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Vincenzo Mazza, *Albert Camus et L'État de siège. Genèse d'un spectacle*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017. 459 pp. Appendices, bibliography, and index. €87.00 (hb). ISBN 978-2-406-06550-0; €49.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-406-06549-4.

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On October 27, 1948, Albert Camus's *L'État de siège* premiered at the Théâtre Marigny, directed by the famed actor and director Jean-Louis Barrault. Arriving on the Parisian stage only a year after the publication of Camus's best-selling novel, *La Peste*, the play was a stunning failure, both critically and commercially. In *Albert Camus et L'État de siège: Genèse d'un spectacle*, Vincenzo Mazza sets out to illuminate the conditions under which this little-known and neglected production was created and to interrogate the cultural, historical, and aesthetic reasons for its overwhelming rejection by the public. The motivating force of this work is to rescue *L'État de siège* from the shadows to which it was relegated by its box-office failure and attempt to comprehend the reasons for the unanimous lambasting it received from critics. For Mazza, this project is a work of restitution, giving the play and its creators their rightful place in the annals of French theater. Retracing the history of *L'État de siège* primarily means acknowledging the central position occupied by Barrault from the play's conception through its production, as well as insisting on Camus's profound engagement with the theater and his participation in the play's *mise en scène*.

This book is a welcome contribution to the field of Camus studies, which has tended to reinforce *L'État de siège*'s status as an anomaly in the writer's career. The general lacuna around *L'État de siège* in Camus scholarship is all the more surprising in light of the pride of place accorded to the play by Camus himself. Writing in the early 1950s, he declared, "je n'ai jamais cessé de considérer que *L'État de siège*, avec tous ses défauts, est peut-être celui de mes écrits qui me ressemble le plus."^[1] Mazza's work is extremely timely, since *L'État de siège*, so rarely performed in the seventy years since its disastrous premiere, was adapted and staged in 2017 by Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota.^[2]

L'État de siège dramatizes the invasion and sequestration of the city of Cadiz by a dictatorial figure named "la Peste." A young man named Diego (played by Barrault) finally overcomes his fear and confronts the Plague, liberating the city and becoming a martyr for the cause of collective revolt. Through an eccentric mélange of generic traits, Camus and Barrault sought to combine all forms of dramatic expression, from the lyrical monologue to collective theater, including pantomime, simple dialogue, farce, and a chorus. Both Barrault and Camus expressed a desire to experiment with corporeality and physical expression on stage, but the audience of 1948 was not open to this departure from the norms of theatrical performance. One critic declared in *Le Figaro*, "il est dommage de voir un écrivain de cette qualité se complaire à des bouffonneries qui seraient parfois mieux à leur place dans une revue montmartroise" (quoted p. 271), while Elsa Triolet, writing in *Les Lettres françaises*, opens her review by trying to imagine "ce qui a pu présider à une si vaste erreur que *L'État de siège*" (quoted p. 305). By assembling a large variety of primary documents, including multiple archives and unpublished correspondence, Mazza succeeds in contextualizing such responses to the play while also illuminating

the place of *L'État de siège* in the careers of its creators and in the literary and theatrical history of twentieth-century France.

The book is divided into four parts, reconstructing the genealogy of the play from its original conception by Barrault, to the composition of successive versions of the text, and finally, its critical reception. While Mazza traces Barrault's desire to create a play about the plague to his friendship with Antonin Artaud in the 1930s,^[3] several years before Camus was invited to collaborate on the text, the bulk of part one is dedicated to Barrault's relationship with another major figure of modern France: Jean-Paul Sartre. Recounting Sartre's and Barrault's time as colleagues teaching at a drama school during the Occupation (Charles Dullin's *L'École du Théâtre de la Cité*), Mazza argues convincingly that the philosopher's immersion in the history and practice of theater during this period was decisive in his emergence as a dramaturge, and shaped the writing of his first play, *Les Mouches* (1943). This section has an unexpected and significant impact for scholars of Sartre's theater and of French drama in the 1930s and 40s and makes a provocative case for Mazza's larger goal of investigating the points of contact between the literary and theatrical milieu of twentieth-century France. However, while this in-depth look at the early stages of Sartre's theatrical career is indeed fascinating, we plunge the depths of this affair long enough to run the risk of losing track of our main object of study: *L'État de siège*. The connection that provides the logic of dedicating one-fourth of this book to Sartre and Barrault's relationship before Camus may appear tenuous to some: it was Sartre who originally advised Barrault to seek a collaboration with Camus, since the latter was already writing a novel about the plague at the time that Barrault was developing the script. Even though Barrault's attempt to collaborate with Sartre on a play never came to fruition, Mazza dedicates dozens of pages to detailing their personal and intellectual relationship, resulting in a section of the book that seems only marginally related to what follows.

