

## Saadallah Wannous: From Existentialist to Activist

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### Abstract

Like many of his contemporaries, Saadallah Wannous, a Syrian prominent playwright, demonstrated great appetite for politics, but whether this is a healthy appetite remains a topic for debate. Wannous was one of the major Arab playwrights who shook the conventional Arab theatrical ground off its feet. Most critics identify three stages of his work: the Existential poetic beginning, the progressive political middle-stage, and the self-questioning final-stage. For my paper, I discuss the first two stages as I look at *The Glass Café*, from the first stage and *The King's Elephant* from the second. The suffocating absurd sense of the first play that seems to advance the audience into an imminent ending collides with and complements the sense of political activism and the urgency to “do something” of the second. Thus for this paper, I track the existentialist and later the militant qualities in Wannous’ work both as a reflection of his own private philosophical growth and the general atmosphere of a crumbling Arab world of the time.

**Keywords:** Arabic drama, Arab theatre, Wannous, existentialist theatre, epic theatre