

second and third radicals seem to be missing. They are fairly rare, but one can record the adjectives *niḥibb*, “timid”, *qumudd*, “strong”, *qu’dud*, “ignoble”, ‘*arakrak*, “thick”. A warning could also have been given against pseudo-infixes resulting from the dissimilation of a geminated consonant or consisting in an intrusive *hamza*, for instance in *da’abba*, “pack animal”, or *ša’abba*, “young woman”, quoted in *Lisān* I, 14. These are the words *dābba* and *šābba*, spelled in a way revealing a two-peak syllable which arose through the difficulty of articulating a long vowel in a close syllable (Ch. Rabin). A similar phenomenon occurs in the Hebrew name ‘*Abraham* for ‘*Abrām*, where the intrusive *hē* plays the same role as *hamza* in the concerned Arabic dialect of al-Kalb, in the extreme north of the Arabian Peninsula.

The book under review is no doubt an excellent contribution to the study and understanding of the Arabic language, offering a systematic analysis of nominal patterns. Its detailed comparison with similar mechanisms in Polish language will help Polish students of Semitic languages to understand the morphological system of Arabic and other Semitic idioms. The Author should be congratulated and the wish expressed that she will be able to continue her study, perhaps extending her research to modern Arabic dialects.

*Edward Lipiński*

*Doomed by Hope. Essays on Arab Theatre*, edited by Eyad Houssami, Pluto Press, London 2012, 189 pp.

As well as upsetting the socio-political order in the Middle East, the events of the Arab Spring affected the cultural life of that region. In addition, these events put into focus the question of Arab artistic expression. One thing that emerged amidst this turmoil of change was a lively debate on the condition of Arab theatre and its mission. A range of festivals, conferences, and, most importantly, articles by both the artists and the audiences, whose opinions were voiced by critics, provided a platform for the debate. *Doomed by Hope. Essays on Arab Theatre* by Eyad Houssami, published by Pluto Press in 2012 in London, joins this debate, which started three years ago.

Playwright, director and founder of the Masrah Ensemble Theatre, Eyad Houssami recalls in the introduction that the idea to write on the contemporary Arab scene came to him as he was contemplating the works of Saadallah Wannous, including his famous article *Thirst for Dialog*. Concerned about the condition of Arab theatre and the political situation in the Middle East, he wrote: *Theatre is in fact more than art. It is a complex civilizational phenomenon. If we lose and deprive ourselves of theatre, the world will become a more forlorn, ugly, and impoverished place* (Sa’ad Allāh Wannūs, *Al-Ġū’ ilā al-ḥiwār*, in *Al-A’māl al-kāmila*, Bayrūt 2004, p. 39). As bitter as his remarks were, Saadallah Wannous saw the future brightly. He expressed a profound belief that by championing culture one can bring the theatre back to where it belongs and deserves to

be. Full of optimism, he made a powerful statement that *we are doomed by hope, and, come what may, today cannot be the end of history*. The *doomed by hope* expression that the Syrian author reiterates several times in his article is a reflection of almost Sisyphean efforts of theatre artists in totalitarian and oligarchic societies. Indeed, these regimes stifle any attempts to find a space for free artistic expression. The words of Saadallah Wannous and his unshakable faith in the need for and the power of artistic expression not only inspired the title of the discussed book, but also became its guiding theme.

Having secured the funding for his project from the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, and with expert help from Nehad Selaiha, Marvin Carlson and Marie Elias, Eyad Houssami addressed in March 2011 the community of artists and critics with an official letter. This call for papers was an invitation to send in articles on the issues addressed in Saadallah Wannous *Thirst for Dialogue*. Also, the letter encouraged artists and critics to focus on the context of Arab theatre, and, above all, voice their own thoughts stemming from their experience of theatre life. Out of 40 articles submitted, the editorial committee selected 14. They were to be published in English and Arabic. The rationale behind this decision was driven by the need for cultural exchange and the very scarce English-language writings on Arab theatre.

Eyad Houssami's book is a collection of literary analyses of drama and some behind-the-scene insights into the performances. It also contains stories about the theatre and the ways of discussing theatre. *Doomed by Hope. Essays on Arab Theatre* is also a testimony to the great power of dramatic works, the literary and artistic craft of telling a story, sparking a discussion and informing culture. The introduction claims that the primary aim of this book is to share insights and artistic experiences with all those who deal with the theatre but rarely have an opportunity to discuss it. The editor, in turn, says: *It is my hope as steward of the essays in this volume, that this book enables directors in Baghdad to glimpse into the theatre classroom of Birzeit University; that it allows actors in Port Said to envisage rehearsal in Kuwait; that it prompts playwrights in Tunis to consider the difference between theatre research in New York, Cairo, and Damascus; that it invites audiences to think more critically and deeply about theatre* (p. 2).

