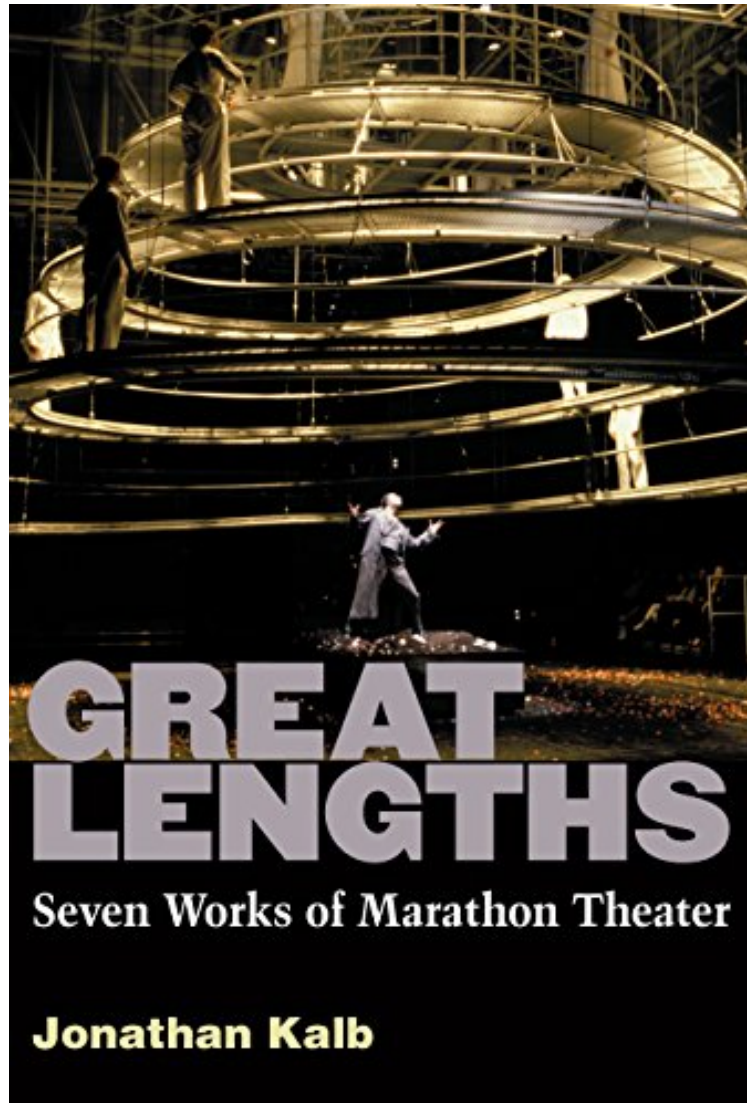


[Library ebook] Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater

## Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater

*Jonathan Kalb*

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**Jonathan Kalb : Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A rare and enjoyable book of criticismBy Forest F. WhitePros:  
When I began reading this, the only book I could find that detailed a performance of Goethe's Faust I and II (which is seldom performed, let alone written about), I was under the false impression that this critic was only going to cover the highlights of these long performances. I was pleasantly surprised by the depth of analysis provided in this book. I can't say I've seen all the performances covered here, as each is a sort of marathon of theater, but this book left me with an appreciation of the place and intent of Einstein on the Beach and Nicholas Nickleby, which I had actively avoided, and

