

play as either a Freudian illustration or as Cocteau's poetic debate on free will versus determinism.



*"Theatre Arts" on Acting*. Edited by Laurence Senelick. Routledge Theatre Classics. London and New York: Routledge, 2008; pp. 552. \$120 cloth, \$36.95 paper.

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Between 1916 and 1964, *Theatre Arts* magazine chronicled trends both experimental and popular within the American theatre. Launched as a mouthpiece for champions of the New Stagecraft and other theatrical reforms inspired by European models, *Theatre Arts* gradually embraced the highest exemplars of Broadway and Hollywood commercialism. Laurence Senelick's immensely readable *"Theatre Arts" on Acting* draws together short essays on the actor's art from the magazine's founding to its demise, providing a mosaic perspective on the development of American acting and its foreign influences during the twentieth century's middle decades.

Pitched to a popular readership, *"Theatre Arts" on Acting* contains a heterogeneous assortment of articles by notable critics and celebrated actors. Senelick divides his collection into six parts: "Acting in the American Tradition," "The British Legacy," "Foreign Modes of Performance," "Stanislavsky and His Followers," "The Actor and His Role," and "Technical Matters." Senelick prefaces each selection with a densely informative introduction, and the volume concludes with a staggeringly exhaustive glossary of proper names. This perhaps overly comprehensive glossary (almost 150 pages) will be most useful to the general reader who lacks a working knowledge of twentieth-century theatre history. The volume's general introduction, on the other hand, encompasses a scant five pages. Perhaps Senelick and his publishers feared that a longer and more scholarly introduction might overwhelm the popular reader? Whatever the reason, this editorial decision means that a macroscopic perspective must emerge largely through accumulated impressions as the reader moves from selection to selection.

Although some of the collection's profile pieces tend toward hagiography and the *Theatre Arts* critics often write with a tone of total assurance approaching grandiloquence, the compendium is nevertheless full of gems for the student or scholar of theatre. Pieces of special interest, among others, include Morton Eustis's profiles of the Yiddish actor Paul Muni, the Russian *émigrée* Alla Nazimova, and the American theatre's royal couple of the 1920s and 1930s, Lynne Fontanne and Alfred Lunt; Stark Young's analysis of the soulful formalism of the Chinese actor Mei Lan-Fang and his American pragmatism-inflected discussion of the actor's voice; Edith Isaacs on the practice of typecasting and its consequences for artistic creativity; John Gielgud's

charmingly vivid sketch of his days as a youthful scion of the Terry theatrical dynasty and his surprisingly enthusiastic appraisal of Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares*; Michael Chekhov's characteristically mystical but provocative discussion of the actor's "three selves"; and the English actor Cedric Hardwicke's drolly penetrative assessments of the state of his profession in 1939 and 1958.

Theatre scholarship typically approaches the evolution of American acting from the post-World War I period to the 1960s in terms of a well-established narrative, defined by the impact of the Moscow Art Theatre's tours to the United States in 1923 and 1924, the Americanization of Stanislavsky's "system," the founding and breakup of the Group Theatre, and the rise of the Actors Studio and Strasberg's "Method," along with all of the conflicts and controversies attending these unquestionably momentous developments. What *"Theatre Arts" on Acting* also reveals is that during these decades most actors still cultivated a personal approach to craft in the "hit-and-miss school of long runs" (to steal a phrase from critic Morton Eustis) and that many sectors of the American theatre community tenaciously resisted the psychologism and technical emphasis of the Stanislavskian paradigm. One of the chief pleasures in reading *"Theatre Arts" on Acting* comes in discovering an abundance of insights into the experiential dimensions of stage performance expressed with idiosyncratic lucidity by actors without technical jargon or self-conscious theatrical ideology. Furthermore, many of these vocationally trained actors endorse values we have come to ascribe entirely to Stanislavsky's influence: ensemble playing, development of imaginative circumstances, use of personal experience in role interpretation, and an ethic of rigorous professionalism. The clash between such ideals and prevailing conditions of production creates some of the volume's most impassioned prose: Senelick's actors repeatedly lament insufficient rehearsal time, inveigh against the corruptive influence of the profit motive, and bemoan the lack of permanent acting companies as the chief obstacle to the serious development of theatrical art. Much has changed in the American theatre since the middle decades of the last century, but much, it seems, remains the same.

As our critical distance from the concerns and controversies of the past century grows, a thorough reassessment of that era's theatrical developments within the context of a rapidly transforming American culture becomes increasingly possible and urgently necessary. Studies like J. Ellen Gainor's *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics, 1915-48* (2001) and David Savran's *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (2009) exemplify a mode of scholarship that transcends received narratives and the automatized preservation of celebrity and canonicity by using culture as a lens to read theatre and theatre as a lens to read culture. As theatre scholarship moves forward over the next decades, *"Theatre Arts" on Acting* will prove a valuable sourcebook for reconstructing how theatre practitioners of the past century understood their own aims and efforts, a necessary first step toward assessing the historical and cultural significance of their achievements from our present-day position.

