Book Reviews

Acting Now. Conversations on Craft and Career by Edward Vilga. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8135-2403-2.

The structure of Edward Vilga's *Acting Now. Conversations on Craft and Career* is an all too familiar one. Books of collected interviews with actors, as well as similar tomes on playwrights, designers, and directors, have become a small cottage industry within the admittedly small realm of publications on theatre and drama. If those interviewed are interesting, diverse in their views among the other interviewees included, and important figures, the collection will at the very least prove intriguing for both the theatrical artist and the more general reader. At best, such a collection provides inspiration and insight to other practitioners from those who have made a distinct professional mark, and a rare glimpse into those aspects of the often mysterious and intangible process of theatrical performance.

On my own bookshelf I find at least four similar collections on acting, and at least as many on directing and playwriting. Some, like *Actors on Acting* edited by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1949, 1954, 1970), focus on historical theorizing from actors across the cultures from the fifth century B.C. Greeks to the mid-twentieth century. Others, such as *Actors Talk About Acting*, edited by Lewis Funke and John E. Booth (New York: Avon, 1961), *Actors on Acting. Performing in Theatre and Film Today*, edited by Joanmarie Kalter (New York: Sterling Publishing,1979), and *Conversations in the Wings. Talking About Acting*, edited by Roy Harris (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), deal exclusively with American (or English-speaking) actors discussing their backgrounds, training, and individual approaches to acting on stage, television, and in film, as well as the works in which they have appeared. Vilga's volume falls into this category

Vilga's interviewees are an appropriately eclectic group spanning several generations, beginning with the late Stella Adler, whose association with the legendary Group Theatre and whose long career as a leading acting teacher of some of the finest actors since the 1940s, provides the book with an anchor at the true beginnings of contemporary American theatre and film. Adler, a modern "classicist" among acting teachers, stresses the significance of finding a character through close study of the play text, and to building a richer understanding of a character's actions through an awareness of a "larger life," which for her are the social, political, and cultural realities of the character's time and place as they meet those of the audience. She laments the fact that actors of "size" have vanished, perhaps, as she believes, "shrunken by the values of the motion picture or of Broadway" (p. 9). She pithily discusses the commercial considerations of the modern dramatic arts that she believes mar the ability of the true artist to contribute and function in serious ways. Not surprisingly, she is articulate, irreverent (except

about those plays and actors she clearly respects), and passionately convinced of the eternal need for drama within the American community.

Following Adler, Vilga focuses on the two generations following her's, those artists who came of age since the 1950s-1960s and are still functioning as actors, directors, teachers, and on the business end of the theatre and media. These are followed by a number of interviewees in similar categories who have attained prominence since the late 1970s. The first group begins with Harold Baldridge, director of the Neighborhood Playhouse. He stresses the necessity of the "fusion on the arts" (p. 12), which he defines as the combining of the skills of method-style naturalistic acting with intensive study of voice, speech, dance, and music, a mode of training characteristic of the Neighborhood Playhouse. Refreshingly, Baldridge emphasizes the importance of aspiring actors receiving a liberal arts education before entering conservatory training. Robert Brustein, founder of both the Yale Repertory Theatre and the American Repertory Company, and one of America's most distinguished critics (as well as a director of note), differs slightly in his belief that acting students "need to work both with their peers and with professionals" (p. 57). He emphasizes that acting cannot truly be taught, and that not everyone can be an actor, insisting that "there are two common errors. One is thinking that if you don't have the talent, you can become an actor through a lot of training. That's an error. The other error is that if you have the talent, you don't need the training. The fact is, you need the training and the talent" (p. 59). Oscar and Tony Award-winning actress Ellen Burstyn amusingly describes the ways Actors Studio head Lee Strasberg stripped away her "pretty belle" (p. 69) ingenue persona to allow her to grow into one of the finer actors of her generation. Some interviewees, like André Bishop, former artistic director of Playwrights Horizon and current head of the Lincoln Center Theatre, and Tanya Berezin, founder of the Circle Repertory Company and a working stage and screen actress, offer useful but somewhat more pedestrian practical advice on working as actors in the profession. Vilga also includes interviews with career consultants (Henry House, operator of an agency called Ontrack) and casting directors (Juliet Taylor), to similarly emphasize the "how to" aspects of a professional acting career. The mixture of serious reflections on the art and craft of acting with advice on how to function as a working actor in today's theatre reaps mixed results. The reader is left with the impression that the volume would be more effective if it had been one thing or the other. The practical problems of the actor's survival are infinitely changeable and depend, to some extent, on the evolution of the various media. For example, there is no discussion of the impact of computer-generated and interactive media, certainly a likely growth area for actor employment in coming years. Its impact on the survival of various other media, especially live theatre, remains unclear. It is certainly the case that the greater insights found in *Acting Now* emerge from an Adler, Brustein, or Burstyn, or Robert Falls, artistic director of Chicago's Goodman

Theatre, who eloquently discusses the rehearsal process and the complex relationship of actors with directors. Similarly, performance artist and monologist Spalding Gray illuminates some of the difficulties of moving back and forth between stage and film, and the fine line between traditional theatre and performance art that he walks in his work. Other interviewees are individuals of greater or lesser significance in the realm of acting and actor training, including Marilyn Fried, Scott Macaulay, Austin Pendleton, Neil Pepe, and the author's spouse, Nela Wagman. Vilga's questions are generally effective in drawing out the interviewee and are appropriately particular to each subject's area of expertise and level of achievement.

