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## Broadway Goes to War: American Theater during World War II

By Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2021; pp. x + 290, 11 illustrations. \$35.00 cloth, \$35 e-book.

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Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry's last collaboration took on Hollywood at war, examining some of the ways in which film shaped Americans' understanding of World War II. Their current book responds to that most Hollywood of desires, the want of a sequel, and it does not disappoint. In *Broadway Goes to War: American Theater during World War II*, McLaughlin and Parry focus on the theatre's response to the Second World War by suggesting that Broadway "presented a less tidy but more complex view of the war than any other popular-culture medium" (22). McLaughlin and Parry argue that this complexity exposes the myth of wartime consensus. "This is not to say that patriotic pulling together, personal and economic sacrifice, did not happen," they write, "but that this love of country and support for the war effort were carried on side by side with questions, concerns, criticisms, and fear" (132). Whereas the majority of plays produced during the period focused on America and its allies—"we have found no plays that support fascism," the authors assure readers—New York theatre did not shy away from the domestic difficulties exposed by the war (44). *Broadway Goes to War* reveals just how the war enabled playwrights and practitioners to produce vibrant, timely theatre that offered audiences an unvarnished, nuanced, and at times unpleasant look at the social and cultural challenges facing midcentury America.

Organized by wartime phases rather than by themes, *Broadway Goes to War* takes readers from prewar tensions, through overseas combat operations and troubles on the home front, and finally to the beginning of a postwar world. To prepare their case, McLaughlin and Parry identified and studied nearly two hundred plays with a thematic connection to the war, and they stay true to their topical commitment throughout by examining everything from popular hits like *On the Town* (1944) to the expressionist antiwar musical *Johnny Johnson* (1936). The result is a comprehensive survey of New York productions between 1933 and 1946 that were concerned directly with the Second World War. "Taken together," McLaughlin and Parry argue, these plays "provide a sense of the rich and difficult experience of living in the United States during the war years" (180). *Broadway Goes to War's* strength lies in this inclusivity, a cross section of performance history robust enough to support the authors' claims of theatre's cultural complexity.

McLaughlin and Parry begin well before the United States entered the war, a decision that allows them to show how the war brought long-simmering social concerns to boil, as issues like Depression-era economic woes, the rise of Fascism in Europe, and a general unease about America's role in the world became important subjects for theatre. In the workers theatres and during productions sponsored by the Federal Theatre Project, McLaughlin and Parry find strong affinities for labor, of course, along with social commitments that are occasionally cosmopolitan, even communist, in outlook. These perspectives, they contend, did not quite contribute to pacifism so much as to a kind of suspicion as Europe inched toward war. That wariness turns to interrogation and confrontation as immigrants and refugees flee the war and arrive in the United States, forcing those at home to reckon with the crisis abroad. But despite the global conflagration always close at hand, the plays and musicals in *Broadway Goes to War* tend to focus on interpersonal conflicts, a distillation of wartime tensions into tight social or familial circles. "Not surprisingly, many of the most successful plays of the war years were set on the home front," McLaughlin and Parry find (100). The most interesting examples eagerly expose injustice, like Arnaud D'Usseau and James Gow's *Deep Are the Roots* (1945) and Robert Ardrey's *Jeb* (1946), a pair of plays that consider the experiences of Black servicemen returning from the fight against Fascism abroad only to face segregation and racism at home.

Although *Broadway Goes to War* makes its case that a study of wartime New York theatre resists the myth of cultural consensus, it does so in a manner that cannot help but encourage more work in the field. Because the scope of the book's argument demands breadth, McLaughlin and Parry are unable to devote too much space to any single work, but what might be a limitation in other books here seems only to prompt important questions. For example, McLaughlin and Parry pair the fact that "most Americans' experience of the war is that it was always elsewhere" with the mimetic problems posed by modern combat onstage (64). "Unlike films," McLaughlin and Parry note, "plays could not realistically replicate battle scenes, and, unlike radio, plays could not expect theatergoers to close their eyes, listen to sound effects, and imagine battles, ships at sea, or B-17s in formation" (64). Perhaps. But then, I would add, the problem of representing war accurately and at scale is as old as theatre and less dependent upon the kind of military technologies involved than the authors suggest. The prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry V* famously tackled just this problem: "Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them," the speaker instructs the assembled audience (1.26). Whether the fighting occurs at Agincourt or during the Blitz, actors have long worked upon audiences' "imaginary forces" (1.18), conjuring medieval armies or modern bombers. McLaughlin and Parry hint that wartime theatre audience expectations had changed with exposure to new media technologies, but they do not have an opportunity to investigate audience reception further. Such analysis falls beyond the scope of the book, of course, but it remains one of many places where *Broadway Goes to War* invites further scholarship.

McLaughlin and Parry append a useful resource to *Broadway Goes to War*, a sixty-five-page "Annotated List of War-Related Plays Produced in New York, 1933–1946." A goldmine of plays with detailed annotations, McLaughlin and Parry's appendix should be an early stop for anyone teaching midcentury

American theatre performance. This inclusive catalog will prompt new investigations into the critical intersections McLaughlin and Parry suggest throughout the book. *Broadway Goes to War* will undoubtedly inspire other scholars to further inquiry, and I, for one, can't wait for the sequel.

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## Institutional Theatrics: Performing Arts Policy in Post-Wall Berlin

By Brandon Woolf. *Performance Works*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021; pp. xii + 268, 24 illustrations. \$99.95 cloth, \$34.95 paper, \$34.95 e-book.

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Berlin's theatre culture easily excites scholars and artists because of the city's financial support for and never-ending crises in the theatres. This excitement is obvious in Brandon Woolf's *Institutional Theatrics: Performing Arts Policy in Post-Wall Berlin* for those familiar with Berlin's theatre culture. Woolf also provides detailed descriptions of the theatres, performances, buildings, and protests for those new to it. He achieves writing such a compelling book not only through extensive archival research but also by analyzing mundane performances both at the theatres and on the streets. Although much has been written on Berlin theatre, Woolf offers a new perspective "by examining the intersections of performance and policy" to demonstrate how politicians support but simultaneously limit the theatres (2). Analyzing various theatre institutions and practices, he explores "theater's changing role in a changing society" since German unification in 1990 (2). The author argues that "understanding performance as itself a form of policy can help us understand the ways artists engage systems of state support" (8).

To discuss the idea of "performance as itself a form of policy" and his notion of "institutional dis/avowal[s]," which means accepting or resisting theatre's institutional structures and state funding for theatres, Woolf structures his book in two main parts, "State-Stages" and "Free-Scenes," with two chapters in each part (11). In Part 1, he examines traditional state-funded theatres to show how performance manifests itself as policy in institutions and how theatre institutions avow state funding while disavowing policies made without theatre makers' involvement in the process. In Part 2, he investigates nontraditional theatre institutions that receive project-based state funding to demonstrate how independent performance groups disavow the theatres' problematic institutional structures and director's dominance on theatre productions and explore new institutional forms. To do so, Woolf draws on Christopher Balme's and Peter Boenisch's scholarship on contemporary Berlin theatre and employs theories developed by Theodor W. Adorno, Tony Bennett, Toby Miller, George Yúdice, Judith Butler, Shannon Jackson, and Hans-Thies Lehmann.