

## Four Plays from the ReOrient Festival 2015

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*Arab Stages*,

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*Arab Stages* is delighted to report that, thanks to the generosity of Golden Thread and its director Torange Yaghiazarian, we have the honor of publishing four plays in this issue from the most recent offering of its ReOrient Festival. In the words of founder Yeghiazarian:

Golden Thread Productions' ReOrient Festival of Short Plays was inaugurated in 1999 to present alternative perspectives of the Middle East and to showcase the multiplicity of stories, voices, and styles from the region and has since become Golden Thread's most recognized and celebrated program. This ambitious festival, now presented biannually, turns San Francisco into a Mecca for innovative, spirited, and thought-provoking theatre from and about the Middle East. It has served as a springboard for the careers of top Middle Eastern-American playwrights such as Yussef El Guindi, Torange Yeghiazarian, and Betty Shamieh, and has introduced Bay Area audiences to significant and rarely-produced dramatic works from the Middle East by authors such as Sadegh Hedayat, Fatma Gallaire, and Tawfiq Al-Hakim. Alongside Middle Eastern voices, ReOrient also features the work of non-Middle Eastern playwrights, and has included premieres by distinguished American playwrights such as Naomi Wallace, Eric Ehn, and Israel Horovitz. Since 2009, in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the festival, Golden Thread has organized the ReOrient Forum, a weekend-long conference in San Francisco aimed at expanding the dialogue on theatre, the Middle East, and current hot topics that illuminate the region's relationship with the US.

Eight short plays were selected to be presented during the ReOrient 2015 Festival, which will run from September 10 to October 4 at Z Below Theatre in San Francisco. Artistic Director Yeghiazarian has reported that: "This year's selection process was particularly difficult, because we faced extraordinarily high quality of plays. It's such a thrill to discover new writers and follow common themes in the submissions. For example, this year we had two very strong plays humanizing a tyrant. There seems to be an urge to explore the mind of some of the leaders who have been toppled, perhaps to understand how to deal with the ones who have not."

The 2015 winners feature returning ReOrient favorites Yussef El Guindi, Mona Mansour, Tala Manassah, and Silva Semerciyan, as well as emerging Middle Eastern-American playwrights such as Nahal Navidar. Also noteworthy is the inclusion of three UK-based playwrights: Semerciyan, Hassan Abdulrazzak, and Hannah Khalil. ReOrient 2015 will be the US debut for Abdulrazzak and Khalil. Two ReOrient newcomers Emma Goldman-Sherman and Ken Kaissar round out the winners. Selected from 75 submissions from 15 countries, the winning short plays are diverse in content and style, highlighting the multiplicity of Middle Eastern perspectives and identities. In addition, six playwrights received Honorable Mentions: James Christy, J. Thalia Cunningham, Jesse Freeman, Tariq Hamami, Mara Lockowandt, and Madison Niederhauser. Here is a complete list of the **winning works**:

*Lost Kingdom* by Hassan Abdulrazzak (London, UK)  
*Picking Up the Scent* by Yussef El Guindi (Seattle, WA, USA)  
*Counting in Shaab* by Emma Goldman-Sherman (New York, NY, USA)  
*Ceasefire* by Ken Kaissar (Yardley, PA, USA)  
*Bitterenders* by Hannah Khalil (London, UK)  
*The House* by Tala Manassah and Mona Mansour (New York, NY, USA)  
*Songs of Our Childhood* by Nahal Navidar (Los Angeles, CA, USA)  
*Turning Tricks* by Silva Semerciyan (Bristol, UK)

### **Honorary Mentions**

*Egyptian Song* by James Christy (Princeton, NJ, USA)  
*Unveiled* by J. Thalia Cunningham (Delmar, NY, USA)  
*The Legendary Fingers Nowicki* by Jesse Freeman (Brooklyn, NY, USA)  
*Final Request* by Tariq Hamami (Bronx, NY, USA)  
*A Traveller's Guide to the West Bank Settlements* by Mara Lockowandt (London, UK)  
*In the In-Between* by Madison Niederhauser (Houston, TX, USA)

We are proud to present in this issue the following four works from this list *Bitterenders* by Hannah Khalil; *Lost Kingdom* by Hassan Abdulrazzak; *Picking Up the Scent* by Yussef El Guindi; and *The House* by Tala Manassah and Mona Mansour.

### **Bitterenders**

Hannah Khalil is an award-winning Palestinian-Irish writer, Hannah's first short play, *Ring*, was selected for Soho Theatre London's Westminster Prize and her first full-length piece, *Leaving Home*, was staged at The King's Head. Further work includes *Plan D*, which was produced at Tristan Bates Theatre and nominated for the Meyer Whitworth Award. Most recently Hannah's play *Bitterenders* won Sandpit Arts' Bulbul 2013 competition and was staged at The Nightingale in Brighton. Her monologue *The Worst Cook in the West Bank* was performed as part of an evening of short plays about Arab women in the Arab Spring at the Old Red Lion in London and the Unity Theatre as part of the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival. Hannah also writes for radio, and her new play *Last of the Pearl Fishers* will be on BBC Radio 4 early next year. In 2015 *Plan D* will be published as part of *Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora* edited by Naomi Wallace and Ismail Khalidi.