Vilga has included informative notes that fill in some background on references made in the interviews, and each interview is headed with a photo of the subject as well as some biographical information, which is particularly helpful with the less well-known individuals. Otherwise, the book only features the interviews; a bibliography of sources relating to each interviewee and of similar works on acting would help. Handsomely bound and modestly priced as a paperback, it is easy to imagine well-thumbed copies of *Acting Now* in the hands of young actors, many of whom may well find inspiration and useful advice between its covers. More likely, they will simply enjoy the anecdotal recounting of important careers and well-articulated arguments in the general and familiar debate on the merits of "internal" or "external" acting and other matters of contention in the realm of acting. However, like all such discussions of an intangible and often mysterious art form, it becomes increasingly clear from the interviews in *Acting Now* that the complex art of acting can neither be taught nor fully articulated by even its most effective practitioners.

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Ibsen's Drama. Right Action and Tragic Joy by Theoharis C. Theoharis. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. ISBN 0-312-22149-5; ***Edwardian Shaw. The Writer and His Age*** by Leon Hugo. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999. ISBN 0-312-21796-X; ***Understanding Chekhov. A Critical Study of Chekhov's Prose and Drama*** by Donald Rayfield. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. ISBN 0-299-16314-8.

Theatrical scholars are well aware of the seemingly endless stream of books on the lives, plays, and influence of the three essential figures of early modern European drama: Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and Anton Chekhov. What, one might reasonably wonder, is left to be said about them? At least as evidenced to varying degrees by three new books, one on each of these dramatists, there is much more to say. Together, these three volumes offer more than a mere introduction to the influence of these three titans. Each, in its own way, challenges the reader to a fuller and deeper exploration of their distinct artistry and a portrait of the theatrical and literary environment of their remarkable times.

Theoharis C. Theoharis's *Ibsen's Drama. Right Action and Tragic Joy* is a copious examination of Ibsen's innovations and use of dramatic action and its foundations in ancient and modern philosophical concepts. Theoharis provides a solid foundation by explaining Aristotle's theories as they illuminate Nietzsche's, which then leads him to focus intently on three of Ibsen's greatest plays, *Ghosts* (1881), *Rosmersholm* (1886), and *The Master Builder* (1892), with passing references to most of Ibsen's other dramas. Theoharis explains in his preface the inherent ambiguity of Ibsen's dramatic actions that propel his protagonists toward "the same divided consciousness of moral law that afflicted Saint Paul: the good they would, they do not, but the evil they would not, they do (Rom. 8:19)" (p. vii). Theoharis efficiently rehashes Aristotle's thoughts on reality and change in the *Poetics* while doing the same with Nietzsche's various writings, most especially *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), *The Twilight of the Idols* (1889), and *The Anti-Christ* (1895). Although it is the case that most of Ibsen's important plays were written before Nietzsche's ideas were disseminated, the application to Ibsen's drama is penetratingly explored. In taking up Nietzsche's theories, Theoharis illuminates the central dilemma of many of Ibsen's characters when he suggests that "Truth and its object, the real, are then always true and real for something or, more accurately, for someone. This conviction allows Nietzsche to claim that new philosophy can beget as well as undo a valuable world, can rehabilitate as well as disengage human agency" (p. 31). Theoharis argues that Ibsen's characters create worlds and destroy them and the moral ground beneath them shifts to reveal the reality of their moral character as well as the hypocrisies and untruths in the values of their society. Theoharis's emphasis on what he

