave Jaber devises an ingenious scheme in which his body, his head, is offered as a medium to inscribe a text, which he hopes will allow him to rise in rank.

But woven in alongside these Brechtian elements are Eastern ones such as a song by the renowned Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum playing on the radio, Jaber's statement that no one can get out of Baghdad with a letter from the vizier to the opposing commander even with a "cap of concealment," the *hakawati* and, of course, the milieu of the café with its hookahs, *ibriqs* (kettles) of coffee and backgammon boards. Wannous apparently believed the play was never realized in the way he envisioned because he had imagined it being performed in one of the centers of Arab cultural life, a café, which would have added yet another frame to the play.

In 1977 Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, made a separate peace with Israel, an agreement manifested in the Camp David accords, a treaty many in the Arab world viewed as another act of treachery, especially since it did nothing to resolve the long simmering crisis of the Palestinians displaced by Israel. Wannous, who was apparently depressed in general, and in particular about the inability of his theatrical work to effect negligible change in Syria and the Arab world, attempted suicide by ingesting pills, but after a coma that lasted three days, he awoke. In an interview given almost two decades later, in 1996, the year before his death, in the documentary film *An Ephemeral Death*, Wannous says that he was stunned by Sadat's visit to Israel, which he viewed as a betrayal.¹²

For almost a decade he granted no interviews, and for more than ten years he wrote no plays, although he helped to establish and later taught at the High Institute of Theatre Arts in Damascus. His next play *Al-Ightisab (The Rape)* (1989) appears to mark a clear shift from his earlier works. Beginning with this play and extending to those he wrote in the 1990s, Wannous, instead of writing works in which characters embody class and abstract philosophical, historical, and political concepts as they did in the Manichean universe of his plays

¹² Al-'Anezi, 198.

in the 1960s and 1970s, he strives to create characters with more complex, contradictory, and individual psychological motives. In the place of pedagogy, narration, and performance as an antidote to the indoctrination and terror of the totalitarian state, Wannous offers reflection and dialogue, in which a range of ideological positions are aired, and individual psychology becomes a window to understand historical events. (In fact, his 1996 address for UNESCO's World Theatre day is entitled "Theatre and the Thirst for Dialogue.") He openly expressed his admiration for Chekhov, which is not altogether surprising considering the Russian writer's continuing influence in the Eastern bloc during the Cold War and the fact that his plays are exemplars of non-doctrinaire dissections of a society that is sick and in need of transformation. In an interview given in the 1990s, Wannous would say: "For the first time I feel that writing is pleasure. I used to feel that personal suffering or individual particularities are nonessential, superficial 'bourgeois' matters that can be put aside . . . I considered, mistakenly, that interest in the movement of history must transcend individual particularities . . ." ¹³

Nidal al-Ashqar, who in 1996 in Beirut directed Wannous's play *Tuqus al-Isharat wa-l-Tahawwulat (Rituals of Signs and Transformations)* (1994), which is included in this volume, compared his works in this later period to the plays of Shakespeare. It is evident, not only in this play but in the other major plays written in the 1990s, *Munamnamat Tarikhiyah (Historical Miniatures)* (1994) and *Al-Ayyam Al-Makhmura (The Drunken Days)* (1995), also included here, as well as in *The Rape*, that one sees a transformation in the characters, especially the minor ones, into fully wrought, autonomous individuals. As in many of Shakespeare's works, these ostensibly minor characters, such as 'Afsa and 'Abbas in *Rituals*, the Mufti's macho bodyguards who have a sexual relationship, seem as central to the concerns of the play as some of the supposed major characters.

In addition to his continuing admiration for Marx as a social theorist and Brecht as a playwright—if less so, Brecht as a theorist—Wannous also obviously continued to draw on the work of a number of thinkers and writers from the Arab world. Roger Allen points to major

