

The second volume takes as its starting point Rancière's idea of the 'aesthetic regime of art', which Boenisch connects with Hegel's announcement of a 'new era' in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In its first part, the book then plots the development of the *Regisseur*, and of *Regie* as a mode of thinking, from the late eighteenth century to the work of Leopold Jessner. In an appropriately Hegelian move, Boenisch seeks within this history for insights which may help us to understand contemporary *Regie* as a process and a function where, in his words, 'the playtext remains . . . the same, yet our perception and understanding of it is ultimately changed'.

Prominent among such insights are Schiller's notion of 'play' as a mediating function between binary oppositions; Helmar Schramm's conception of performance as a situation defined by relations between corporeality or kinesis, meaning or semiosis, and perception or aesthesis; and Jessner's activation of dialectic relations between text, staging, and spectators. In the second part of the book, Boenisch reads the work of contemporary *Regisseurs* in the light of the constellation of ideas explored in the first. He offers complex, provocative readings of productions that are likely to be known to a UK audience, such as Ostermeier's *Volksfeind* and Ivo van Hove's *Scènes uit een Huwelijk* (*Scenes from a Marriage*, 2005), as well as major works from directors less likely to be familiar to an Anglophone readership: Jürgen Gosch, Michael Thalheimer, Andreas Kriegenburg, Guy Cassiers, Frank Castorf, and the Antwerp-based collective 'tg STAN'.

Boenisch acknowledges the partiality of this list, which, in spite of the variety of work discussed, can only be considered to be problematically monocultural in the context of contemporary Europe. It would be true to argue that an all-white and male selection is nonetheless representative of those *Regisseurs* currently privileged enough to make work on the scale that Boenisch has chosen to analyze – predominantly large-cast productions of canonical works. But some will doubtless find a troubling connection between the politics of this selection and Boenisch's Hegelian account of the history of *Regie* as 'a chain of mediated antagonisms and sublated contradictions' that ultimately affirm the canonical texts with which it unfolds.

Those who take issue with Boenisch's account along these lines will, however, still find much that is valuable in this deeply scholarly account of the many ways in which *Regie* offers opportunities for attacking the 'distribution of the sensible' under contemporary capitalism, and disrupting 'the established hegemonic aesthetic-political order of things'. My own perspective is that Boenisch's over-arching approach to the study of *Regie* takes somewhat for granted another 'established hegemonic . . . order of things', namely the

processes by which the particular directors he has chosen to study have been able to rise to such cultural prominence. But I am nonetheless entirely persuaded that the dialectic form of *Regie* that he elucidates in such detail here contains numerous essential intellectual tools for generating forms of theatre that enable us as spectators to, in Boenisch's words, 'reflect on our involvement and our responsibility as a subject in our . . . world'.

TOM CORNFORD

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*Hans-Thies Lehmann, trans. Erik Butler*

**Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre**

Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2016. 466 p.

£32.99.

ISBN: 978-1-1381-9196-9.

The trickiest aspect of the writing of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, first published in German in 2014, was perhaps finding the right title. As Lehmann notes, it is customary to start by disentangling tragedy, the tragic, tragic experience, *Trauerspiel*, and so on, and the choice of which terms to favour indicates Lehmann's focus. This book is an extension and expansion of his influential 1999 German text, translated in 2006 as *Postdramatic Theatre*.

Lehmann wryly laments how much of the theoretical work on tragedy sees theatrical performance as an impediment to thinking about the tragic: 'What gets in the way of the theatre is . . . theatre' (ellipsis original). Lehmann's interest is in the texture of a tragic experience that is peculiarly theatrical. Ironically, as with *Postdramatic Theatre*, some material has absented itself in translation. *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* has lost some commentary on Racine, on dance, on Hölderlin, on Wagner and 'Musikdrama'. Opposing itself to one form of theory, Lehmann's text remains compellingly theoretical. He insists on aesthetic experience, emphasizing spectator-as-witness over protagonist-as-noble-sufferer. Playing off Kant against Hegel in the shadow of Adorno, his is not an aesthetic of organic unity but of rupture, stressing interruption of the aesthetic itself as the dramatic empties itself into the postdramatic.