describes as Ibsen's "prose cycle" of plays, from *Pillars of Society* (1877) to *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), leads him to relate the "many philosophical and dramatic transformations" (p. 60) that evolved since Aristotle described the Greek conviction "that people act themselves into stable, knowable being in a stable, knowable way" (p. 60). Ibsen, Theoharis posits, renders his own transformations through an attentiveness to "the world of money and family" which develops into "the superior force of mysterious contests" (p. 72) in the later plays. Theoharis insists that Ibsen accomplishes his dramatic ends by setting up his protagonists as challengers of a moral order that illuminates human alienation in a misbegotten social structure. In explaining the "sick will" in *Ghosts*, Theoharis notes that its characters, particularly Mrs. Alving, "decline into paralysis not because they make the wrong choices but because they cannot make any right ones as long as they want to change the world that changes them" (p. 73). *Rosmersholm* provides Theoharis with a grim drama in which its central characters battle with managing tragic pasts, while *The Master Builder*, which Theoharis examines in greater depth, presents Solness, a central character who is the antithesis of Shakespeare's Prospero. Prospero, Theoharis claims, restores "political, familial, natural, and supernatural orders to lawful prosperity" while the "multiple" crises of Solness's situation catch him in "the ambiguous stasis of resisting and requiring change in all of his relationships and circumstances" (p. 186). Theoharis concludes his thesis on the "tragic joy" that emerges from Ibsen's greatest prose dramas describing Nietzsche's attempt to "cure what he regarded as the long European disease of rational humanism," while Ibsen, who similarly offers an examination of the "transvaluation of all values," brought about dramatic changes that "radiated out from Ibsen's stage to Shaw's, Chekhov's, O'Neill's, and, in its most radical form, Beckett's" (p. 281). There is no denying Ibsen's profound influence on the playwrights who followed him, whether or not Theoharis's densely constructed, well-written thesis seems completely convincing.

Ibsen opened the door for the European stage's next two important voices, Shaw, who proclaimed his debt to Ibsen in what he defined as his use of the drama to provide social debate and in the refusal of his characters to acquiesce to long-held values, and Chekhov, who without acknowledgement seems to draw on elements of Ibsen's dramatic techniques in his lyrical meditations on human behavior. In Leon Hugo's *Edwardian Shaw. The Writer and His Age*, Shaw's experiences between 1901 and 1910 are examined as they effect his evolution as a dramatist. Hugo begins with an efficiently sketched introduction of Shaw's transformation into a dramatist in the 1890s, when Ibsen's work had a profound influence, although Hugo does not mention it. Instead, he explains the ways in which the failure of Shaw's earliest plays in production stiffened his resolve to, as he explained in a letter to Ellen Terry, "try again & again & again. I always said I should have to write twenty bad plays before I could write one good one" (p. 7). What stands out in Hugo's account is Shaw's tenacity despite a record of crushing

failure as a novelist in the 1880s and for the first decade of his playwriting, but also in the seismic changes he led not only in British drama, but in his society as a whole. In confrontation with a deeply conservative society, Shaw succeeded through his plays and other writings to steadily insinuate radical socialist ideas that by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century became, in many respects, mainstream views. Hugo does not shy away from Shaw's obvious failings: a need to retaliate against his critics, his flagrant self-promotion, and his eccentricities in personal relationships, but these pale in comparison with Hugo's account of Shaw's vigorous promotion of Fabian social causes and his battles against censorship despite, at least initially, fierce antagonism from entrenched political views and the comfortable establishment theatre. This last is most particularly represented by Henry Irving, who resisted forms of drama, like Ibsen's and Shaw's that, as Irving insisted, "abolished God, duty, the devotion of a mother to her children, and the obligation of man to his fellow-men" (p. 94). The strength of *Edwardian Shaw* is in its detailed tracing of Shaw's struggles in the period; it is significantly less effective in its cursory analysis of the plays themselves. Perhaps Hugo assumes the reader will be overly familiar with the style and content of the plays, but in focusing exclusively on a social history of Shaw's impact he leaves too much to chance in regard to the reader's appreciation of the ways in which Shaw's struggles became part of the texture of his dramatic works.

Donald Rayfield has what may seem an easier task than Hugo in his *Understanding Chekhov. A Critical Study of Chekhov's Prose and Drama.* Rayfield has a smaller dramatic output to examine and a writer who was less a polemicist than an incisive and lyrical observer of the slow drift toward colossal changes that would come abruptly and violently in Russian society two decades later. Rayfield's lucid prose, refreshingly free of the excesses of scholarly lingo, traces the formation of Chekhov as a writer in the first eight chapters of *Understanding Chekhov.* Here he presents Chekhov's background, his earliest writings, and the influences on his work from diverse literary sources (his reading, as Rayfield notes, "was unexpectedly varied" [p. 135]), most particularly two significant figures in nineteenth century Russian culture, Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin and Leo Tolstoy. Although his relationship with Suvorin would eventually be undermined by the anti-Semitic attitudes of Suvorin's paper *New Times*, the opportunities to contribute kept him afloat as a writer between 1886 and 1887 and, as Rayfield posits, marked Chekhov's "entry into serious literature" (p. 33). Within that year, Chekhov wrote in excess of eighty pieces published in several publications. Rayfield also traces the obvious influence of Tolstoy on Chekhov's writing in the same period, but Chekhov's personal difficulties, especially his frequent bouts of serious illness throughout the remainder of his life, movingly shadows Rayfield's elucidation of Chekhov's evolution as dramatist and prose writer. It is perhaps not surprising that *Understanding Chekhov* is at its best when Rayfield focuses on Chekhov's