13 Massad, 374.

figures in Arabic literature such as the Moroccan playwright Tayyib al-Siddiqui, Egyptian playwright Yusuf Idris, and Palestinian writer Mohammad Yusuf as interlocutors. Al-'Anezi mentions 'Abdullah al-'Arawi, whose call for "historical thinking in the Arab world" Wannous wholeheartedly endorsed; the Palestinian critic Faisal al-Daraj, and the Saudi novelist 'Abdulrahman Munif, with whom he published a quarterly; and the Egyptian philosopher Taha Hussein.¹⁴ Wannous, in response to Hussein, developed "his own views," al-'Anezi writes, "on global capitalism and consumerism, and attacking the reactionary Islamic clergy, who he saw as the real enemy, especially when the religious right allied itself with the political right. The influence of those clerics, he [Wannous] argued, was harmful to historical awareness, since it perpetuated pious myths about the past and obfuscated any understanding of contemporary events. These concerns are dramatized in Wannous's plays of the 1990s."¹⁵ One sees this disdain for the clergy, for example, in *Rituals*, in which religious leaders, uniformly hypocrites and sexually corrupt, are active agents impeding the attempt by women, homosexuals, and others to transform themselves and society.

The Rape was immediately controversial when it was published, in part because it portrayed a sympathetic Israeli character, Doctor Munohim, a psychiatrist. Munohim advises his patient, Ishaq, a Shin Beth officer who has become impotent after witnessing the rape of a Palestinian prisoner's wife in front of the prisoner and after torturing her himself, to confess his hideous crime. The play, which also contains another graphic rape scene, appears to end with Ishaq's death at the hands of his fellow torturers, but then a final unexpected scene takes place in which an actor playing Wannous interviews Doctor Munohim, and the two characters stake out common ground. Not only was Wannous accused of treason for writing the play, he told *The New York Times* that Syrian authorities had banned it and forbidden some Syrian newspapers from publishing his name.¹⁶ Wannous in the play and in interviews denounced what he called "Arab Zionists," by which he apparently meant corrupt Arab regimes,

14 Al-'Anezi, 216.

15 Ibid., 218.

16 Ibid., 215.

and expressed his willingness to engage in dialogue with any Israeli who would, as he put it, denounce the apparatus of Zionism. In Syria any such meeting would have been illegal. It is interesting to contrast Wannous's position with that of Fugard, who had, from the beginning of his career, been part of a broad-based, multi-racial coalition that had opposed the apartheid system and helped to bring it to an end in South Africa several years after Wannous wrote *The Rape*. Whereas Fugard had, from the beginning of his career worked with black actors, especially Zakes Mokae and John Kani, appearing with them in multi-racial productions—although many official impediments were placed in their paths and he and they were eventually forced into exile—Wannous's play was prohibited even though both he and Doctor Munohim would obviously have both been played by Arab actors.

In 1990, Wannous's life and writing took another turn, and his work took on a special urgency when he was diagnosed with cancer, which, two years later, spread to his liver, causing doctors to tell him he likely had only six months to live. In the 1996 UNESCO address, Wannous credited the act of writing with keeping him alive after that diagnosis: "My strongest weapon in this battle [against cancer] has been to write frenziedly for the theatre."¹⁷

The final two plays in this volume were both written during this period. The first, *Rituals of Signs and Transformations* is, according to Wannous's prologue, based on the historian Fakhri al-Barudi's account of an incident in the 1880s in Damascus, when two clerics, the Mufti, the chief religious legal authority, and the Naqib al-Ashraf, i.e. leader of the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad, were involved in a feud that split the city into two factions. The Mufti, Barudi suggests, may have arranged for the chief of police to arrest the Naqib while he was engaged in lovemaking with his mistress in his semi-private garden. The Mufti then saved the Naqib by replacing his mistress—arrested and in jail with him—with the Naqib's wife, which left the Naqib in the Mufti's debt for saving him from humiliation. When the Ottoman governor, the Wali, discovered that the chief of police had apparently arrested the prominent religious leader for

¹⁷ Sa'dallah Wannous, "Theatre and the Thirst for Dialogue," *Lebanon and Syria, Middle East Report* 203 (Spring 1997): 14-15.

lovemaking with his wife, he jailed the chief of police. (Al-Barudi points out that the chief of police was also feuding with the Mufti and may have acted on his own when he arrested the Naqib.)