Part of Lehmann's aim is to displace the tendency to tie tragedy to dramatic theatre by thinking tragedy through the lens of the postdramatic. There is a strong anti-Aristotelianism, taking apart the theatre of representation (here effectively synonymous with dramatic theatre) and the generic categories that depend on it, opening the door to tragedy-as-literature. Lehmann slyly rewrites Kant: 'Tragic experience is not simply a matter of reflection; it is also a pause in reflection – it is sensory, "blind" (so to speak), and affect-laden all at once; otherwise, it amounts to nothing

at all.' After Benjamin, outlined is what might be called catharsis at a standstill.

Lehmann's magisterial discussion is appropriately expansive, from Greek theatre to Sarah Kane and Elfriede Jelinek; invoking Racine, Schiller, and Brecht; at times moving beyond a predictable tragic canon altogether. His thinking draws on texts and performances from several languages, but his theoretical touchstones are mostly German: Benjamin, Brecht, and Heiner Müller, but also Christoph Menke. Pivotal for thinking about tragedy – and eloquent on why we still need to – this is a highly significant book.

MARK ROBSON

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Robert Henke

### **Poverty and Charity in Early Modern Theatre and Performance**

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015. 224 p. \$55.

ISBN: 978-1-6093-8361-9.

This book offers a fascinating exploration of the themes of poverty and charity in early modern theatre and performance. The author argues that an important, albeit overlooked, relationship between theatre, performance, and poverty emerges in this period. Early modern capitalism – with its enclosures, poor laws, and burgeoning urbanization – provided the context for the first recognizably European theatre, modern forms of poverty, and early modes of professional theatre practice.

The opening two chapters provide a discussion of this relationship, including an exploration of contradictions in how the poor are written about in official legislation and associated literatures, and of shared precarity between itinerant performers and playwrights and the poor. There is a stated intention to explore how theatrical form, 'in its rich temporal sedimentations', complicates official accounts of the poor, setting the disciplinary rhetoric of the poor laws and other moralizing texts against medieval norms of sacred giving, for example, and thereby providing a more variegated context for the representation of the poor. Successive chapters offer an analysis of such sedimentations via carefully crafted analyses of a series of well-selected examples.

Taking a transnational European perspective – which is one of its key strengths – the book

presents five case studies, each identified with a distinct form of theatrical expression and/or theatrical tradition. It moves from a thoroughly illuminating account of semiotic excess in depictions of the poor in various pan-continental 'Beggar Catalogues', to explore piazza performances given by pedlar-performers in Italy, with the piazza represented here as an early, non-literary form of public sphere.

The remaining three chapters explore the treatment of the figure of the poor and experiences of poverty in *commedia dell'arte*, and in the work of two iconic playwrights of the period, Ruzante and Shakespeare, with detailed textual and performance analysis consistently highlighting the ambivalent and disparate attitudes towards poverty/the poor across each example. The book gradually and convincingly develops an argument about these texts/performances as defined by a 'principle of perpetual interpretability' in how theatre engages with poverty and the poor, a principle that leaves open the possibility of revealing nuanced and disparate perspectives, including empathy for the poor, in the processes of the production and reception of early modern theatre.

I engaged with this book not as a historian with expertise in early modern theatre, but as a theatre researcher with an interest in how performance represents issues of poverty and economic justice. I cannot comment on the book's contribution to early modern theatre scholarship, then, but I very much appreciate its important contribution to the study of the overlooked, resonant theme of poverty in European theatre history. In the accessible and yet critical way it frames its substantive focus, and in its thorough research (the extensive footnotes and references are very useful), accessible writing style, and lively and compassionate discussion, this book is extremely informative and rewarding to read.

Henke's frequent turns to celebrate moments in performances that counter punitive perceptions of the poor, and express unconditional modes of generosity and charity, created a strong sense of being in good company as a reader. This is a fantastic book, of interest to general readers and specialist audiences, and offering a compendium of materials, ideas, and arguments to stimulate ongoing research into the theme of poverty and economic inequality in this and other periods of theatre history.

JENNY HUGHES