dramatic works, *The Seagull* (1895), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *Three Sisters* (1900), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1903). He suggests that all of the plays, with the exception of *Uncle Vanya*, are linked by their construction around single central heroines. *The Seagull* he finds to be Chekhov's "most heterogeneous work and, in some ways, his most literary" (p. 136), while he suggests that the Brontë sisters provided inspiration, both literary and literally, for *Three Sisters*, and that *The Cherry Orchard* was, more than literally, the "culmination of all his drama" (p. 240). *Uncle Vanya* was described by Maxim Gorky, "no friend of Chekhovian drama," as "enormous, Symbolist, and in form it is a completely original, unique thing" (p. 179), and Rayfield's insights in regard to this play are among his most impressive contributions. Arguably the finest of Chekhov's plays, Rayfield believes that *Uncle Vanya* profits from lessons Chekhov learned writing *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters*, and that it especially stands out in its "economy of characterization and above all in the symbolism" (p. 181). As Rayfield concludes his comments in the final chapter, he says that *The Cherry Orchard*—and this might well be extended to Chekhov's complete dramatic output, as well as the achievements of Ibsen and Shaw—provides a "crossroads for old and new literature: it generates as much as it perpetuates" (p. 266).

All three volumes include select bibliographies and detailed notes, but little in the way of visual illustration, which is unfortunate. Theoharis and especially Rayfield provide vivid and valuable illumination of what Ibsen and Chekhov generate and perpetuate respectively, while Hugo is somewhat less effective, perhaps because he chooses to focus solely on one distinct era in Shaw's work which, inevitably, gives short shrift to numerous works spread across a writing career that lasted considerably more than half a century. However, all three books will interest both the serious scholar of modern European drama, as well as those seeking an introductory guide to the foundation on which contemporary drama is built.

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Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama by Jeanette R. Malkin.
Theatre: Theory/Text/Performance. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. ISBN 0-472-11037-3.

So much theatre scholarship is marked by belatedness. Once a theme or method has made the rounds of all the other humanistic disciplines, it arrives on the doorstep of the Theatre department, trailing behind it an already lengthy and varied bibliography. There is, then, a sense of predictability, if not inevitability, about this volume. The 1990s have been a decade in which disputes over memory increasingly proliferated—disputes over Freudian theory, recovered memory, Holocaust memorials, trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. These popular debates quickly found themselves reflected in academic scholarship. Andreas Huyssen, perhaps the most nuanced and meticulous thinker to address these issues, pondered questions of memory and representation in his 1995 *Twilight Memories*. Elaine Showalter's shrill and provocative *Hystories* entered the field in 1997, painting a garish picture of a public in ever-growing seizures of media-induced hysteria. The next year, Kirby Farrell went trauma-hunting in *Post-Traumatic Culture* and found it in abundance, from the adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle and H. Rider Haggard to the latest offerings at the cineplex. Finally, near the end of the decade there appears a volume on memory and contemporary drama, a venture that offers few surprises to readers who have been following the literature on memory produced in other disciplines. As so often happens, the belated work of dramatic criticism borrows extensively from other fields, but yields few fresh insights to the larger discussion in return, limiting itself to some useful insights into particular dramatic texts.

The structure of Malkin's book is familiar to readers of dramatic criticism, so familiar that it might easily escape notice. The core is made up of five chapters on individual playwrights (Samuel Beckett, Heiner Müller, Sam Shepard, Suzan Lori-Parks and Thomas Bernhard) flanked by introductory and concluding sections that are more broadly theoretical. Three of the core chapters include extensive passages from articles that the author had previously published elsewhere. Each of these chapters easily stands alone, and the best way to read the volume is to read them as individual essays. The chapters on Müller, Parks and Bernhard not only serve as excellent introductions to their subjects, but offer insightful readings of key works for the more advanced student. With such extensively-mined playwrights as Beckett and Shepard, the sense of discovery is less, (and it is odd that Samuel Beckett's long essay on Marcel Proust, that masterful anatomist of memory, escapes mention) but the work is nevertheless solid, and certainly should be recommended to advanced undergraduate and graduate students in both Theatre and Comparative Literature.

These core chapters, however, sit uneasily between the theoretical chapters which read as if they were fitted around the previously written material. It says little for these theoretical chapters that they can so easily be skipped over. While Malkin's treatment of dramatic texts is meticulous, her treatment of theory tends to be cursory. She tries to unite her playwrights by reference to postmodernism, while trying to avoid the many debates that have flared up around the term. The result is that the term dwindles into little more than a stylistic rubric that fails to serve the author's purposes well. It works best with Müller and Parks, whose disjointed landscapes of memory and fantasy both question and subvert national projects of history and forgetting. But the term is less useful for Shepard and Beckett, both of whom, the abundant critical literature suggests, straddle the boundary between modernism and postmodernism. In both cases, Malkin feels constrained to argue for their inclusion safely within the postmodern canon, oblivious to the fact that their mongrel status may in itself be highly significant. Bernhard emerges far less as a postmodernist than a good old-fashioned satirist, energetically castigating the vices of his German and Austrian audiences with sarcasm and invective. The rubric "postmodern" almost reads like an afterthought, imposed to give a greater appearance of unity than the critical readings warrant.

