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Citation

Wentz, J. (2022). Notions of the 'mechanical' in a Nineteenth-Century Adaption of Aaron Hill's: An Essay on the Art of Acting. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3304588>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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Notions of the 'mechanical' in a Nineteenth-Century Adaption of Aaron Hill's
An Essay on the Art of Acting

'An Essay on the Art of Acting', published in 1753 in *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq.*, has received a good deal of scholarly attention (including recently by David Wiles and James Harriman-Smith) due to its insistence that, in order to generate affect, the actor can work both from *inside out* and from *outside in*. Hill proposes that emotion can best be generated by starting with the imagination (a technique now often associated with The Method), but that at times it can be beneficial to work more 'mechanically' by making appropriate adjustments to the actor's muscle tension.

Interestingly, in 1821, long after its first appearance, 'Mr. Aaron Hill's celebrated Essay upon the Histrionic Art' was published in London in a 're-arrangement' entitled *The Actor, or Guide to the Stage*. Although claiming that Hill's original positions are merely being 'enforced by modern examples', the final section of this adaption in fact seeks to defend Hill from his detractors by misrepresenting his intentions, thus adding a new layer of misunderstanding to the fraught discourse surrounding acting technique before Stanislavski.

Jed Wentz has worked as a traverso-player, conductor and teacher specialized in the performance practice of the long eighteenth-century. He received his doctorate in 2010 from Leiden University, where he currently works at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts. His area of interest at the moment is centered on declamation and acting techniques, 1680-1930 and their relationship to musical performance. He has published in, among others, *Early Music*, *The Riemenschneider Bach Journal* and *The Cambridge Opera Journal*; and has recorded many CDs with his ensemble Musica ad Rhenum. He is artistic advisor to the Utrecht Early Music Festival.