

For Immediate Release



## **AUB professor among group awarded \$50,000 grant by MacArthur Foundation**

Beirut, Lebanon- 29/11/2012 - AUB Professor Robert Myers was among a group who were awarded a \$50,000 grant by the MacArthur Foundation to translate to English and produce a play by late Syrian playwright Saadallah Wannous in Beirut and Chicago.

Myers, a playwright and writer who teaches English and creative writing at AUB, will share the grant with Nada Saab, assistant professor of comparative literature at Lebanese American University (LAU), their respective institutions, and Silk Road Rising Theater in Chicago.

The award will fund the translation to English and production of *Tuqus al-isharat wa al-tahawwulat* (Rituals of Signs and Transformations), which deals with female sexuality, religious corruption, homosexuality, the abuse of domestic servants, Sufism, honor killing, Arabic storytelling traditions, personal transformation and changing gender roles in the Arab world.

The play, which has been compared to Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure," was written in 1994 and first produced in Arabic in Beirut two years later under the direction of Nidal Al-Ashkar. It was Wannous's last major work after he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, which led to his death in 1997. That version, which was in the original Arabic, has been broadcast on television in Lebanon. A French version, directed by Sulayman Al Bassam, will premiere at the Comédie Française, in the spring of 2013.

Professors Myers and Saab have previously collaborated on several projects, including the translation/adaptation of *Al Diktator* [The Dictator], by the Lebanese playwright Issam Mahfouz, and *Hammam Baghdadi* [Baghdadi Bath], by the Iraqi playwright Jawad Al Assadi, which was produced at La Mama Theatre in New York in 2009 and which received an excellent review in *The New York Times*. Together they will translate and adapt Wannous's play for the stage.

They have just completed an article on the play for a special issue of the journal *Theatre Research International*, published by Cambridge University Press, on contemporary Arab theater and the so-called Arab spring, which will be released in 2013.

*Rituals of Signs and Transformations* is also slated for public presentation in Beirut and Chicago in 2013 and will be directed by Jamil Khoury, artistic director of Silk Road Rising. The staged reading in Beirut will include the participation of actors, students and theatre artists from AUB, LAU and the Beirut theatrical community.

This project has received enthusiastic support from Malik Gillani, executive director of Silk Road Rising; AUB Provost Ahmad Dallal; Patrick McGreevy, dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences at AUB; Elise Salem, vice-president for student development and enrollment management at LAU; Vahid Behmardi, chair of the Department of Humanities at LAU; Phillipe Frossard, dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences at LAU; and many others at all three institutions.

*Rituals of Signs and Transformations* is loosely based on a historical incident that took place in Damascus in the 19th century. The play focuses on the story of Mu'mina, the upper-class wife of Abdallah, a religious leader, who saves her husband from public scandal by taking the place of his mistress, Warda, in prison when he is arrested on charges of immorality. The scheme to save Abdallah is concocted by his enemy, the Mufti, who agrees to grant Mu'mina a divorce in return for her cooperation. When she saves her husband, she divorces him, changes her name to Al Maza, and, with the help of Warda, becomes a popular and admired prostitute, which scandalizes her family and the leaders of Damascus. The Mufti proposes marriage to Mu'mina/Al Maza, supposedly to save her from scandal, but actually because he has fallen in love with her. Meanwhile, the Mufti's two male bodyguards enter into an ill-fated relationship, and Abdallah, after his divorce, renounces the world and becomes a Sufi.

#### ENDS

Photo Caption: Professor Robert Myers; cover of *Rituals of Signs and Transformations*

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#### Note to Editors

##### About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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