Malkin creates further problems by yoking the concept of postmodernism to that of trauma. Both terms are slippery, and the relationship between them here remains indefinite. Instead of discussing traumatized playwrights or characters, the author invokes the notion of collective trauma, a trauma that is not precisely situated in any individual subject. The notion of a traumatization that exists somehow independently of a subject is an awkward fusion of psychology and poststructuralist thought, in which both agency and causality become unclear. The result is muddled, and the best I can conclude is that Malkin is using the term "collective trauma" to evoke a wounded Zeitgeist which causes repetitions and splittings that either mirror or bring about the repetitions and splittings of some postmodern works of art. It is one thing, however, to postulate a collective of individuals who share certain traumatic experiences in common, and quite another to summon up a trauma without a self, "sourceless, without a psychological home, as though emanating from a culturally determined collective subconscious" (p. 8). Malkin erases the subject on the individual level, only to reconstitute it, hazily, on the social. The process is baffling—how, for example, could Sam Shepard become the channel for a free-floating traumatization arising somehow from the frontier experience?

One also must ask if there is any necessary relationship between trauma and the postmodern. Certainly August Strindberg, Antonin Artaud and the German expressionists demonstrate that traumatization can as easily express itself in modernist forms as postmodern, and Kirby Farrell's study of post-traumatic formations in popular culture shows that trauma need not lead to any particular style

or form. Indeed, one could argue that if there is any particular relationship between trauma and the postmodern it is the widespread circulation of discourses of traumatization through bestsellers, movies, television talk shows, and computer chat rooms. Perhaps a study of celebrity deaths, such as Princess Diana and John F. Kennedy, Jr., would tell us more about the characteristic configurations of trauma in the postmodern age than the analysis of any play.

By linking collective trauma with the postmodern, Malkin reduces the complex politics, economics and erotics of memory to the status of a festering wound. The model is vaguely Freudian and bypasses the rich insights on memory found in Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche and the Frankfurt School. But, by doing away with the individual subject, Malkin also sacrifices the specificity of Freud's best work. For, if there is no individual subject, there is no personal history, and the trauma dissolves into an entity that is both everywhere and nowhere—a miasma that takes on dramatic form. The chapter on Samuel Beckett, as a result, unfolds in a void, and the chapters on Parks and Shepard seem oddly disconnected from the specific political and social situations in which their plays were written. Only in the chapters on Müller and Bernhard does Malkin opt for greater personal and contextual specificity, and those chapters come alive as none of the others do. Here we read of distinct human agents who intervene in specific social situations. There is a heightened sense of the historical, a vividness in the prose, and a clear sense of agency. One wishes that all of the book were on this level. Malkin's forte is not the elaboration of theory, but the writing of history, and I look forward to more historical writing from her.

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German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage. David F. Kuhns. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-521-58340-3.

The Expressionist artist and designer Käthe Kollwitz once wrote, "I am convinced that there must be an understanding between the artist and the people such as there always used to be in the best periods of history," a statement which underlines the progressive socio-aesthetic intents of the German Expressionist movement. As David F. Kuhns suggests, these were artists and philosophers who sought "to revolutionize German society and renew its faith in humanity" (p. 1). However, Kollwitz's artistic manifesto is also representative of why the Expressionists are frequently neglected in studies of the avant garde; too often, Expressionism is regarded as an ineffective political movement whose agenda was crushed after World War I resulting from the degradation of the German people by staggering war reparations, global depression, and the rise of national socialism. Although several art historians have effectively documented the Expressionist movement in terms of its aesthetic tenets, a discussion of Expressionist stagecraft has long been a necessity. However, in his thoughtful and detailed study, *German Expressionist Theatre*, Kuhns effectively discusses the significance of the movement in terms of its development and philosophy, its effect on Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, and its role as theatrical antecedent for subsequent movements in the twentieth century.

Kuhns primarily documents work done in the brief period 1916-21, which he claims as the moment of greatest clarity for Expressionist theatre. The author also denotes that his study "is neither solely a factual reconstruction nor a social history of Expressionist performance" (p. 4). Instead, Kuhns considers the importance of the actor's body and voice as the conduit for Expressionist semiotics. The actor became a vehicle for often abstract Expressionist art forms–dance, music, color, movement, the utterance–and thus the physical embodiment of the movement's rhetoric and conceptions of reform. By focusing on the characteristically anti-realistic, symbolic acting modes defined by directors such as Leopold Jessner and Lothar Schreyer, Kuhns compellingly argues that the performers' "expressive powers" essentially sought to manifest complex political and ethical changes in the behavior of audiences and German society as a whole: "To this end, the actor–as raw material for the director, and sometimes raw meat for the audience–became the medium in which theatrical Expressionism performatively inscribed its discourse of cultural renewal" (p. 19).

