

FRED EURINGER.

A Fly on the Curtain.

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JAMIE SKIDMORE

Three-quarters of the way through *A Fly on the Curtain* Fred Euringer freely admits that what he has “to offer is [...] a collection of anecdotal recollections.” True, Euringer’s style is primarily anecdotal, but his book provides many interesting insights into theatre in Canada during the 1950s and early 1960s. What is especially fascinating is Euringer’s perspective, suggested in his self-deprecating title *A Fly on the Curtain*. Euringer is the “fly,” in this case referring to himself as someone who was a part of the Canadian theatre scene in the 1950s and 1960s, but not a central figure. This text is not given from the point of view of a Tyrone Guthrie or a Douglas Campbell, but from the perspective of the little guy who mucked it out in the trenches in order to survive a Canadian theatre still wet behind the ears.

A Fly on the Curtain deals with Euringer’s personal experiences working with many of the important amateur and professional theatre companies during the ‘50s and ‘60s. It covers his work as a playwright, director, and primarily as an actor with the Hart House Theatre, the Straw Hat Players, the University Alumnae Dramatic Club, the Dominion Drama Festival, the Crest Theatre, the Canadian Players, and the Stratford Festival. The book provides insights into the directing styles of the prominent scholastic and professional theatre directors of the day, including Robert Gill, Herbert Whittaker, and Douglas Campbell. For instance, Euringer contrasts the authoritarian style of Gill’s directing method with that of Whittaker’s. Gill knew from the start of the rehearsal process exactly how he wanted his actors to move, where he wanted them to move to, and how he wanted them to stand once they got there. Whittaker, on the other hand, never seemed to have any idea what he wanted from his actors, according to Euringer. Douglas Campbell’s staging of productions of *Julius Caesar* and *St. Joan* are two of the many plays discussed in great detail in *A Fly on the Curtain*. Euringer details Campbell’s method of blocking these plays, describing the “static” staging and the focus on the importance of speaking the text clearly and strongly with “well-defined intentions.”

Elsewhere in the book Euringer paints a vivid picture of life as a summer stock actor with the Straw Hat Players, even providing a formula for the rehearsal of a play. On Tuesdays the entire play was

blocked; actors were off-book by the next day and worked all of Act One. On Thursday Act Two was gone over in detail, followed by Act Three on Friday. Saturday the company ran the new show twice, performed the current production in the evening (striking it), and prepared the technical side of the new show on Sunday, for a Monday night opening.

The details that Euringer provides on his work with Campbell, Gill, Whittaker, and others are what make this book a valuable tool for a theatre historian. *A Fly on the Curtain* is the perspective of only one relatively minor actor/director. The value of this work, however, is that it provides one piece of the mosaic that is Canadian theatre in the 1950s and 1960s. On its own it may seem to be only a collection of personal anecdotes by a little known actor, but combined with texts such as Ann Saddlemeyer's and Richard Plant's *Later Stages*, Don Rubin's *Canadian Theatre History*, or Betty Lee's *Love and Whiskey* it takes on a new significance. *Later Stages*, for example, provides essential information about when and where the Straw Hat Players performed, as well as who was in the company (including Euringer) and what shows were staged. *A Fly on the Wall* adds to this base knowledge by fleshing out how these plays were staged and details about the working conditions of the time. Together with other historical texts, Euringer's first person experiences help to create a vivid picture of an emerging Canadian theatre.

As a student of Fred Euringer's in the 1990s, I quickly came to realize that he did not teach in broad strokes, but with detailed movements of his brush. His directing classes, for example, did not provide his students with extensive definitions on how to direct a play. Rather, Euringer taught that it is the small details in a theatrical production that really bring it to life. *A Fly on the Curtain* is full of the same specifics that Euringer brought to his classes, and consequently provides the reader with a rich and textured impression of Canadian theatre in the 1950s and early 1960s. ❁

RIC KNOWLES.

Shakespeare and Canada: Essays on Production, Translation, and Adaptation.

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SUSAN BENNETT

What is it with Shakespeare and Canada? Somehow this has become a relationship that obsessively captures the imagination