

THE FIRST FRAME: THEATRE SPACE IN ENLIGHTENMENT FRANCE. By Pannill Camp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; pp. 300.

Pannill Camp's *The First Frame* explores the stylistic proliferation of plays, theories, and especially buildings that marked the eighteenth-century French theatre. Drawing on a vast archive of texts and figures—from Molière to Beaumarchais in the playhouse and from d'Aubignac to Diderot outside of it—Camp's book recalls Jeffrey Ravel's magisterial *The Contested Parterre* (1999) not only in its fine historical analysis, but also in its methodology. Camp too understands the theatre as a space of encounter for artists, philosophers, social reformers, and spectators; he identifies lines of thought that brought them into dialogue with one another, and he honors his period by avoiding anachronistic distinctions among types of inquiry. Indeed, even the demarcation between *rationalism* and *empiricism*, rigidly enforced in our intellectual histories, here reveals itself to be notional or at least constantly navigated in both theory and practice throughout France's "century of the theatre." We see traces of rationalist theory even in the most sensational accounts of natural philosophy, just as we see an emphasis on perception and experience in the work of that most rational of philosophers, Descartes.

To offer an "interpretation of the evolving spatial ideology beneath a profound mutation in theatre aesthetics" (6), Camp begins by focusing on the immediate prehistory of this mutation. His first chapter describes the spatial logic of the dominant theatre style in seventeenth-century France, the rectangular *jeu de paume*, which struggled to accommodate both forced-perspective scenery and bodies increasingly given to the perspective-defying movement. In the second chapter he maps these two phenomena onto competing pressures in neoclassical dramatic theory: on the one hand, an understanding of the stage as a mirror, containing a discrete world; and on the other, an understanding of the theatre as a window, a transparent field affording sensational encounter between actors and audience. As the eighteenth century progressed, the latter view became more dominant, and its relationship to Lockean empiricism grew more reciprocal. Camp details in his third chapter how French theatre spectatorship and natural philosophy became drawn into a "discursive and spatial convergence" exemplified in the Théâtre de Nicolet, a fairground space whose varied scenic attractions included physics demonstrations (95). This remarkable section is the book's center of gravity. The author demonstrates how ideas from drama and dramatic theory found their way into natural philosophy, with researchers

(and, no doubt, some quacks) turning their experiments into theatre. Meanwhile, French playwrights turned increasingly to an empiricist understanding of stage action and character psychology, and *décorateurs*—the multitasking designers and technical directors who managed French theatres—turned to new understandings of physics.

The book is not organized chronologically, nor does it develop its argument in chapter-by-chapter increments. Rather, the first three discussions—of pre-reform theatres; of a dramatic theory torn between reflection and transparency; and of the mutually reinforcing scenes of drama and natural philosophy—ground and make possible the analysis suggested by the book's subtitle and offered by the fourth chapter. Here, Camp focuses on the theatre space itself, a space undergoing conceptual and literal renovation in eighteenth-century France. The science of optics, in important ways initiated by Descartes in his 1637 *Dioptrics*, had flourished a century later, providing rationales for new theatre designs: abandoning the rectangular shapes and perspective sets, architects and designers increasingly looked to circular or oblong spaces that were better disposed to the spectator's sensory perception. Reflecting the cultural currency of empiricism, these theatre reformers abandoned vanishing-point perspective in favor of more natural blocking whose patterns they arrayed under wider proscenium arches and therefore broader fields of sensory perception. In other words, the preoccupations of contemporary dramatic theory, optical theory, and natural philosophy constellated in the theatre reformers' understanding of spectatorship as a "largely visual activity predicated on innate sensory and mental capacities that playhouses could either help or hinder" (131). Consequently, Camp argues, the French theatre abandoned the rationalist proofs and Vitruvian geometries that had characterized seventeenth-century spaces, which were displaced in the explosion of theatre construction in the latter half of the eighteenth century. If this explosion (neatly captured in an appendix) generated a variety of styles, they were united by new presumptions about the experience of spectatorship.