German Expressionist Theatre begins with two introductory chapters on Expressionist thought and theatrical antecedents for the budding art community. Although Kuhns himself suggests that these chapters are intended more for the novice reader than the scholar of Expressionism, the introductory material is thor-

oughly engaging and is an effective guide to the book's subsequent discussion. Kuhns reviews the historical, political, and philosophical progenitors for the movement, including the Julien-Auguste Hervé's coining of the term "Expressionism" for the Salon des Indépendents in Paris and the aesthetic movements that sprung up in its wake, like Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter; the philosophical tradition that informed the Expressionist aesthetic, from Kant to Nietzsche; and the notion that Expressionism essentially stood as a revolt of sons against fathers, social change against political conservatism. Thus, the elements of the German patriarchal social organization provoked the Expressionists to publicly reject the status quo, as well as fostered the recurrent images of existential angst and isolation in Expressionist drama. Even though the complex philosophical underpinnings of the movement are sometimes not given the development they require, the author's discussion of aesthetic influences and the German state are particularly well-defined. Kuhns' second chapter, "The Poetics of Expressionist Performance," is one of his best; he carefully weaves together multiple strands of discussion and coherently connects the myriad theatrical and aesthetic influences on the Expressionist movement, from Frank Wedekind to futurism, from the carnival and the cabaret to Oskar Kokoschka. In this chapter, Kuhns also notes that through these influences, the female character in Expressionist drama was often relegated to the position of sexual object, as vampire or victim. But while Kuhns laments that women's roles were essentially "sexual caricature" or spiritual inspiration (p. 59), his promise to further discuss the Expressionists' misogyny is never carried through, one of the few developmental flaws in the text.

In his subsequent three chapters, Kuhns foregrounds his discussion of the actor as social agency with a discussion of Mel Gordon's three basic types of Expressionist performance: "Schrei," "Geist," and "Ich" (although Kuhns prefers the label "emblematic performance" for the latter). Kuhns accepts Gordon's terminology and framework, but develops his discussion in terms of Expressionist rhetoric as well as style. Devoting a lengthy chapter to each performative mode, Kuhns documents through this tripartite structure not only frequently noted elements of the Expressionist theatrical theme and agenda–alienation, primitivism, ecstatic performance, and abstraction–but also the broader, unchanging objectives of the movement despite the rapidly shifting focus points of style and subject matter throughout this brief five-year period. Kuhns also helpfully includes discussions of well-known Expressionist films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1920), in these chapters as counterpoints to and deviations from Expressionist style as embodied simultaneously on the German stage.

Chapter 3, "Schrei Ecstatic Performance," covers the first Expressionist productions before the War, with a detailed portrait of three actors who best embodied the "Schrei" performance style described as "electrical energy" and lead-

ing to the eventual release of emotional pressure through the fusion of movement and speech: Fritz Kortner, Werner Krauss, and Ernst Deutsch. The author also details here three seminal ensemble performances of this period which categorize Kuhns' three tendencies of "Schrei" vocalization: confrontational dialogue in Hasenclever's *Der Sohn*, operatic verbal duet in Kornfeld's *Die Verführung*, and monologue in Sorge's *Der Bettler*. It is in this chapter that Kuhns best realizes his theory that the Expressionist actor ultimately became "the walking text of conflicting cultural forces" (p. 138).

Chapter 4, however, is perhaps Kuhns' most important contribution to the study of theatrical Expressionism. Here, the author discusses "spiritual theatricality" or "Geist" Expressionism, a style heavily influenced by Vassily Kandinsky's aesthetic philosophy, and one that depended upon the theories of cultural struggle as aesthetically inspired rather than politically, artistic totality, and audience inclusion. Because "Geist" productions were frequently private, performed only for the coterie of a particular director like Schreyer, and also because members of the press were not allowed to review the productions, scholars have few resources to consult for this period of Expressionist performance during and immediately after World War I. As a result, "Geist" performances have long been neglected by theatrical scholars, but Kuhns has created an impressive discussion from his expansive research. In fact, the entire work benefits from the author's exacting use of interviews, descriptions, letters, reviews, and methodologies; Kuhns has efficiently combed through a large body of research material, which is evident in his meticulous albeit conversational notes section.

The final performative mode, "Ich," centered in the post-War period in Germany, is addressed in Chapter 5, as the Expressionist performances perhaps best known and most often documented in studies of the time are, such as Fehling's *Masse Mensch* and Jessner's *Richard III* and *Wilhelm Tell*. Though this is the least original of the performance chapters, Kuhns' style is polished and articulate, and his inclusion of actors' commentary on the productions, particularly Kortner's, as well as detailed descriptions of lighting, staging, and the performance history of the plays, makes this chapter one of the most enjoyable to read.