Indeed, despite the unique position granted to Camus in the book's title, the reader soon becomes aware that this is equally—if not more so—a book about Jean-Louis Barrault. Occasional calls for renewed attention to and appreciation of Barrault as a major figure in not only the theater but the cultural life of twentieth-century France become one of Mazza's recurring themes. Similarly, one of the book's central theses is that *L'État de siège* must be understood as a complete collaboration between Barrault and Camus, in which both men participated fully in the writing as well as the visual conceptualization and direction of the play. The exclusion of Barrault from the book's title, then, not only misrepresents its content, but does a disservice to one of the author's proclaimed goals: to draw greater attention to Barrault's work and career. The title of the book belies Mazza's true aim of granting Barrault recognition of his status as co-creator of the play.^[4]

The second part of the book is structured around the three primary protagonists in the creation of *L'État de siège* for the stage: Barrault, Camus, and the artist Balthus. Mazza provides a useful and well-informed overview of Camus's background in and dedication to the theater world, from his love of the collective labor of *travail en équipe* to his admiration of Elizabethan theater and the Spanish Golden Age, and his conviction (shared with Barrault) that corporeality is at the heart of dramatic expression. The profound significance of theater in Camus's life and thought is perhaps best represented by the figure of the *comédien* in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), deployed as a parallel to *l'homme absurde*, whose existence is defined as ultimately ephemeral and perishable. Barrault, for his part, conceived of himself as an artisan rather than an artist, one who always placed the highest importance on the physical and visual aspects of theater. Though he is now best remembered for his films, Mazza describes Barrault's long career as prefiguring the emergence of performance art later in the century, suggesting that the poor reception of *L'État de siège* was partly due to the use of expressive forms that only came to be understood and appreciated decades later. Much of the chapter on Balthus is dedicated to describing the painter's close friendship with Artaud—whose ideas about theater and the plague so impacted the young actor Barrault—and the painter's original costume and set design for another of French theater's failed experiments, although one much better remembered than *L'État de siège*: Artaud's *Les Cenci* (1935).

Part three traces the three major intertexts that dialogue, to varying degrees, in the final version of *L'État de siège*: Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*; Artaud's *Le Théâtre et la peste*; and Camus's *La Peste*. Barrault first wrote his own adaptation of Defoe in the late 1930s, rewriting it again before ultimately passing it to Camus. Barrault's text remained the backbone of the play that Camus would rework and elaborate many times over the course of their collaboration. Mazza argues that Barrault's original vision of the plague as a *mal purificateur* was mainly shaped by Artaud, but that it gave way in the final version to Camus's more politically engaged allegory of the plague as structures of oppression. Mazza carefully tracks the permutations of various stages of writing and rewriting, efficiently delineating the respective contributions of Barrault and Camus as they adapted the story of the plague into what Camus called a "mythe moderne." While most spectators of 1948 assumed the play to be an adaptation of Camus's novel—a misconception that resulted in huge disappointment among theatergoers, and which lingers today in some accounts of the play—Mazza shows that many elements of the play that seem transposed from the novel were in fact present long before Camus's involvement. This allows Camus's contributions to be better understood, while fully dispelling the *idée reçue* that the text of the play was singlehandedly written by Camus. Mazza makes a compelling case for the richness, complexity, and singularity of their collaboration, which requires a reconceptualization of the kinds of roles taken on by both Camus and Barrault in terms of writing and directing. While Barrault should be remembered as an author of *L'État de siège* in his own right, the ambitions of Camus are made clear as well: "il veut faire du théâtre, et pas seulement en écrire" (p. 252).

The fourth and final part of the book is perhaps the most interesting, as the preceding sections leave us eager to delve into the performance of the play itself. Due to the relative lack of material traces, we are left with little else but the accounts of critics to produce a sense of the overall effect on stage. Through the reviews of *L'État de siège*—many of which were extremely harsh—an image emerges of a strikingly unconventional performance, by which most critics were deeply bothered. Camus and Barrault's aesthetic choices seem to have profoundly disturbed the public's theatrical and intellectual sensibilities in a way that, in Mazza's account, announced a change on the horizon.