After Camp's book appeared late last year, I was asked to review it by several journals because of the presumed overlap or dissension between it and my own *The Mind-Body Stage* (2013), which traced the impact of Cartesian thought on dramatic theory, acting, and theatre architecture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It is no surprise that the last figure in my book is the first in Camp's: Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's remarkable "Coup d'oeil" of his theatre at Besançon, which we both read as a sign of the eye's triumph over other sensual apparatuses in eighteenth-century spectatorship. But

Camp, while steeped in seventeenth-century theatre history and philosophy, really begins where I leave off, tracing the complicating effects of post-Cartesian epistemologies, especially English empiricism, up to and beyond the French Revolution. The book's strengths lie in its rich historical context and capacity to describe and synthesize diverse cultural phenomena as the author conducts cheek-by-jowl analyses of theatre blueprints, aesthetic theories, science experiments, philosophical treatises, and performances. Camp mercifully does not offer a tidy narrative of the eighteenth-century French theatre, which he rightly sees as teeming with cultural cross-pressures and artistic false starts. And for this reason his book will not reward the inattentive or too-casual reader unwilling to dwell in sometimes contradictory details. The rest of us will be amply rewarded not only for the fuller picture of a pivotal place and time in theatre history, but also for the methodological advances on display. The epilogue moves beyond the book's temporal frame to Husserlian phenomenology, in whose model of consciousness Camp sees signs of eighteenth-century French influence. But even before then the book has established its value to performance scholars in general and those working in philosophy and performance in particular. Indeed, in demonstrating the uses to which natural philosophy put the theatre, Camp identifies a critical step in the development of performance as an epistemology. It is his book's signal, but by no means only, achievement.

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INVENTING THE SPECTATOR: SUBJECTIVITY AND THE THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE IN EARLY MODERN FRANCE. By Joseph Harris. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; pp. 304.

Joseph Harris tells the rise and fall of the spectator as a conceptual, psychological, and aesthetic crux in French dramatic theory from the 1630s beginnings of the "classical" stage to nearly the Revolution, when Denis Diderot's and Louis-Sebastien Mercier's *drame* hoped to "replace" the (individualist) spectator with a communal "audience." Harris moves between two narratives: the "Whig" story runs from a spectator invented as butt of ruled "trickery," fooled by staged illusion into a mostly intellectual empathy with character and action, to one who knowingly accepts emotional "identity" with staged interests; another, more tangled narrative has Diderot still reacting to François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac (1640) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau partially echoing strictures raised

by others, such as Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet in 1694. The resulting rift rather confuses a chronology of the (male) spectator that theorists have created to explore dramatic performance.

In three thematic chapters and five on specific writers, Harris focuses on "how spectatorship was understood" (11). He first engages the many polemical texts and prefaces to what were offered as new kinds of play, against earlier forms that assumed quite another performance relationship. These and other writings eventually develop a "'zero-degree' spectator of remarkably restricted intellectual faculties, who must be 'tricked' into believing himself present at an actual event" (17). Harris traces a path from the uses of illusion to "deceive" a spectator into empathy to the belief that anti-"distraction" rules—one place, one action, time nearing that of performance, and verisimilitude—would thoroughly "enthrall" the spectator's spirit in the staged action. Here, loose translation creates a key misunderstanding: rendering Jean Chapelain's "*feint*" and "*feinte*" as "false" and "falsity" rather than as "feigned," "pretended," or "fictive," Harris's translation skews an important conjuncture of *vraisemblance* and fiction (34–41). The use of staged illusion is not to trick, but to enable a particular psychological effect: empathy among staged action, character, and spectator. Still, Harris rightly stresses in his first chapter all its mid-seventeenth-century authors' claims that their rules act on the mind as it ever objectively is and therefore can be counted on to produce the effects they analyze (48–49).

Chapter 2 studies d'Aubignac, the theorist whom Harris calls "Cartesian" in seeking "to establish a secure, objective, theoretical grounding for his own theories of . . . human subjectivity," although not adopting "pure Cartesian rationality" (51–52). But nor does Descartes for that matter, and Darren Gobert's *The Mind-Body Stage* (2013) offers an excellent counter, highlighting Descartes' 1649 *Traité des passions* as guiding quite another understanding of later theatre. For Harris, d'Aubignac elaborates a spectator caught intellectually in the action exactly *because* he is brought to feel physically absent from the space where the action physically occurs (55, 57). D'Aubignac may leave room for emotions (71), yet takes the rules to a limit where they cannot engage actual performance. On this point, as claimed in chapter 3, Corneille flourishes with a laxer, more subjective, pragmatic approach to the spectator's role (chiefly in the 1660s *Discours*). Corneille's spectator possesses "cultural knowledge and expectations," as aware of theatrical conventions as of the histories behind the events he watches. Harris asserts that his "'belief' is not purely intellectual but deeply intertwined with more subjective questions of perception, interest, and emotion" (84). This



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