

*Dear Reader, The Publishers of this book have asked me to write a preface, to tell you what it is about. But I have said in the book what it is about. [...] So I have decided to be kind to us both and let you off with a preface; and now you can get on with the story.*¹

MARY RENAULT: There is only one kind of shock worse than the totally unexpected: the expected for which one has refused to prepare.²

JOSEPH SVOBODA: I'd like to eliminate dilettantism and make theatre truly professional.³

RENAULT: The music rose, to cover the creak of the machine; the rope at my back went taut. I grasped my silver bow, and leaned on the harness in the arc of flight. Up I soared, out above the skene, the crane-job, with its travelling screen of painted clouds lifted and turned upon its pivot.⁴

SVOBODA: It's all structured like music, and a law is present. Break it and a new one is set up.⁵

RENAULT: Looking up and about, I thought it was like dwarfs playing on a stage designed for titans.⁶

SVOBODA: ...the sheer multitudinousness of man, the sheer numbers that make one question the difference between insects and people.⁷

RENAULT: I had never seen such machinery as there was back stage and under it. Dionysios must have turned his war-engineers loose there when they had nothing else on hand.⁸

SVOBODA: Why shouldn't this age make the most of its technical developments as previous eras did? That is, the machinery of the baroque era, the electric light of the turn of the century?⁹

RENAULT: One huge device of wheels and levers left me quite at a loss; later I found it was to raise the stage or lower it, by pumping water in or out of chambers below.¹⁰

SVOBODA: The result is real psycho-plastic space created by transforming the dimensions of space in response to the nature of the scene.¹¹

RENAULT: I put on the robe of Zeus for the prologue, a lovely thing, purple worked with golden oak leaves. The dresser rubbed-up the great mirror of smoothed bronze.¹²

SVOBODA: In fact, we created space by means of the overhead view provided by the mirrors: two mirror surfaces in themselves would multiply the image reflected, but...¹³

RENAULT: It showed me at my back the other end of the room with Eupolis' table. In the quiet, I heard clearly his voice on stage, and the audience coughing.¹⁴

SVOBODA: ...their honeycombed segmentation is what chiefly created the effect of space and multiplicity here. It was an example of scenography precisely expressing the play, of a design hitting the nail on the head one-hundred percent; there were no holes in the conception or execution.¹⁵

RENAULT: To hate excellence is to hate the gods.¹⁶

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POSTCARD FROM THE IMPROBABLE CITY

1. Mary Renault in David Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, 1993, p234.
2. Renault, *The Charioteer*, 1953.
3. Joseph Svoboda in J.M. Burian, 'Theatre Artist in an Age of Science' *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1970, p124.
4. Renault, *The Mask of Apollo*, 1966, p44.
5. Svoboda, 1970, p142.
6. Renault, 1966, p35-36.
7. Svoboda, *The Secrets of Theatrical Space*, Trans. J.M. Burian, 1993, p27.
8. Renault, 1966, p109-10.
9. Svoboda, prev. cit.
10. Renault, prev. cit.
11. Svoboda, 1970, p39.
12. Renault, 1966, p95.
13. Svoboda, 1993, p27.
14. Renault, prev. cit.
15. Svoboda, prev. cit.
16. Renault, *The Persian Boy*, 1972, p400.

Neil Mulholland *Tyre no.5 (from the Jatindagadendar)*

Commissioned with Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art

Bronze sculpture with acrylic rods

Waverley Train Station

Courtesy of the Artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London



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