For Wannous, this historical account is—as so many similar real and mythical tales are for other playwrights such as Shakespeare—merely a point of departure for creating a complex dramatic universe in which an array of characters undergo radical transformations as a result of unexpected circumstances that force suppressed fears and desires about which they are only dimly aware to suddenly surface. One obvious literary source of the play, as Joseph Massad and others have pointed out, appears to be *Measure for Measure*, which also features a lecherous judge and the substitution of one woman for another. *Rituals* also includes scenes of the chief of police, 'Izzat Beik, in prison, in which he is driven insane by the falsehood agreed upon by his jailers and everyone involved in the scheme to substitute mistress for wife, that are reminiscent of the travails of Malvolio at the hands of his tormentors in *Twelfth Night*. Both Warda, the Naqib's mistress, and Mu'mina, the Naqib's wife, who changes her name to Almasa (*almasa* "Diamond") after she divorces him and sets up shop as a high-end prostitute, are complex, contradictory characters—far removed from the allegorical entities of Wannous's earlier works.

Unlike *Measure for Measure* and *Twelfth Night*, *Rituals* can in no sense be classified as a comedy, in spite of its bawdy opening and the darkly comic scenes of the Mufti as he becomes aware that his Machiavellian scheming and Puritanical veneer are no match for Almasa's unswerving devotion to self discovery. When he first meets her to tell her that she will replace her husband's mistress in prison, he says that he, the Mufti, is "the same inside as out." Thus, the audience is likely to look on with amusement as his desire for Al Masa—or is it just plain, old-fashioned lust?—which he knows will be his undoing, metastasizes inside him and finally erupts.

The play includes an array of characters who elude easy typology: Mu'mina/Almasa's aged father, Sheikh Mohammad, who, for a very dark motive, resists his younger son's insistence that his daughter be killed to preserve the family name after she divorces and becomes a prostitute; 'Izzat Beik, who is transformed from petty tyrant into existential hero driven insane in his quest for truth in an Orwellian universe; and, most significantly, 'Afsa, one of the Mufti's

strong-arms, who, through his sexual affair with 'Abbas, his fellow bodyguard, embodies the courage required to pursue one's quest for self-discovery to the point of self-destruction.

As in all of Wannous's later plays, Eastern and Western elements are woven into a new hybrid. In addition to his portrayal of a traditional Islamic society and the historical setting of Damascus, Wannous appropriates the inherent theatricality, heterodox belief system and philosophy of self-abnegation of Sufism. In one of the play's most radical metamorphoses, the Naqib transforms from debauched and hypocritical religious leader to genuinely repentant spouse to mad fakir wandering about the city in rags handing out nuts to children and begging them to slap his face.

Although the play was staged without opposition in Damascus in 1994, when it was presented again several years later in several Syrian cities, it was forced to close after the first night of a planned run in the more conservative city of Aleppo after the city's Mufti was informed of the play's contents. In the 1996 production in Beirut, which Wannous attended shortly before his death, the director Nidal al-Ashqar staged the play with scenes running simultaneously, a structure that emphasized its relationship to framed tales. Wannous makes the link explicit in the play, through the character Mu'mina/Almasa, who talks of her prodigious reading, specifically *One Thousand and One Nights*, and near the play's end compares herself to a tale that will spread out infinitely.

Wannous's critique of religious scheming and hypocrisy was, ironically, less provocative two decades ago under Syria's secular Ba'th regime than it is in some Arab countries today. In the ensuing years, religious parties and groups have emerged as powerful alternatives to repressive secular regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria itself. Today the play's portrayal of Islamic clergy as lascivious charlatans is as problematic in some Arab countries as its dramatizations of prostitution and openly gay characters. Nonetheless, the play was produced at the American University of Cairo in 2012, and the American University of Beirut is producing the first English-language production, based on the translation included here, in 2013. It will receive a staged reading at Silk Road Rising Theatre in Chicago in 2014, and it received a full production, in French, in 2013, at the Comédie Française in Paris, directed by

Anglo-Kuwaiti Sulayman Al Bassam. Obviously, part of the play's contemporary appeal is related to its theme of transformation, specifically in an Arab, Islamic, and Syrian context. It has, however, been criticized, by Joseph Massad, for example, for using "ready-made and uninterrogated Western formulae"—i.e. gay liberation, feminism, identity politics—to critique the Arab world.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the play appears to have the potential to circulate globally in a way that no contemporary Arab play—in fact, no play from the Arab or Islamic world—ever has, and it clearly resonates with audiences in the Arab world two decades after it was written.