The majority of the critiques of *L'État de siège* are "textocentric," treating the play primarily as a dramatic text written by a single author, which it is the director's responsibility to faithfully translate to the stage. Many of the negative reviews take issue with the script itself, declaring *L'État de siège* a failed play because it did not offer believable and empathetic characters with whom the audience could identify. Lack of emotion is the constant refrain among critics, who found themselves left with symbolism they found not just obvious, but cold and intellectual. The refusal of naturalism made it inaccessible and incomprehensible to the public of the time. However, others accused Barrault of overtaking Camus's work and dominating the production, imposing an aesthetic vision that ruined the effect of the text. The idea that the position of *metteur en scène* is necessarily subordinate to that of the *auteur* is typical of French discourses on theater during the Occupation and the immediate postwar years, but the figure of the *metteur en scène* as an independent artistic force begins to ascend in the early 1960s. The staging of *L'État de siège* as well as the nature of Camus and Barrault's collaboration prefigures this cultural shift in the hierarchy of writer and director, text and *mise en scène*. In his review of the play, the theater critic Bernard Simiot expresses the profound anxiety that accompanies such a shift, in a world where "les valeurs ne sont plus à leur place" because "les metteurs en scène imposent leur loi aux auteurs"—soon, he warns, "les garde-barrières voudront conduire demain les locomotives et les chanteurs de music-hall faire de la philosophie" (quoted p. 302). Barrault was an object of contempt for those who wanted to resist such a disruption of the hierarchy, for whom lowly theater directors intruding upon the creation and expression of literature was akin to philosophy emerging from the music hall. One of the most interesting and original contributions of Mazza's book is the argument for re-evaluating how the *métier* of the director has been transformed in the past seventy years, and the extent to which Barrault was a pioneering figure in this current that significantly altered how works of theater are produced and perceived.

This book effectively communicates the complexity and richness of Barrault and Camus's relationship, and we are left regretting that after completing *Les Justes* in 1949, Camus never wrote another original play, perhaps, as Mazza suggests, wounded by the virulence of the critics of *L'État de siège*. Readers may also be left yearning for a greater sense of the complexity and richness of the play itself to have been reflected in this study (even those who, like myself, have already read it or seen it performed). The wealth of material deployed by Mazza is certainly cause for praise, but considering just how widely he casts his net in order to fully reconstruct the *genèse* of the play—such as a lengthy section on Sartre, with whom Barrault did not ultimately collaborate—the book could have benefitted from stronger and more persistent *files conducteurs*. While the four-part structure promises a clear approach to the play's origins, creation, and reception, the sections and sub-sections often result in a certain amount of repetition. In addition, the editors could have taken a bit more care in producing the book, which is marred by a number of typos, and an occasional lack of clarity in references.

Still, this book compellingly shows that *L'État de siège* is not just a forgotten text, but a complex and misunderstood event that tells us much about the literary and theatrical milieux of modern France. The breadth of archival work makes Mazza's book indispensable to anyone working on this neglected play, and incredibly valuable to scholars and specialists of Camus, Barrault, theater history, literature, or cultural studies. However, it is worth noting that Mazza's focus here is essentially historical and bibliographic, so readers looking for interpretation of the play itself or deeper analysis of its potential meanings—such as its intervention in discourses of allegory, revolt, history, or representation—will need to look elsewhere (or rather, look forward to the scholarship to come). Mazza leaves us prepared to harness this highly documented historical narrative by continuing to investigate *L'État de siège*'s fascinating legacy.

NOTES

[1] Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes* II (Paris : Gallimard, 2006), p. 372.

[2] In 2017, Demarcy-Mota's production of the play was performed in Paris at the Théâtre de la Ville from March 8 to April 1, followed by the Théâtre National de Bretagne from April 25 to May 6, and conducted a limited tour of the U.S. and Canada in October-November 2017.

[3] Artaud's "Le Théâtre et la peste" appears in *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

[4] It is worth remarking that this book is a revised version of the author's doctoral thesis in theater studies, which was defended in 2013 at Paris X, titled *Jean-Louis Barrault – Albert Camus: l'enjeu de L'État de siège: entre adaptations et collaborations le travail d'un capocomico français du XXe siècle*. The elimination of Barrault's name from the title of the present volume is puzzling, as the dissertation's title seems to more accurately reflect the scope of Mazza's work.

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