Though Kuhns' description of productions and actors is often able, *German Expressionist Theatre* is sorely in need of some form of illustration or visual documentation of the Expressionist movement and the productions encapsulated in the text. Surely some representation of production photos, design graphics, film stills, or sketches of the masks and costumes used by the performers (the "Geist" practitioners in particular) would be helpful to the reader's visualization and understanding of the differing models of Expressionism and the social and political importance of the movement. Though the author wants to foreground the performance of the actor's body through description, this can only be aided by illustration, not hindered as the author suggests. Expressionist theatre was a highly

visual art, and while photos on a page are only a blueprint for what existed on the stage, they can also guide the reader's mind's eye to more effectively "see" the total theatre of Reinhardt and Jessner.

The book concludes with an emphasis on the theatrical "legacies" of the Expressionist movement, a subject which Kuhns handles deftly, and is again one that has been dismissed or ignored by earlier scholarly texts. Kuhns thus demonstrates the importance of the Expressionist aesthetic for later theatre practitioners. This chapter was created for those who only regard Expressionism as a movement that eventually failed to live up to its social agenda instead of a living theatre that influenced the work of obvious inheritors like Piscator and Brecht, but also the less often acknowledged creative and political descendants such as Artaud, Beckett, Grotowski, Peter Brook, Pina Bausch, and Reza Abdoh. Although some of his "legacies" seem to be a stretch and demand further development (particularly his discussion of performance artists, like Karen Finley, or the use of collage in Robert Wilson's work), Kuhns' concluding remarks testify to the far-reaching effects of the Expressionists' creative ideology and desire for reform. If, as Kuhns claims, the "cultural heritage" of Expressionism is the "the experience of life as historical crisis," then the book's conclusion clearly shows how this tenet has unfortunately remained too true in aesthetic and political movements engendered in the wake of the Holocaust, the Cold War, the AIDS epidemic, and ethnic cleansing. *German Expressionist Theatre* is a book with far-reaching importance; for the student, the scholar, and the theatre artist alike, this is a study that is fresh, timely, and provocative, while at the same time an essential addition to the ongoing study of an oft-neglected social and theatrical moment of power and hope placed centrally between two epochs of politicized inhumanity.

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Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film. Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-19-818267-8.

During the past few years, there have been several celebrations in honor of the centennial of film making, and as a result, more scholars have recently examined aspects of the classical Hollywood film, as well as works of the silent era. However, not enough serious consideration has been paid to the first twenty years of film and the stage contexts early directors relied upon for developing precedents in mise-en-scène, stage construction, pacing, and modes of acting. As its book jacket pronounces, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* is "the first book-length study of the relations between early cinema and nineteenth-century theatre for nearly fifty years." This detailed study of the cinematic "borrowings" from nineteenth-century tragedy and melodrama, crafted by Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, is obviously long overdue. Utilizing recent criticism of several film scholars as an entry point for their discussion, Brewster and Jacobs lavishly document and describe for readers a multitude of films and the variety of ways in which early feature film directors adapted stage techniques in three principal areas: the tableau, acting, and staging. The authors successfully pick up their discussion from where their predecessor, A. Nicholas Vardac, left off in his *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film: From Garrick to Griffith* in 1949. Brewster and Jacobs have done necessary work, and their theories are often challenging and complex. However, the fresh ideas of the text are at times undercut by the authors' rather dry methodology, frequent repetition of claims, and at times, hasty dismissal of the work of other critics, like Roberta Pearson and Kristin Thompson.

In the initial two chapters of *Theatre to Cinema*, Brewster and Jacobs introduce readers to the two fundamental focus points of their discussion: theatrical pictorialism and the conception that the melodramatic plot functioned as a series of situations with specifically related staging practices. Besides laying the critical groundwork for their study in their summary and repudiation of Vardac's work, Chapter 1, "Pictures," and Chapter 2, "Situations," also identify the expectations for the visual image on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stage and screen, from technologies and literary plot lines developed for both media, to pictorial effects like the spectacle, and more importantly for this study, the tableau. French director Marcel Carné once claimed, "One must compose images as the old masters did their canvases, with the same preoccupation with effect and expression." In their introductory chapters, Brewster and Jacobs demonstrate that Carné's conception of the visual and painterly aesthetic for cinema originated on the stage and in early films as part of each medium's method of telling a story. Thus, stage

and screen pictures "were not autonomous narratives; they were part of the narrative structure of the play as a whole, and a way of articulating the relation of the play's story in time" (14). Because the first two chapters are introductory, they are the most derivative in the text; "Pictures" and "Situations" rely on work by theorists such as Diderot, Tom Gunning, Michael Booth, and Christian Metz to establish such accepted principles as, for example, that the theatre is essentially an exhibitionist art while the cinema encourages voyeurism. However, these chapters serve as an effective beginning point for the original insights that come later in the study, and—as is apparent throughout the text—are fine examples of meticulous research, as the lengthy chapter endnotes and final bibliography attest.

