



**International Theatre Institute**  
World Organization for the Performing Arts

IPF – International Playwrights Forum

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### **The Sholem Aleichem Adaptation's Contest comes to the end**

**In June 2019 The International Playwrights Forum (IPF) of the ITI, in collaboration with the Israeli Centre of the ITI and The Institute for Jewish Theatre (with which the Israeli Centre is associated), and thanks to the generous support of the ITI Executive Council and the ITI's Director General Tobias Biancone, launched an international project: A competition of new dramatic adaptations of Sholem Aleichem's short stories.**

2019 has been declared as The Sholem Aleichem Year due to the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the great Yiddish and international humour celebrity – the writer Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916). Sholem Aleichem stories have been translated into 99 languages, and served as a source of inspiration for comedy writers - Jewish and non-Jewish alike (the best known example is the highly successful musical "Fiddler on the Roof" based on Sholem Aleichem's "Tevye the Dairyman and his Daughters"). Sholem Aleichem's works abound with a humanistic outlook, ardent faith in the goodness of people and survivability despite hardship and painful life, although he doesn't spare them his pinpointed satirical criticism.

Due to the universal and humane appeal of Sholem Aleichem's works, quite apart from their ingrained theatrical quality, the IPF, together with the abovementioned partners decided to embrace the initiative of Prof. Gad Kaynar Kissinger, and launch an international competition of new dramatic adaptations of Sholem Aleichem's short stories. Plays in both official languages of the UNESCO – English and French – were accepted.

The aims are of this project were:

- To challenge writers all over the Globe with the opportunity to find their unique cultural and personal expression and method to render a rich literary and cultural heritage with its humane appeal, compassion and humour, internationally accessible through the theatre.
- To develop the skills of emerging as well as more established playwrights by juxtaposing them with the difficult task of inter-medial and trans-cultural dramatic adaptation, as well as by offering them economic support for appropriating their works to stage productions.
- To endow the winning works with international exposure, thus promoting the chances of arousing international interest in their texts.
- Through the sheer inter-cultural encounter with the stories and through their medially-accommodated processing – to express the common human threads that unite us all as members of the Family of Man.

To the great surprise of myself and my partner in this project – the Secretary General of the IPF, Ms Ursula Werdenberg, to whom I'm deeply obliged for her support and dedication - we got 20 plays from Africa, America (North and South), Asia and Europe. 15 texts were submitted in English, and 5 in French. They covered a broad range of Sholem Aleichem's tragi-comic writings, and displayed various kinds of genres from solid, traditional realizations, to free, contemporaneous adaptations.

The plays were read and evaluated by two juries: The Jury for the plays written in English was composed of the following IPF members: Satish Alekar (India), Boaz Gaon (Israel), Changwha Gim (Korea), Rathna Pushpa Kumari (Sri Lanka), Constantina Ziropoulou (Greece). The Jury for the plays written in French consisted of: Jean-Charles Birotheau, Michel Basle, Joël-Maxime Ghienne (France); Kakumoto Atsushi (Japan), and Staša Mihlečič (Slovenia). I would like to seize this opportunity to thank the jurors for their professional, thorough and conscientious work.

Before presenting the choices of the juries and the final results, I would like to thank all the participants for the wonderful pieces that they have sent us. They gave a hard time to the jurors, and the evidence for that is that after consolidating the results of both juries, there was one definite first award winner, but two winners who share the second prize. Their plays were so good that the choices of the juries evidently demanded to endow both of them with this honour, even at the expense of omitting the third prize, and adding the sum allotted for this prize to that reserved for the second award.

The first prize of 2500 EURO was accorded to **LAZARE**, a French adaptation by Louis Malié (France).

The playwright about the play:

"Dans le shtetl de Kiev, en 1905, Lazare, un riche négociant, s'éprend de Rose, une jeune militante de l'Union des Travailleurs Juifs (la BUND). Alors que grandit l'ombre des pogroms antisémites de Kiev, Lazare compte sur sa situation pour séduire

Rose. Il demande à son vieil ami Ytshchok, professeur de Lettres, de parler à Rose pour lui. Mais c'est sans compter l'admiration de Rose pour Joseph le meneur de la BUND à Kiev..."

Three jurors, members of the French ITI justified their choice with the following arguments:

" Le choix du Centre ITI France/Unesco s'est porté sur LAZARE, une œuvre révélatrice de la présence forte de juifs en Ukraine à une période où grandit l'antisémitisme en URSS. Cette période illustrée par des actions violentes sur des minorités religieuses présente à Kiev, met en lumière les persécutions de centaines de milliers de juifs polonais passés sous juridiction russe.

Nous avons été sensible au traitement d'un sujet grave et humain abordé sous l'angle de la comédie, à l'instar des écrits de Sholem Aleichem. Ce texte met en relief la vie des ouvriers juifs de l'époque, par le biais de l'Union Générale de travailleurs juifs qui défendent leurs droits et leur souhait d'autonomie culturelle."

The second prize of 1375 EURO each was divided between two Hungarian competitors:

Péter Körmöczi-Kriván for the Play **ALMOST**

The Playwright about the play:

"Habits first behave like thin concrete. When I step in, I can still lift my legs out of it. But if the concrete sets, I can pull the world behind me. In the story, we look under the 'concrete', not just almost"

The jury motivated its choice with the words:

"In Almost the playwright has brilliantly melted the two stories obliquely "A Kippur Scandal" and "The Clock " keeping the context intact. The playwright also has successfully scouted the relevance of the Master in today's difficult times keeping the narrative ethos the same with humor, absurdity and ideology." Satish Alekar (Pune) India

Péter Hollós for the play **THE DREAMERS**.

The playwright described the work:

"How close is the Messiah and how close is the prophet Elijah to the everyday people! One of our heroes, a science man who had studied so much philosophy that one day he imagined himself to be the Messiah. Nobody believed him, so he ended up in a mental asylum. His apprentice, the young shoemaker, whom he considered as the prophet Elijah, was destined for better. He remained a cobbler but played the occasional vigilante prophet, and everyone trusted he was Elijah."

The jury motivated its choice with the words:

"That Play opened up endless possibilities for Sholem Aleichem's imagination and humanity. It contains a deep feeling of sympathy and reflection on the religion of the Jews. Full of love for humans and humor, this work expands the reader's theatrical image." Changhwa Gim (Korea)

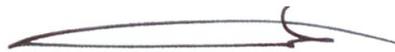
Congratulations to the winners. Apart from the awards for the playwrights, the winning plays will be celebrated and accorded with a staged reading at an ITI international event that will be duly announced. The texts would be published on the websites of the IPF and The Institute for Jewish Theatre and Facebook page. Further options for exposing the plays are considered.

It is moreover the hope of the organizers that *all* the fascinating works of the participants in this unique undertaking will find their way to the stage, a reading, and/or a printed publication.

Prof. Gad Kaynar Kissinger

President – The International Playwrights Forum

President - The Israeli Centre of the ITI



Ms. Ursula Werdenberg

Secretary General - The International Playwrights Forum