

both solitude and relation are amplified, so that inside a theatre auditorium one feels oneself both more alone and more related than one does on the outside in so-called real life” (162). Here, Ridout takes a final turn to foreground the paradoxical aspect of the professional spectator, erstwhile theatre critic, who can attend to such feelings in the realm of necessity and find “real pleasure in the manufacture of that love as a commodity” (162). This is a supple invitation for a postworkerist criticism that does not jettison the labor of obtaining the long view that makes such criticism possible through a deep theatrical audition. Along these lines, the restaging of communism might suggest something of the organizational question that could convey the routes from a specificity of these professional commitments to their societal entailments, however immanent these suggestions remain in the course of this book. We will await eagerly and expectantly further labors along these lines.

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Political Performance in Syria: From the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising.

By Edward Ziter. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; pp. 259, 11 illustrations. \$90 cloth, \$90 e-book.

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Reviewed by George Potter, *Valparaiso University*

In an ideal world, there would be little need to speak of an extended civil war in Syria, ISIS, or the violence of the Assad regime. However, in an irony that many Syrian dramatists would appreciate, the violence that has decimated Syria—and dispersed the production of Syrian theatre—has led to a renewed Western interest in Syrian drama. Since the uprising in 2011, Eyad Houssami edited a collection on Arab theatre, *Doomed by Hope* (2012), anchored in Syrian drama; Marvin Carlson and Safi Mahfouz edited a collection of Sa‘dallah Wannous (aka Saadallah Wannus) plays, *Four Plays from Syria* (2014); Wannus’s *Rituals of Signs and Transformations* has been read or performed in Chicago, New York, and Paris; and numerous plays involving refugees have been developed in Amman, Beirut, and Europe. Edward Ziter’s *Political Performance in Syria: From the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising* is the latest addition to this catalog. However, whereas earlier scholarship in English focused on specific artists and productions, Ziter takes a broad view, looking at a range of so-called political works produced between 1967 and the present.

Ziter argues for his focus clearly at the start of the book, writing, “Over the past fifty years, the very best Syrian theatre has engaged forbidden topics” (2). For Ziter, the topics—and the chapter headings of his book—are competing representations of martyrdom, war, Palestinians, history and heritage, and torture. Given the scarcity of substantive English-language scholarship on Syrian theatre, such a frame begs an inevitable debate as to whether the story of Syrian theatre is one of political theatre. Ziter writes that his work “begins with the premise that Syrians desired greater civil liberties long before the start of the Uprising” (2).

He then traces a long and convincing history of artists struggling to represent the violent repression of the Baath regime, the failed wars with Israel, the mistreatment of Palestinian refugees, and the meaning of Syrian identity. One of the strengths of Ziter's book is the detailed and efficient histories of events that serve to familiarize readers with contemporary Syria. These histories of negotiations between an oppressive state and artists provide one lens for understanding why people rose up in 2011.

Despite the strength of the frame of political theatre, Ziter risks romanticizing opposition to the Assad regime at a distinctly unromantic political moment and reifying stereotypes of the Middle East as a region best understood through politics and war. This is a problem underscored by Ziter's decision to end his book not with a conclusion but, instead, with a long chapter exploring representations of torture in Syria, implying that the topic of torture is all but inevitable in any discussion of political theatre in Syria. A broader discussion of less political theatre and works that support the regime might have provided a wider context for those not versed in Syrian theatre to understand the specific choices that political theatre artists make. Ziter models such an interpretive frame in his extensive discussion of representations of the October (1973) War. In Chapter 2, he delineates the distinctions between the proregime narrative of 'Ali 'Uqla 'Arsan's *The Strangers* and more critical responses to the war in Muhammad al-Maghut and Duraid Lanham's *October Village* and Mustafa al-Hallaj's *Hey Israeli, It's Time to Surrender*. In doing so, he shows a broad range of political stances and artistic choices throughout the archive of Syrian theatre, allowing his reader to see the complexity and diversity of Syrian theatre.

