

Issam Mahfouz's *The Dictator* presented in New York

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presented in New York Marvin Carlson Arab Stages,
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The Dictator, written in 1969 by Lebanese playwright Issam Mahfouz, has been described as an absurdist classic, a minimalist mixture of Ionesco, Plautus and Beckett, with fierce and frequently hilarious jabs at despotism in the Arab world. A revolutionary work when it was written, it continues to speak to the revolutions and reversals unfolding in today's Middle East. Lebanon's *The Daily Star* has called it "a masterpiece of claustrophobia, an exploration of despotism, delusion, and power games."

The Dictator is the story of a tyrant, a mentally disturbed individual under the illusion that he is humanity's long-awaited savior, and of his comic and unpredictable assistant, Saadoun. The translation, which appears in published form alongside an essay about Syrian dramatist Sa'dallah Mahfouz in the January 2015 edition of *PAJ*, allows audiences in the English-speaking world access to the theatre of one of the Middle East's most significant contemporary dramatic voices.



The play received its English language world premiere in a production by Beirut's Tahweel Ensemble Theatre and AUB's Theatre Initiative on September 10 and 12, 2015 as a part of the *Between the Seas* Festival in New York. The English translation was created by Nada Saab and Robert Myers. The director was Sahar Assaf, whose recent works include acclaimed productions of *Rituals of Signs and Transformations* and *The Rape*, by Wannous. *The Dictator* was performed by two of Lebanon's most gifted young actors, Sany Abdul Baki and Raffi Feghali.



Arab Stages

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Table of Content

Essays

- The 2015 Egyptian National Theatre Festival by Dalia Basiouny
- Damascus Theater Laboratory by Waseem Al Sharqy
- The Birth of Modern Iraqi Theatre: Church Drama in Mosul in the Late Nineteenth Century by Amir Al-Azraki and James Al-Shamma
- Theatre as an Optimistic Political Act: Lebanese Theatre Artist Sahar Assaf by Michael Malek Najjar
- A Feminist Tuberculosis Melodrama: *Melek* by Painted Bird Theatre by Emre Erdem
- Much Ado About “Theatre and Censorship Conference” by Dalia Basiouny
- Mass Media Muslims: A Three Lens Theory of Representation by Jamil Khoury

Announcements

- Issam Mahfouz’ *The Dictator* presented in New York by Marvin Carlson
- An 1868 Egyptian Helen of Troy play published by Marvin Carlson
- Nahda: Five Visions of an Arab Awakening

Global Posts

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- *Malumat*: Resources for Research, Writing/Publishing, Teaching, & Performing Arts compiled by Kate C. Wilson

Book Reviews

- *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theatre* by Karin van Nieuwkerk, ed. - A book review by Marvin Carlson
- *Arab American Drama, Film and Performance: A Critical Study, 1908 to the Present* - A book review by George Potter
- *Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora* - A book review by Michael Malek Najjar

Short Plays

- *Out of Control* by Wael Qadour
- *The Village of Tishreen* by Muhammad al-Maghut

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