### **Lost Kingdom**

Hassan Abdulrazzak is of Iraqi origin, born in Prague and living in London. He trained as a cell and molecular biologist and worked at Imperial College and Harvard University. His first play, *Baghdad Wedding*, premiered at Soho Theatre, London (2007). Other productions were at the Belvoir Theatre, Sydney (2009) and by Akvarious productions in India (2012). It was also broadcast on BBC Radio 3. It will have a staged reading by Golden Thread Theatre in the USA later in 2014. His second play, *The Prophet* was staged at the Gate Theatre, London and had a reading by Noor Theatre in NYC (2012). He has written several short plays including *The Tale of Sindbad and the Old Goat* that was part of the multi-author play *Arab Nights* (produced by Metta Theatre), which premiered at Soho Theatre (2012) then toured the UK and *You Don't Have To Be American To Get Laid But It Helps*, part of *Waiting for Summer*, produced and directed by Swivel Theatre Company (2014). He has also written two full-length screenplays and translated several plays for the Royal Court Theatre (Arabic to English).

### **Picking Up the Scent**

Yussef El Guindi's most recent productions include *The Ramayana* (co-adaptor) at ACT; and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (winner of the Steinberg/American Theater Critics Association's New Play Award in 2012; Gregory Award in 2011) also at ACT, and at Center Repertory Company (Walnut Creek, CA) 2013; and *Language Rooms* (Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award), co-produced by Golden Thread Productions and the Asian American Theater Company in San Francisco, at the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia (premiere), and at the Los Angeles Theater Center. His play *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat* was produced by Silk Road Theater Project and won the M. Elizabeth Osborn award. It's included in the anthology *Four Arab American Plays*, published by McFarland Books. His plays *Back of the Throat*, as well as *Such a Beautiful Voice is Sayeda's* and *Karima's City*, have been published by Dramatists Play Service. *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* was published in the September 2012 issue of *American Theatre Magazine*, and will soon be published by Dramatists Play Service, along with his play, *Jihad Jones and The Kalashnikov Babes*.

### **The House**

Tala Jamal Manassah is deputy executive director of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, the national leader in school-based social and emotional learning programs. As a playwright, she has co-written, with Mona Mansour, *The House*, Noor Theater and the American Institute for Architecture; *The Letter*, Golden Thread/ReOrient Festival; *After*, CUNY/Queens College; and *Dressing*, part of *Facing Our Truths: Short Plays about Trayvon, Race and Privilege*. Manassah and Mansour were awarded a residency at Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor in 2013 to develop a musical play called *The Wife*. Most recently, they were given an Ensemble Studio Theatre/Sloan commission to write a play about 1970s Iraq. Manassah received her A.B. (honors) in philosophy and A.M. in the humanities at the University of Chicago.

Mona Mansour's *The Way West* had its world premiere in spring 2014 at Steppenwolf, directed by Amy Morton. The play received the 2013 Sky Cooper New American Play Prize from Marin Theatre Company, where it will get its West Coast premiere in 2015. *The Hour of Feeling* (directed by Mark Wing-Davey) premiered at the 2012 Humana Festival, then was part of the High Tide Festival in the U.K. *Urge for Going* received a LAB production in 2011 at the Public Theater, and had its West Coast premiere at Golden Thread (directed by Evren Odcikin). *The Vagrant*, the third play in the trilogy, was work-shopped at the 2013 Sundance Theater Institute. Mona was a member of the Public Theater's Emerging Writers Group and is part of New Dramatists. With Tala Manassah she has written *The House*, *After*, and *The Letter*, and *Dressing*, part of *Facing Our Truths: Short Plays about Trayvon, Race and Privilege*; they have an EST/Sloan commission to write a play about 1970s Iraq. She was awarded the 2012 Whiting Award and the 2014 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award. [monamansour.com](http://monamansour.com)

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**Torange Yeghiazarian** is the Founding Artistic Director of Golden Thread Productions, the first American theatre company devoted to the Middle East, where she launched such visionary programs as ReOrient Festival & Forum, Middle East America (in partnership with the Lark and Silk Road Rising), Islam 101 (with Hafiz Karmali), New Threads, and the Fairytale Players. Torange's plays include Isfahan Blues, 444 Days, The Fifth String: Ziryab's Passage to Cordoba, and Call Me Mehdi. She is currently under commission by Philip Kan Gotanda to adapt his seminal play, *The Wash to an*

*Armenian setting. Past awards include a Gerbode-Hewlett Playwright Commission Award (Isfahan Blues) and a commission by the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (The Fifth String). Her short play Call Me Mehdi is included in the anthology Salaam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle Eastern-American Drama, TCG 2009. She directed the world premiere of Stuck by Amir Al-Azraki and Voice Room by Reza Soroor in ReOrient Festival 2012, amongst others. Her articles on contemporary theatre in Iran have been published in The Drama Review (2012), American Theatre Magazine (2010), and Theatre Bay Area Magazine (2010), and HowlRound. Torange has contributed to the Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures and Cambridge World Encyclopedia of Stage Actors. Born in Iran and of Armenian heritage, Torange holds a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from San Francisco State University.*

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