Ziter gives the most depth of analysis to the critical theatre of Syrian legend Wannus and the more contemporary work of the Malas brothers. Nearly a third of his book, and the entirety of Chapter 4, focuses on the work of Wannus, by far the most esteemed modern Syrian dramatist. Ziter makes an important argument that it is a misnomer to view Wannus's career in isolated stages. Instead, Ziter contends both Wannus's attention to politics and his Brechtian use of historical settings should be considered as a career-long endeavor. Ziter notes, "Throughout Wannus's varied career he gave focused attention to how ideas of history, heritage, and popular will function in national processes of identity formation" (149). Through the focus on Wannus's interest in historiography and national narratives, Ziter is able to bring the diverse narrative structures and content from this playwright's career into a clear focus for both those familiar with his work and those only now being introduced to it. One can hope that a broader range of theatre scholars will now take Wannus's work more seriously, thereby allowing specialists on Syrian theatre to give lesser known artists equal attention in the future.

Ziter finds a contemporary corollary for the now-deceased Wannus in the work of the Malas twins, Ahmed and Mohammad. The pair rose to fame well beyond Syria's borders with their Masasit Mati puppet shows, which broadcast critiques of the Assad regime over the Internet for all to see. In addition to these videos, Ziter also explores the brothers' two-person theatrical works that examine the role of theatre in the Syrian uprising. This leads to perhaps one of the most hopeful claims in Ziter's book, when he notes, "[D]emocratic change requires

venues in which people can examine their national identity. Though nominally under the control of the state, theatre is one of very few institutions in Syria where such questions can be raised” (56).

In drawing a line from early political theatre in Syria to the heralded works of Wannus to the contemporary activist performances questioning the Assad regime, Ziter has done a service to students and scholars of theatre who would like to know more about the stories they see on the news and the relationship of art to the civil war. Though this is only one frame through which to view the range of performance traditions in Syria, it is a timely one and one that deserves attention.

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The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance. Edited by Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell. New York: Routledge, 2014; pp. xxiv + 325, 66 illustrations. \$215 cloth, \$44.95 paper, \$44.95 e-book.

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Comprising twenty-eight essays and including more than sixty photographs, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* aims to satisfy, at least partially, “a hunger for a more comprehensive investigation and articulation of the poetics of the puppet,” and the book’s claim to be “the most expansive collection of English-language puppetry scholarship to date” (1) proves well-substantiated. Composed by well-known writers and practitioners in the field, the essays amply grapple with the intertwining of age-old, present-day, and future modes of the puppets’ being, exploring their resonance in our collective subconscious and the universal urge to use puppetry in myriad artistic manifestations, through the animation of figures, objects, and images.

The *Companion* has three parts. Part II, “New Dialogues with History and Tradition,” edited by Claudia Orenstein, is the most straightforward: descriptions of lively traditional forms of puppetry are paired with analyses of their practitioners’ determination not only to convey the historical value of these forms, but to effect their evolution so as to bring new meaning to the puppet show for a modern public. Tackling a variety of subjects, such as *opera dei pupi*, the *bunraku*, the *wayang kulit*, the *tolpavakoothu*, the *vertep*, and the Hyundai Puppet Theatre, most essays are invested in continuity and “reinvigoration” (218) in an age that seems to wish to dilute the religion and ritual from which all these shows sprang. Exceptions are Amber West’s engaging account of the eighteenth-century proto-feminist Charlotte Charke and Posner’s explication of Russia’s twentieth-century modernist “[r]edefinitions of the [p]uppet” (130), both revealing important aspects of puppet history in much less familiar contexts.

Part I, edited and introduced by John Bell, consists of theoretical approaches that offer insights of particular value. Stephen Kaplin’s “The Eye of Light” is a poetic explication of shadow theatre and humankind’s ancient beliefs in its cosmic