The final play in this volume, *The Drunken Days*, is one of Wannous's last written works. Again, his focus is on the dilemma of women in the Arab world, and traditional societies more generally, and again he utilizes a mixture of Eastern and Western elements. The play, unlike any of his other works, takes place in Beirut and Lebanon during the 1930s and 1940s, during the so-called French mandate period. (Lebanon was a French mandate, or colony, from shortly after World War I until 1943, when it became an independent country. Although it had been a separate province under Ottoman control, it was treated by the French as part of greater Syria.) In its structure the work seems an attempt to create a miniature dramatic version of such modernist novels as Faulkner's *Absalom*, *Absalom* or *In Search of Lost Time* by Proust. The play opens with a monologue by a character called simply "Grandson," who recalls his first meeting at the age of six with his grandmother, Sana, shortly after World War II, when his mother, Layla, arrived with an unknown elderly woman in his home in Beirut and explained that the boy was all that her husband, who "died a martyr" during the war, had left her. Layla tells her son, i.e. Grandson, who senses his family is the product of a secret, that she believes her mother, his grandmother, was "haunted by a female jinni follower."

As the tale shifts back in time in the following scene, we see Layla as a young girl surprising her mother, who is engaged in conversation with a character called "Woman," whom we soon discover is the jinni and/or the manifestation of her unconscious, urging Sana to

18 Massad, 375.

give in to her fate and respond to her overwhelming passion. We also discover that Sana, who is a Muslim, has fallen in love with a Christian widower, Habib, in the nearby city of Jounieh, and is trying desperately to suppress her desire to be with him. (Although nothing in the Islamic faith prohibits a Muslim man from marrying a non-Muslim woman, there is a prohibition against a Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim man.)

Layla's family is introduced in the next scene, one of the many metatheatrical scenes the play contains, in which the children decide that their old-fashioned father, 'Abdelqader, must discard his traditional attire, and they literally compel him to dress in Western clothes. Her brothers, Adnan, a policeman, and Sarhan, a student at the American University of Beirut whom we soon see dispense with his studies for a career as a hashish smuggler, and Layla's older sister, Salma, a pretentious francophile, re-fit their father for the modern era with the assistance of a tailor who is waiting in the living room. This transformation—complete except for the fez 'Abdelqader insists on retaining—is celebrated with juice and sweets, but when Salma calls out for tango music, Sana, who is obviously preoccupied with the dilemma of her overwhelming passion and has been watching the proceedings from a distance, gags and runs out of the room.

This scene turns out to be one of the key moments in the play. Obviously it recalls the ways in which in all societies—especially traditional, hierarchical ones—people are defined by one of the constituent elements of theatre, costume. Wannous had already explored this theme in *The King is the King*, in which, through a kind of metonymic magic reminiscent of Brecht, a peasant is instantly turned into a monarch. The theme is also dramatized in *Rituals*, in which we see a wide array of dressings, undressings, and re-dressings. For example, *Rituals* opens with Warda exhorting the Naqib to remove the signs of his exalted rank so the couple can engage in lovemaking, and places his turban—the sign of his religious position—on her head just before they are arrested; the Naqib's wife, Mu'mina, gives Warda her veil when she comes to the jail to take the place of the mistress, and later, when she becomes a prostitute, she not only changes her name to Almasa, she is re-dressed as a courtesan in an elaborate robing ceremony; and the

Naqib transforms himself from orthodox religious leader to Sufi fakir by wandering around Damascus dressed in rags.

Obviously, this scene of re-dressing 'Abdelqader in *The Drunken Days* is also a cultural critique of commodity fetishes as signs of modernity, a theme emphasized by the music chosen, not Arab popular songs as in other scenes, but the transcultural tango. The choice of the tango—one of the first examples of the globalized commodification of culture—and the use of cross-cultural dressing also recall Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, set in 1940s Nigeria. In that play a Muslim African, dressed as a colonial policeman, is appalled to see the local British commissioner and his wife dressed in the traditional attire of the *egungun*, the Yoruba death cult, dancing to the tango in preparation for a costume ball with visiting British royalty.

