

English; some of the historical events referred to needed to be explained for those outside Poland (for example, 'the political Thaw of 1956').

Overall, the book provides some resonating questions for consideration, though it is more suited for postgraduates and academic specialists with some pre-existing knowledge of the subject.

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doi:10.1017/S0266464X20000184

James Reynolds

Robert Lepage/Ex Machina: Revolutions in Theatrical Space

London: Methuen Drama, 2019. 240 p. £75.
ISBN 978-1-4742-7609-2.

'I have never been to China'; this is the opening line of Robert Lepage's *The Dragon's Trilogy*, which I first saw in Toronto in 1986. James Reynolds's volume *Robert Lepage/Ex Machina: Revolutions in Theatrical Space* brings to mind the pleasure of the theatrical journey this talented director has taken theatre audiences on over the past three decades.

Reynolds has not seen *The Dragon's Trilogy*, although he discusses it in theoretical terms, through the words of other critics, like me, who were there. Reynolds is not Canadian or Quebecois, and as a result, retells history from Lepage's perspective in the first two parts of this volume, continuously using the royal 'we' and 'us' to generalize his perspective as if presenting the story as it should be understood. This study is meticulous about recounting in detail every step of Lepage's journey and tries to create order, structure and a method out of what is, by the author's own admission, this director's rather eclectic career trajectory.

The resulting Lepage method is formed from four aspects of his approach, which are traced through three stages of development. Concrete narrative, contradiction, *patenteux* (a particularly Quebecois approach to experimentation), and a political sensibility are the defining characteristics of the work, along with a rehearsal schedule that spaces three-week workshops six to twelve months apart. The three parts of the study, *Foundation and Stepping Stones* (1994–9), *Choosing all Directions* (2000–8) and *Starting Points* (2008–18) illustrate the almost impossible task of shaping Lepage's career into a narrative which demonstrates purpose and direction.

Despite the impossible task Reynolds sets himself, this study is the most thorough and considered overview of the work of this director I have ever read. The serious consideration of Lepage's architectural way of creating a story, both in the rehearsal room and on stage, is usefully articulated through the idea of a concrete

narrative. The close examination of the working practices and collaborative relationships of Lepage and his company, *Ex Machina*, is extremely revealing, and produces some compelling conclusions. This volume comes into its own in the final part when the detailed description of what the author saw in the rehearsal room is revealed. 'Perhaps, an argument can be a story,' Reynolds writes; if it can, this one tells a very good tale.

CHRISTIE CARSON

doi:10.1017/S0266464X20000196

Maggie B. Gale and Kate Dorney, eds.

Stage Women, 1900–50: Female Theatre Workers and Professional Practice

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019.
312 p. £80.
ISBN: 978-1-5261-0070-2.

The latest volume in the 'Women, Theatre and Performance' series fills a gap in the performance history of the first half of the twentieth century by examining a broad range of women's working practices. Diverging from the more typical academic focus on the non-commercial stage, the book offers a revealing examination of women's experience within commercial and popular theatre, radio, and television.

The first part explores the diverse areas in which female theatre workers were active beyond the industry, in many cases drawing upon skills they had developed on stage. Maggie B. Gale's chapter demonstrates how consideration of the autobiographical writing of theatrical celebrities can advance revisionist histories of the profession. Kate Dorney's examination of theatre collector, campaigner, and war worker Gabrielle Enthoven reveals the productive intersection between professional and amateur spheres. This is also evident in Lucy Sutherland's study of the 'creative autonomy' Winifred Dolan exercised as a teacher and producer of school drama after retirement from the West End. The social and political engagement of theatre workers is explored through Catherine Hindson's discussion of the not inconsiderable concealed labour actresses were expected to undertake through charity work, and Naomi Paxton's chapter on the campaigning and war effort activities of the Actresses' Franchise League. Less desirable public engagement is evidenced by Viv Gardner in legal cases brought by actresses seeking to defend interests and reputations.

Part Two presents studies of an eclectic mix of women noted for their popular performances. Together they highlight the expertise and resilience displayed in taking on the challenges of new technologies and working conditions.