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Book Review

A Peopled Labyrinth: the histrionic sense: an analysis of the actor's craft by Christopher Fettes (with foreword by Colin Firth), London, GFCA Publishing, 2015, pp. xvii + 342, £35 (Hardback), ISBN 978-0-9932775-0-4

Yat Malmgren (1916-2002), who in 1963 founded Drama Centre with John Blatchley and Christopher Fettes, was a legendary acting teacher whose influence on actor training has spread across the globe. His fate had been altered by the untimely death in 1954 of William Carpenter, who had been working with Rudolf Laban with the development of the latter's Theory of Movement Psychology. Laban, distressed by the idea that the work might not be completed, entrusted Malmgren with the Glossary of Terms and encouraged him to develop it for the training of actors. Malmgren completed the work which had been started by Laban and Carpenter, and his system of Character Analysis became a cornerstone of the curriculum at Drama Centre and he taught there over four decades.

A Peopled Labyrinth, in one of its subtitles (there is a surfeit of these), is described by its author as "The Laban-Carpenter Theory of Movement Psychology, adapted and brought to completion by Yat Malmgren, fully described and interpreted by Christopher Fettes". Fettes was Malmgren's personal assistant, a co-founder of the renowned Drama Centre and their partnership lasted nearly fifty years until Malmgren's death in 2002. Given their longstanding involvement and the absence of publication by Malmgren, any book by Fettes on the subject should merit significant attention.

In Part One of the book, Fettes introduces the components of the Theory of Movement Psychology, detailing the Mental Factors of Sensing, Thinking, Intuiting and Feeling (without a mention of Carl Jung), before moving through the Inner Participations, Motion Factors, Negatives, Inner Quests and Working Actions. These are explored with examples drawn from a plethora of classic texts including some by Marlowe, Wilde, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Proust, Buchner as well as others. Fettes does not always deign to draw clear links between his analysis and his examples, and his conclusions are often presented as incontestable. There are fascinating details that will be familiar to students of Yat: as well as attributing the differentiation of degrees of intensity (Understressed, Normal, Stressed and Overstressed) to William Carpenter, Fettes adds that it is Malmgren who insisted that physical energy is either 'introverted' or 'extroverted' (corresponding with Laban's 'gathering' or 'scattering') so that each action may be followed by a corresponding 'recovery' releasing Flow (96).

Part Two explores the representation of the subconscious mind through the six Inner Attitudes of Near, Remote, Stable, Mobile, Awake and Adream. Each one is presented in detail in its different combinations and fusions of elements. Each Attitude is accompanied by Effort Cube diagrams in their left and right forms. Fettes provides commentary on each iteration, and offers illustrations and interpretations that, while frequently digressive, provide some beguiling, though intransigent, readings of the scenes and characters he presents.

The Externalised Drives of Doing, Passion, Spell and Vision are presented in Part Three, and Fettes separates the elements of each in turn for the purposes of analysis. He shows how the

characteristics of the associated Inner Attitudes are manifested in particular characters (for instance, Oedipus' 'unawareness' reflected in the Inner Attitude of Adream). Actors may choose to emphasise a particular Inner Attitude within the context of the Drive, and Fettes gives examples of each. Introducing each Drive are more of Malmgren's Effort Cube diagrams, and terms for the compounds of yielding and contending from Laban and Carpenter's Glossary of Terms (included as an appendix to the book) find themselves on the corners of the cubes next to their related working actions.

Part Four concerns the Confluence of Externalised Drives that Fettes asserts marks Malmgren's completion of Laban and Carpenter's Theory of Movement Psychology. Each of the Six Inner Attitudes is created by the Confluence of two of the Four Externalised Drives. Fettes unpicks each confluence and offers an explanation of how to interpret the cross. Each Confluence is then illustrated with examples.

The book is introduced (and re-introduced) by a commendation from Frantisek Veres of the University of Gothenburg (where Malmgren was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2000), a foreword by former student Colin Firth, as well as an Introduction, Preface and 'Word of Warning' from the author. Biographies of Malmgren, Laban and Carpenter, as well as the original Laban-Carpenter Glossary of Terms used in Movement Psychology, are included as appendices.

A Peopled Labyrinth is a significant document. It sheds new light on the teaching that has formed the backbone of the pioneering Drama Centre, but it is hard to identify its most suitable readers. It will be fascinating for those who are already fully immersed in teaching of Malmgren and Fettes, but this will never be, perhaps deliberately, a work that will lead students of acting to rapid understanding of Malmgren's work. The author himself warns that the reader will need "to wait patiently until the structure of each example begins to reveal itself" (xvii). Fettes' analysis is often uncompromisingly opaque, and the book seems as much designed to portray him as a master of Malmgren's tools as to pass them on to others. The abundant illustrative examples, drawn principally from classical literature (including many works from the European repertoire), mean that Fettes needs to spend much of his time providing context for excerpts that demonstrate his analysis, rather than giving step-by-step reasons for his conclusions about particular characters. The book will not reward the pusillanimous, and only the most patient and determined would reach the fourth part of the book undefeated, and anything more than a purely intellectual understanding would require the accompanying systematic movement work in a studio for which Malmgren was renowned, but, sadly, does not fall within the scope of this book.

Laban enthusiasts will find much to interest them in Malmgren's definitions and diagrams, though it is not always clear which are Laban's originals and which are Malmgren's adaptations. For instance, the definition of 'Light' and 'Strong' in the Laban-Carpenter glossary is subtly different from Malmgren's, but we are given no indication as to why he made the alterations. Nor is any reference made to the intriguing fact that Malmgren's version of the effort cubes are the reverse on two dimensions (forward-backward and left-right) from those commonly used by other major followers of Laban. Those hoping to approach the work for the first time will find a clearer account in Vladimir Mirodan's thesis, *The way of transformation : the Laban-Malmgren system of dramatic character analysis* (available from the British Library), but *A Peopled Labyrinth* reveals its essence through its own 'shadow moves'.

Peppered throughout the text are pearls of wisdom from Yat the teacher, labelled as “G.E.M.” (from Malmgren’s initials – Yat became his name because of the English inability to pronounce Gert). These ‘gems’ serve to remind the reader of Malmgren as a brilliant and original pedagogue. Fettes laments, in a proverbial epigraph, “men of intelligence/That are counted as refuse”, and finishes the section comprising Malmgren’s biography with a tribute to his capacity for “inspiring love” (326). Thus the book serves as both paeon and planctus, revealing both Malmgren and the author.

In some accounts of Laban’s work and legacy, Malmgren has been, undeservedly, barely a footnote if mentioned, which may be in some measure due to his own reluctance to broadcast his work in written form, but it may also be due to a sense of rivalry from many others claiming to hold Laban’s torch. Fettes seeks here to redress the balance and emphasises Malmgren’s singular genius.

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