In *The Drunken Days*, however, Wannous appears more concerned with personal than cultural transformation, especially the transformation of women, just as he is in *Rituals*. And, in one sense, *The Drunken Days* may be seen as a contemporary Arab supplement to the archetypal modern feminist play, *Doll's House*. Unlike Ibsen's play, however, Sana does not, as Nora does, change from her theatrical attire, the tarantella outfit, to her traveling clothes and immediately announce that she has "changed," nor does Sana bother to explain the reasons for abandoning her family to her husband. She apologizes to her favorite child, Layla, who instantly becomes mute, and leaves to be with Habib, i.e. to placate the jinni who is stalking her. The one who does change his clothing immediately upon discovering the news of his wife's departure is 'Abdelqader. Attributing her scandalous behavior to modern ideas, he tosses out the tailored suit, the symbol of Western immorality foisted upon him by his family, and returns to his traditional attire, suggesting that the re-dressing party was no more than a ploy to distract him from the infidelity of his wife that was happening right under his nose.

As he does in his other plays, Wannous stitches together, almost seamlessly, a theatrical piece that is simultaneously Eastern and Western. In addition to the character of the jinni, he includes interpolated scenes of a shadow play, or traditional Eastern puppet show, in which an *aragoz*, a clown, and two other characters

obliquely comment upon infidelity, cultural displacement and the main action of the play. Near the end of one of the interludes by the troupe of shadow players, there is a dizzying moment of doubling and metatheatre, in which a female performer defends patricide motivated by sexual passion, and Sana and the jinni appear on the balcony watching the performers in the street below. When Sana says that the woman's story "has made me feel a chill is running down my spine," the jinni replies, "you'll never attain happiness unless you have some of her audacity."

Perhaps the only moment Wannous falters in the play is Habib's attempt to find language for his cloying passion for Sana. At first, Sana, much like Almasa, 'Afsa, the Mufti, and the Naqib, is relieved to have her social masks stripped away so that she and her lover can enjoy a kind of intimacy and unity she has never experienced with her husband. Wannous engages in a fascinating thought experiment in which we are allowed to see an impassioned lover attain the object of her love completely, and, like a Sufi mystic, be absorbed into the love object. It is as if, at the doorstep of death himself, Wannous is allowing people, especially women, in the Arab world, in traditional societies, and elsewhere, to imagine what their lives might be like if they were to actually realize their deepest passions. In that sense we are indeed seeing an epilogue to *Doll's House*, but in the case of Sana, she simultaneously becomes repelled by Habib's desire to know everything about her, including intimate details of her personal hygiene, and drawn back into the orbit of her children by the appearance of her son, Adnan, at Habib's house. Like Safwan, Almasa's brother in *Rituals*, he has come to murder a female family member—in this case his mother—to remove the stain of her "sin" from the family name.

Habib's dialogue, although very literally translated from Arabic, necessarily sounds excessive and syrupy in English, an abstract, antiquated rhetoric attempting to describe the ineffable, which one also finds, for example, in the works of Khalil Gibran—even though his works were originally written in English. Thus, in scenes like these, it is difficult to craft an English-language text that does not sound vague and hackneyed. One logical reason for this late Romantic language is that the play, like all of Wannous's writing—and indeed almost all plays in the Arab world—is written in Modern Standard,

or formal, written Arabic. In other words, instead of speaking in vernacular, the language people speak on the streets, Habib and all of the other characters are speaking the formal, written form, which no one speaks in the situations being dramatized. Although most Arab playwrights and theatrical audiences treat this bizarre diglossic situation as normal, the problem becomes especially acute when one is grasping for new language to describe emotions or social situations that have not yet come into existence and one cannot put the living language, the vernacular, to work to find and create this new language.

Wannous began his career focused on the audience, trying to raise their consciousness, and yet his plays were not written in the language most of them spoke every day. (Moreover, unlike Brecht, Wannous did not—as al-'Anezi points out, citing Boal—have a Volksbühne with an audience of 60,000 proletarians.) Wannous obviously understood the paradox of writing for peasants and the working class, and, in the late 1980s and 1990s, of trying to verbally imagine radical transformations in geopolitics and in the condition of women, in a formal, ossified language. As he confided to the Lebanese Palestinian novelist Elias Khoury, he wrote his plays first in vernacular and then translated them into formal Arabic, which sophisticated Arabic speakers say gives many parts of Wannous's plays the syntax or "feel" of the vernacular. Moreover, he encouraged directors of *Mamluk Jaber* to include improvised conversation by the café patrons spoken in the local vernacular. As an ardent Arab nationalist, however, Wannous wanted to write plays not just for Syrians or Arabs who spoke vernaculars of the Levant, but for the entire Arab world. (Some Arab writers have avoided this dilemma by choosing to write in French or English, and only recently some Arab writers and playwrights have begun to incorporate local vernaculars into their texts.)