broader critical perspective on *The Ramayana* and my beloved *Faust*, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Even seeing all of these performances is a noteworthy feat, but the discussion here goes far beyond simply conveying their immensity, artistry, and flaws. Cons: I cannot fault the author for taking an academic stance at times, and when he does, he does a good job of making obtuse cultural concepts accessible to anyone with a basic appreciation of culture and theory. However, I found the analysis of *Angels in America* more difficult than the others. Perhaps this is in tandem with the complexity of the work; perhaps it is because of my own background in queer theory. There is a lot written about this play and for good reason because it isn't easy to navigate. I have sought an analysis that I could really get into for some time, and the treatment here approaches a good combination of thoroughness and theory, but I still felt unresolved at the end, like there was more to say but it was maybe not polite or savvy to do so. Summary: I challenge you to find another book on this subject that isn't the subject of a dissertation, as this book examines some of the most ambitious works ever performed. More-over, it is written with a conscious and penetrating style, to offer depth where once I saw none, and complexity where once I generalized. It is an \*enjoyable\* work of criticism, which I seldom encounter. 4.5 stars. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. *Marathon Theater seen through the Lens of Passionate Scholarship* By Virginia Pye I came to this book of scholarship knowing nothing, or at least very little, about marathon theater. Kalb's easy and intelligent style brought me into this particular, and perhaps most refined, corner of the theater world. But, I did not feel that either the subject or his writing were too erudite for me to enjoy the beauty and intelligence of long theater works. Kalb weaves his impressive historical knowledge of theater into detailed descriptions of marathon productions he has seen and studied. The opinions of other critics are likewise woven into the immediate descriptions of the works. For example, while sharing the swirl of criticism that surrounded the *Mahabharata* at the time of its showing in New York, Kalb also gives us a keen visceral sense of being there in the theater with him to see the show. The politics behind *Angels in America*, both in the theater world and in the country at large, is woven into eloquent descriptions of the show, each actor and their performance. The energy, the rise and fall within each production, and the success of each work are all carefully shown. This makes for fascinating reading. I felt privileged to "see" these masterworks through Kalb's eyes, and it made me more interested than ever to witness marathon theater myself in the future. This is criticism at its best--when theater history, politics and aesthetic debate all inform carefully wrought descriptions of the plays as performed. Kalb's love of the theater, his respect and occasional awe for the playwrights, directors and actors is what propels this book. He is passionate about great theater and shares that passion through dynamic scholarship.

We know that size matters in many areas of human endeavor, but what about works of the imagination? Why do some dramatic creations extend to five hours or more, and how does their extreme length help them accomplish extraordinarily ambitious aims? In *Great Lengths*, theater critic and scholar Jonathan Kalb addresses these and other questions through a close look at seven internationally prominent theater productions, including Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*, the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Nicholas Nickleby*, and the "durational works" of the British experimental company *Forced Entertainment*. This is a book about extreme length, monumental scope, and intensive immersion in the theater in general, written by a passionate spectator reflecting on selected pinnacles of his theatergoing over thirty years. The book's examples, deliberately chosen for their diversity, range from adapted novels and epics, to dramatic chronicles with macrohistorical and macropolitical implications, to stagings of super-size classic plays, to "postdramatic" works that negotiate the border between life and art. Kalb reconstructs each of the works, re-creating the experience of seeing it while at the same time explaining how it maintained attention and interest over so many hours, and then expanding the scope to embrace a wider view and ask broader questions. The discussion of *Nicholas Nickleby*, for example, considers melodrama as a basic tool of theatrical communication, and the section on Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* explores the ethical problems surrounding theatrical exoticism. The chapter on *Einstein on the Beach* grows into a reflection on the media-age status of the much-debated *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or "total artwork") and a reassessment of the long avant-gardist tradition of challenging the primacy of rational language in theater. The essay on Peter Stein's *Faust I + II* becomes a reflection on the interpretive role of theater directors and the theatrical viability of antitheatrical closet drama. *Great Lengths* thus offers a remarkable panorama of the surprisingly broad field of contemporary marathon theater--an art form that diverse audiences of savvy, screen-weaned spectators continue to seek out, for the increasingly rare experiences of awe, transcendence, and sustained immersion that it provides. *Great Lengths* will appeal to general readers as well as theater specialists. It situates the chosen productions in various historical and critical contexts and engages with the many lively scholarly debates that have swirled around them. At the same time, it uses the productions as springboards for wide-ranging reflections on the basic purpose and enduring power of theater in an attention-challenged, media-saturated era.

George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism