Le Monde Français du Dix-Huitième Siècle

Volume 4, Issue-numéro 1 2019

Book Review

Jeffrey M. Leichman, *Acting UP. Staging
the Subject in Enlightenment France*,
Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press,
2016

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DOI: 10.5206/mfds-ecfw.v4i1.8277

Jeffrey M. Leichman *Acting Up. Staging the Subject in Enlightenment France*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-61148-724-4, 261pp. 1-800-462-6420, <www.rowman.com>

The book covers seventeenth and eighteenth-century developments in French theater, a development that begins as a specificity due to Cardinal de Richelieu's program, offering a competing moral public spectacle to the Catholic Church, with the aim of confirming royal power, independently from religious institutions. Hence, the Church will exclude French comedians from its rituals while Italian actors do not suffer the same fate. A subchapter is devoted to the legal status of theater and comedians. More importantly, Leichman attempts to trace public performance as the "habitus" of codes acted up by the nobility, soon copied by rich merchants, and paradoxically projecting what is then considered ease and naturalness in polite exchanges among French society, mostly around Paris. The model of a new subject goes hand in hand with the eradication of *gauloiseries* and crude or lude spectacles. Actors lie through a moral trickery pertaining to lead the public toward goodness. Good acting and acting good become integrated pp. 34-62. Obviously Leichman considers Diderot's evolving reflection on theater and contextualizes it, and contrasts it with Rousseau's complex opposition to the establishment of French theater whereas he conceptualizes a new citizenship and negotiates public space and spectacles as much as the Revolutionaries, and later governments will.

Leichman also comments on the push toward more "natural" and realistic developments that will extend well into the 1880's. Meanwhile, with La Chaussée and Diderot, certainly the focus of spectacles falls on the daily life of commoners. He pursues his analysis from the first transitions evident as early as the 1720's, with authors such as Marivaux. Even though Marivaux does not reject Molière, his plots no longer rest on types and established characters, instead the material of his comedies comes from daily-life observation of his contemporaries.

Leichman gives a three-dimensional portrait of evolving French theater in synchrony with successive regimes. His title indicates that he focusses on the use of theater by the Enlightenment philosophers who want to promote their vision of progress. Referring to the new Oxford edition of the complete works of Voltaire, he suggests that Rousseau opposes Voltaire's theater in Geneva because of competing views on progress. It will allow a better understanding of Rousseau's break from Diderot and most central philosophers to the Enlightenment. Furthermore, Leichman gives several leads allowing points of comparison between French theater and other national stages. As our team of eighteenth-century French studies (UWO) was engaged in a study of Marivaux, it certainly helped us understand how this author fits in his century while remaining atypical.

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