Therefore, one small part of the answer to the question of why Wannous is not as well known as he should be has to do with the particular challenges of translating his works into English and the simple fact that he writes in Arabic. Soyinka and Fugard, of course, wrote in English, and helped to re-define what the language is by incorporating Nigerian and South African elements that included aspects of Afrikaans, Yoruba, Xhosa, and other languages. Boal,

through the translation of his critical works into English and other major languages, has helped to re-define theatre, especially in countries of the so-called global south and marginal communities, as simultaneously consciousness raising, teaching, community building, and psycho-social therapy. Another more obvious reason why so few theatre artists, scholars, and others in the West and elsewhere in the world know about Wannous's work is the fact that contemporary cultural products, especially theatre and literature, from the Arab world have in recent years been viewed as having minimal interest and value in other parts of the world, if people even know of their existence. Certainly in the U.S. there was a profound lack of curiosity about the Arab world until the twenty-first century, and much of the interest since then has been military and political, not cultural. Moreover, many Americans and Westerners seem to have largely accepted a simplistic narrative that portrays Arab cultures as wholly irrational, anti-modern, and mired in intractable and timeless enmities.

Although these translations may not, as Walter Benjamin suggests literary translations should ideally do, change the language into which they are translated, surely they should help to dispel some of the most egregious misconceptions about the Arab world and Arab theatre. For example, Wannous's scathing critique of the Islamic clergy and corrupt Arab autocrats, his portrayal of a sympathetic Israeli character two decades ago and his call for reasoned discourse with Israelis willing to renounce the racial basis of their state, his championing of not only women's rights but female sexuality, his sympathetic portrayal of gay characters, and his varied formal innovations will surely force theatre scholars, artists, and others to interrogate what they believed they knew about Islamic societies, the Middle East, the Arab world, and theatre from these areas of the world. One hopes that as a result of these translations, Wannous's plays will take their place alongside the works of his more celebrated contemporaries and, especially after the recent uprisings in the region, help to transform the way those in the West and elsewhere in the world see Syria and the Arab world.

Robert Myers
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The translation of this collection of four plays by the Syrian playwright Sa'dallah Wannous (1941–1997) fills a long-standing gap in world literature, for it acquaints readers and theatregoers worldwide with this renowned Arab dramatist, who was until quite recently almost unknown among academics and theatre historians in the West. Ali Al-Anezi (2006) lamented that "Wannous's name is virtually unknown in the West; only two academic studies of any significance have appeared in English on this eminent and challenging writer ... Even in the Arab world his standing rests largely upon his celebrity as a cultural icon, since professional performances of his plays are rare due to the decline of the theatre in the region, and little attention has been devoted to theatre studies by Arab academics."(V) Despite his fame as a pioneer in modern Arabic drama, so far only one play, *The King is the King*, has been translated into English in an anthology on modern Arabic drama.¹

In recognition of Wannous as a prominent Arabic dramatist UNESCO and the International Institute of Theatre selected him as the first Arab playwright to deliver the keynote speech on the International Theatre Day on March 27, 1996. His address to the world theatre community was hailed by theatre historians and academics as a pivotal speech on modern Arabic drama and was later translated into many languages. Roger Allen (2000) stated "In confronting questions of language, of theatre semiotics, of acting technique, and of production through both his plays and critical writings, Wannous fulfilled an invaluable role in the continuing process of developing an Arabic drama that is both lively and relevant. No other dramatist in Syria and Lebanon has managed to match the comprehensive nature of his contribution to the Arabic theatre tradition."²

This collection includes a translation of four plays Wannous wrote in the aftermath of the six-day Arab-Israeli war in June, 1967.

¹ *The King Is the King*, in *Modern Arabic Drama: An Anthology*, edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Roger Allen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

² Roger Allen, *An Introduction to Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 211.