Section Two of *Theatre to Cinema* is devoted to the tableau, a device that, as Brewster and Jacobs demonstrate, was a vital component of nineteenth-century staging, particularly for moments of great "effect"–emotional climaxes, suspense, spectacle, intense display, allegorical moments–or at the end of scenes or acts. Although the authors argue that the tableau was not incorporated into early feature films in a straightforward way primarily because of differing audience expectations for the medium, (as well as editing and camera technology), film makers were inevitably affected by the predominant stage tableau, and thus directors and actors adopted tableau-inspired moments in their filmed versions of well-known plays. This hybridization of the tableau is beautifully illustrated in the study of one particular text: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. After detailing the various tableaux created by four different productions of the stage version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel (Aiken, Fitzball, Lemon and Taylor, and Hermann), the authors then compare how three subsequent films of the text adopted the strong performance traditions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the screen (the single-reeled Edison of 1903, and the multiple-reeled Vitagraph version of 1910 and the World version of 1914). Brewster and Jacobs are particularly adept in their detailed line-up and comparison of these seven disparate visual texts. The authors effectively focus on a handful of recurrent pictorial traditions adapted from the novel and visualized in most of the stagings to varying success and effect, including the escape of Eliza across the ice floes of the Ohio River, Eva and Tom in the garden, the death and ascension of Eva, Tom's refusal to flog Emmeline, and Tom's death or rescue. Here the frozen scene or moment of the stage tableau is adopted in film in a variety of briefer pauses, stylized acting poses, and through camera shots and editing techniques. In their discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the authors simultaneously chart the fate of the tableau in early feature films of Europe and America like Notre Dame de Paris and Alias Jimmy Valentine. The tableau was no longer predicated on performance modes and was instead narratively motivated, or as the authors attest, "the film reproduced the canonical tableaux of the old play with a new panoply of cinematic techniques" (p. 76).

Strongest of the book's segments is Section Three on "Acting," in which Brewster and Jacobs outline the replacement of stylized, pictorial, and often stereotyped acting modes of the nineteenth-century stage with a more modern, verisimilar style for the screen characterized by smaller gestures and restrained facial expressions engendered by the close camera shot. The authors recount methods of training actors in order to reproduce poses and gestures from classical paintings and sculpture, as well as "how poses and attitudes functioned as an integral part of the actor's preparation for a role" (p. 82). Through lively discussion and description, the authors demonstrate how actors trained in the classical tradition were expected to make internal states external through gesture and attitude, as for example, an actress playing Alcestis might have adopted a highly mannered, even histrionic style according to Henry Siddons' plans and sketches for the opera, *Alceste*. The authors once again use contrast to excellent effect when juxtaposing this emotive style with the wave of naturalism and realism that was contemporaneously sweeping the stage. The inclusion of Stanislavsky's comments to neophyte actors taught to pose rather than experience their roles are particularly illuminating and humorous. The authors then continue their fine discussion in two subsequent chapters, discussing how acting styles for film, particularly in America, necessarily became more realistic, although some pictorial stage mannerisms were essentially retained for aspects such as gestural soliloquies, tableaux, and pictorial blocking.

The book's final section centers on staging, both in terms of the analogy between stage and screen as framed pictures for the audience's view, but also in the iteration that theatre and cinema as spectacle were essentially "optical machines" which created differing effects and problems for producers of both mediums. This section documents cross-adoptions on the part of directors for stage and screen in order to create new spectacles and illusions for audiences; however, Brewster and Jacobs also delineate here the differences in space, focus, action, technology, and mechanisms that separated pictorial theatre from the cinematic stage.

The abundance of black-and-white illustrations in the book may explain its exorbitant $95 price tag, and many of the photographs (often sequential stills from rare copies of early films) and stage models are quite appropriate. However, in the case of some exceptions, like a series of stills from the 1917 film, *Klovnen* (p. 178), the tiny photos (1_ x 1_") are difficult to read, complicated by the fact that they are dark and often blurred. The inclusion of such photographs is questionable, especially when larger and clearer stills (3 x 2 _") from the same film are provided for viewers a few pages earlier (pp. 104-105). The design and sizing decisions and the selection of images is thus inconsistent and at times, confusing. There are also instances when the chosen still contradicts the authors' description of the action depicted, the most egregious of which occurs in a series of frames from Swedish director Victor Sjöström's *Ingmarssönerna*. The authors

write, "The actors typically remain poker-faced in the medium-shot framings. . . . each character is trying to withhold the display of emotions," and yet the film images clearly show the character Little Ingmar (Sjöström himself) mugging expressively for the camera (pp. 133-135).

However, the stylistic and visual flaws of *Theatre to Cinema* are minimalized next to the authors' thorough and groundbreaking study. In their conclusion, Brewster and Jacobs ask a series of questions to inspire further research about the connection between theatre and cinema of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, and hopefully, the pair will continue their own investigation, as well as inspire other film scholars to heed their call. *Theatre to Cinema* would be a helpful addition to the collection of any research or school library, and should be mandatory reading for all scholars of nineteenth-century theatre, early stage realism, or the genesis of film.

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