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Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson, ed.

It's All Allowed: the Performances of Adrian Howells

Bristol; London: Live Art Development Agency and Intellect, 2016. 336 p. £21.50.
ISBN: 978-1-78320-589-9.

This sumptuous book more than fulfils its editors' aspirations for it to be 'filled with textures, colours, emotions, and aesthetics'. It gathers a huge body of writing by and about performer Adrian Howells who made a professional journey from early training and working in traditional professional theatre to later more exploratory performance work that pushed boundaries and made huge demands on the artist who created it.

Howells's path reminded me of fellow artistic experimenter Spalding Gray – both started out in more traditional theatre before exploring the possibilities open to the solo performer. Indeed, both artists also took their own lives, but it is Howells's exploration of the solo performer and the solo audience member in his one-to-one pieces that has gathered much recent praise and attention. I never saw his work live but, having read this book, feel as though I have personally followed his professional development and seen (or participated in) many of his shows.

I suspect that this is partly due to the huge number of beautiful, detailed photographs presented throughout. Although they have no discernible chronological order, the first and last ones poignantly show an empty set for one of Howells's performances, a really affective touch. Readers can visually distinguish the various phases of Howells's work from his early performance alter ego, 'Adrienne', all domestic tabards and incongruously glamorous make-up, to 'Adrian', the more sombre shamanic figure washing people's feet, holding their tired bodies, perhaps talking gently to them, many times apparently not talking at all; often fixing the camera with a provocative stare beyond the frame, seemingly straight into the reader's eyes.

The editors and all of the contributors tread a difficult line in this 'bittersweet endeavour' between friendship and professional relationships, between warmth and critical distance, between criticism and hagiography. The balance is beautifully maintained, partly through the number and range of the contributors (28 in all, including the editors), and through the inclusion of Howells's own reflections and the use of interview material where we hear more conversational exchanges. It would be impossible to discuss all the inputs in a short review but, in addition to the voices of many theatre makers and academics, there is a fascinating insight into the role of producers, whose voices we often don't hear, in developing

and promoting new work. In one chapter past students and collaborators gather to reminisce after Howells's death, and there is another nice nod to his legacy when the biographies at the end of the book show their influence on the contemporary arts scene in Scotland and beyond. This is a big, thoughtfully executed, extravagant, beautifully designed and produced, and, if I may be permitted to borrow the term, thoroughly 'gorgearse' book.

ALISON JEFFERS

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David Tucker and Trish McTighe, ed.

Staging Beckett in Great Britain

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016.
xxvii, 258 p. £85.

ISBN: 978-1-4742-4017-8.

Trish McTighe and David Tucker, ed.

Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016.
xxx, 256 p. £85.

ISBN: 978-1-4742-4055-0.

For the sheer wealth of new historical and contextual information they contain, these two volumes represent important contributions to Beckett scholarship and to histories of UK and Irish theatre cultures over the past sixty years. Both spring from a three-year, AHRC-funded collaboration between the University of Reading, the University of Chester, and the Victoria and Albert Museum entitled 'Staging Beckett: the Impact of Productions of Samuel Beckett's Drama on Theatre Practice and Cultures in the United Kingdom and Ireland', a collaboration that also produced the still-growing, free-to-access 'Staging Beckett' online database, itself an invaluable tool for students and scholars (reading.ac.uk/staging-beckett).

What makes these published volumes worth reading is how they put such reams of raw data to work. A number of contributions historicize and complicate old debates about fidelity to Beckett's dramatic vision by paying close attention to actual actors, audiences, spaces, and performance contexts. Sarah Jane Scaife speaks of her experience of working with ethnically diverse actors and points out that the black/white/grey aesthetic so often associated with Beckett's plays is 'predicated on the way light reflects off white skin'. Kene Igweonu highlights the important connotations of 'the fact of blackness' in the 2012 all-black production of *Waiting for Godot* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Siobhán O'Gorman shows how the all-female company Taboo staged a production of *Godot* that made perfect sense, and resonated strongly with contemporary concerns around women's rights