

## Editors Note: Nehad Selaiha

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By Marvin Carlson

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On January 6, 2017, the Arab theatre world lost one of its best-known, beloved, and distinguished figures, the Egyptian theatre critic Nehad Selaiha. In view of her centrality of her life and work to the aims and concerns of this publication, we are presenting a special memorial issue dedicated to her memory. The range and scope of her contributions cannot be quickly or easily represented or summarized, but we will offer a very modest selection of the central work of her life, a few of the literally hundreds of essays she wrote on every aspect of Egyptian and international theatre, followed by a few testimonials offered by some of the uncounted persons around the world whose lives she touched, enriched, and inspired. Several hundred essays from the past decade are available online at the website of [al-Ahram](#), for which Selaiha has been drama critic for many years. We are here reprinting ten earlier essays to suggest her continuing interest in encouraging young dramatists, experimental work, and an international perspective.

Born in 1945, Selaiha studied English literature at Cairo University and then attended the University of Sussex in England where she obtained her MA in 1969. There both studying and performing Shakespeare, she formed her life-long bond to theatre. This was reinforced by her marriage to the leading theatre editor, scholar, translator and playwright Mohamed Enani.

In the mid-1970s Selaiha taught Shakespearian drama at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, returning later in that decade to teach drama and criticism at the High Institute for Art Criticism in Cairo, where she began her influence upon an entire generation of Egyptian theatre-makers and scholars. She earned her PhD in drama from the University of Exeter, and then returned to the Institute, of which she became Dean in 2001.

During the 1990s Selaiha emerged not only as the dominant critical commentator on the Egyptian theatre but as the most influential advocate for the developing independent theatre movement and for a new generation of actors, directors, and dramatists. She also became for many the voice of the Egyptian theatre, her reviews in [al-Ahram](#) providing for much the English-speaking world the best insight into that theatre and Selaiha herself regularly invited to represent the Arab theatre at major conferences around the world.

Her work was honored and awarded at most of the leading theatre festivals throughout the Arab world and she received a number of major state awards marking her outstanding contributions to the arts, but her memory will surely be best preserved in the hundreds of perceptive essays she created, leaving behind a marvelously nuanced and detailed picture of several decades of the modern Egyptian theatre, and perhaps even more significantly, in the countless lives she touched in Egypt and abroad in in whom she left something of her dedication, devotion to and love of the theatrical art.

**Marvin Carlson** is the Sidney E. Cohn Professor of Theatre, Comparative Literature, and Middle Eastern Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and Editor-in-Chief of Arab Stages. His research and teaching interests include dramatic theory and Western European theatre history and dramatic literature, especially of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. He has been awarded the ATHE Career Achievement Award, the George Jean Nathan Prize, the Bernard Hewitt prize, the George Freedley Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He has been a Walker-Ames Professor at the University of Washington, a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Indiana University, a visiting professor at the Freie Universitat of Berlin, and a Fellow of the American Theatre. In 2005 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Athens. His best-known book, *Theories of the Theatre* (Cornell University Press, 1993), has been translated into seven languages. His 2001 book, *The Haunted Stage* won the Calloway Prize. His newest book is *Four Plays From Syria: Sa'dallah Wannous* (Martin E. Segal Center Publications, 2014).



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