The book opens with a foreword by Elias Khuri, which is a contemplative but also very refreshing and vivid reflection on Saadallah Wannous. The Lebanese writer describes his memories of his friend primarily in the context of Wannous politically- and socially-charged works. He compares his hopes and dreams with the current situation in the Middle East and particularly in Syria. Full of intimate memories, Khuri's accounts paint a picture of an artist with a profound belief that art is there not only to describe the world we live in, but also to create a space for freedom, dialogue and thought-sharing, and thereby has a real impact on the current reality.

In the first article, Edward Ziter from the Department of Drama at New York University offers a literary analysis of Wannous play *Soirée for the 5th of June*. He points to the deeply-political and extremely-bold nature of this play. Ziter identifies the means by which the Syrian writer exposed the mechanisms of the totalitarian system and encouraged independent, self-aware thinking about the situation in the post-1967 Arab world.

Rania Jawad also makes a direct reference to the works of Saadallah Wannous by describing her experiences when delivering lectures on Wannous at Birzeit University. Jawad's account shows the methods of working on the text in refugee camps on the West Bank and describes the realities of running the theatre there.

A further two essays deal with theatre in Egypt and address the issue of building shared memories in the context of a revolution. A theatre artist and a drama lecturer at the American University in Cairo, Dalia Basiouny shares her thoughts on the process of staging a documentary performance entitled *Tahrir Stories*. Samia Habib, in turn, provides an insight into the activities of Egypt's theatre scene shortly after Mubarak's ousting. The author focusses on the analysis of three spectacles, including *Story of the Square*, *Scratches* and *The Long Trunk Generation*. Reflecting on the explosion of theatre initiatives that has taken place in Egypt after 2011, she also offers some thoughts on the theatre as a medium of the direct relationship between the audience and the actor.

The articles by Katherine Hennessey, Asaad Al-Saleh and Meisoun Ali provide an academic reflection on theatre practice in Yemen and Syria shortly before the Spring Revolution struck in 2011. Particularly notable is Hennessey's essay on the Yemeni theatre scene, a rare subject of research. Aside from offering many interesting remarks on the history of the theatre movement in Yemen, the author focuses primarily on analysing the staging process of three performances. Her piece shows the realities of local theatre and its community and also provides insights into the cultural landscape of Yemen, with its persisting social rift.

Other articles are authored by theatre artists, including Abdullah Al Kafri, Zeina Deccache, Rabih Mroué and Sulayman Al Bassam. Their writings contain some very valuable and intimate thoughts on theatre practice in Syria, Lebanon and Kuwait. Abdullah Al Kafri discusses the independent theatre scene in Damascus and describes the struggles of local troupes with the ossified apparatus of state administration. Drawing on the intellectual legacy of Saadallah Wannous, Rabih Mroué shares his reflections surrounding the issue of freedom in art and the prospects of making it a platform for social dialogue. Sulayman Al Bassam, in turn, uses the political theatre of Wannous to present an interesting study on the Arab adaptations of Shakespeare that the Middle East saw in last decade.

The essay by Zeina Deccache, a Lebanese actress and director, delivers an unusually-touching account of theatrical experience. The founder of the Lebanese Center for Drama Therapy describes her work as a therapist and director at the Roumieh prison, where together with a group of inmate actors, she staged Reginald Rose's piece *Twelve Angry Men*. The reflections and feelings she shares with the readers clearly tap into Wannous idea of socially-engaged theatre. Both the article of the Lebanese director and Wannous entire body of work ooze the same strong sense of faith in art as a human-centric vehicle for change.

The next two articles offer a different, albeit very compelling, perspective on theatre-study reflection. They identify two different aspects of the cultural life of the Arab Diaspora in the United States. Joseph Shahadi's piece is an in-depth analysis of Jennifer Jajeh's one-woman show *I Heart Hamas: And Other Things I am Afraid to Tell You*. The

author argues that the question of Palestinian identity might become a subject of a serious debate also in the context of the Diaspora and that the geographical perspective may objectivise reflection rather than hindering it. Margaret Litving, in turn, analyses two festivals of Arab culture in Washington and New York. She deals extensively with Arab theatre, pointing to the growing interest in the Middle-East scene in the United States. In addition, this Professor at the Boston University provides many observations on the programmes of cultural cooperation between the Arab world and the USA.

Closing the collection is a very intimate and poetic article by Jawad Al Asadi. This acclaimed Iraqi playwright and director recalls some personal memories of working with Saadallah Wannous. Waxing lyrical, he draws a picture of an uncompromising artist and an unwavering man who, before dying, struggled with great dignity with an incurable disease. Despite the hardships of both professional and private life, he became faithful to his ideals and the hope he claimed we were doomed to.

It is important to note that the book is complete with Dalisa Khamissy's, Yazan Khalis's and Joseph Seif's pictures of Arab artists and theatre institutions.

In conclusion, the presented book is a remarkably well-thought-out and harmoniously-structured account of multi-dimensional and multi-perspective reflections on contemporary Arab theatre. Let's hope that *Doomed by Hope. Essays on Arab Theatre* is the first in a series of English-language publications on the so far often neglected problems of performing arts in the Arab world.

*Sebastian Gadomski*