

The One and Only: Nehad Selaiha

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By Nora Amin

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The following is not an obituary nor is it a testimony about the person of Nehad Selaiha; it is rather a humble documentation of the spiritual life of a lady who is one of a kind. The following has been written in the present tense, this is not a grammatical fault, nor a printing mistake.

Nehad lives with us now in the form of an abstract energy, she was once materialized: in the ephemeral physical body that carried her through her social and professional life, but now her existence takes another shape: one that is eternal. The abstract energy that Nehad exists in today is her unique spiritual identity, that identity that everybody describes as loving, giving, supportive and motherly. This identity is the soul of Nehad, and her soul has touched all of us in the arts field to the extent that we are all certain that she continues existing within us, and among us. In her own special way, Nehad lives by loving, and she lives for loving. Her path in literary studies, theatre criticism, translation and academic teaching can be summarized in one word: love.

As a theatre critic, she succeeded to connect to all artistic experiences, especially by including her emotionality. This emotionality is frequently considered by scholars and critics as irrational, thus unscientific and false. Yet Nehad does not see a contradiction between the mind and the heart, the intellectual and the emotional, both are one, probably bonded by the spirit. She is able to comprehend beyond the image, beyond the ideological discourse, she embraces times and places with her spirit, and projects everything back onto her writing. Her writings are literary pieces of outstanding caliber. She is a poet, a writer and a philosopher. She is the one who "sees" when all are blinded. She is the survivor of despair and of oppression. She is the tireless rebel and the mature woman who acknowledges her femininity as an organic part of her holistic knowledge.

To read a review of a theatre production by Nehad Selaiha is to re-live the experience via the verbal language, to witness a whole reconstruction of the performative aesthetics in the alphabetical writing. She is the master of transforming the lived experience into a memorable document; she is the live memory of Egyptian theatre and of decades of the lives of thousands of artists. The core reason behind all of this, is that she knows how to live the moment to the full. A theatre performance for her is a life experience, a moment of celebration of all our senses, souls and minds. She does not go to theatre for her duties as a critic, she goes for her practice of life and beauty. She does not watch the performance, she lives it. She is the one who spectates by giving and not only by taking the performance in. She sits among the audience and radiates an energy, a mode of communication, a profound understanding, that rewards the performers instantly and adds to their delivery.

This form of being, and this ability to communicate and to radiate energy and emotions, are essentially performative skills. Nehad who had aspired -early in her life- to become an actress without ever managing

to achieve her dream, eventually became her own type of performer. Without standing on stage, memorizing lines, and adopting a fictional character, Nehad projects life and love onto her entourage and community. She excels in having direct impact on our thoughts and emotions, she touches us with only a word or a look. She helps us become aware of performance as a profound mode of communication, a truthful experience, an authentic expression and a transformational moment. She is the enemy of hypocrisy, and all the artistic conventions that support it. She is the enemy of pretension and falsehood. She is the ally of authenticity, freedom and openness. She is sitting there in the dark, but we can see her shining eyes and feel her passionate breath. We can only be true, for the presence of Nehad will open the circles of perception and facilitate the meeting of our souls and the flourishing of our being. Such a soul can only be free. She is the free soul that opens, connects, appreciates, projects, transforms and loves.

I truly believe she will always remain alive and among us, because the spiritual energy of love does not die, it only transforms. Her soul has now transformed into parts of our souls, she has become part of us, we have become her. In all the past and future decades of Egyptian theatre Nehad will be there, for she contributed the most to the creation of this history, therefore her traces will be versed onto the future continuing to exist, to inspire and to radiate love.

I will not use the expression "God mother" which she so much hated whenever I uttered, I will say "Nehad my friend" just as she preferred it to be. And so, my friend Nehad: the only reason I can continue going on stage and making theatre is your teachings: stand tall and never let anyone break you, love yourself and do what pleases you, your dignity is your own and nothing can touch it. Every time I shall stand on stage you will be within me, part of my soul and my dignity. Although you didn't realize your old wish of standing on stage as an actress, but your soul marks the stages of Egypt, and all the stages of our lives.

I believe that the stage is the face of our human dignity, and Nehad is the soul of this stage. Nehad Selaiha: the one and only.

Nora Amin is a writer, performer, theatre director and translator. She is also the founder of Lamusica Independent Theatre Group.



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