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A significant contribution to our further understanding and appreciation of American theater and entertainment in the mid-20th century. Bradford Ropes deserves a bright spotlight, and Maya Cantu has provided it."

— Jack F. Sharrar, author of Avery Hopwood: His Life and Plays

GREASEPAINT PURITAN

Boston to 42nd Street in the Queer Backstage Novels of Bradford Ropes

Maya Cantu

Greasepaint Puritan details the life and work of Bradford Ropes, author of the bawdy 1932 novel 42nd Street, on which the classic film and its stage adaptation are based. Each of Ropes's long-forgotten novels was inspired by his own experiences as a performer, and focused on the lives of gay men in show business, offering rare glimpses into backstage Broadway. But why did Ropes's body of work, and consequently his biographical footsteps, disappear into such obscurity?

Greasepaint Puritan aims to find out and reclaim his story. Descended from Mayflower Pilgrims, Ropes rebelled against the "Proper Bostonian" life, in a career that touched upon the Jazz Age, American vaudeville, and theater censorship. We follow Ropes's successful career as both a performer and the author of the trilogy of backstage novels: 42nd Street, Stage Mother, and Go Into Your Dance. Populated by scheming stage mothers, precocious stage children, grandiose bit players, and tart-tongued chorines, these novels centered on the lives and relationships of gay men on Broadway during the Jazz Age and Prohibition era. Rigorously researched, Greasepaint Puritan chronicles Ropes's career as a successful screenwriter in 1930s and '40s Hollywood, where he continued to be a part of a dynamic gay subculture within the movie industry before returning to obscurity in the 1950s. His legacy lives on in the Hollywood and Broadway incarnations of 42nd Street—but Greasepaint Puritan restores the "forgotten melody" of the man who first envisioned its colorful characters.

Maya Cantu is a dramaturg, interdisciplinary scholar, and historian who teaches on the Drama Faculty of Bennington College. She is also the author of American Cinderellas on the Broadway Musical Stage: Imagining the Working Girl from "Irene" to "Gypsy"

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