

PERFORMANCE AND DIASPORA: IRISH THEATRE IN ITS INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS

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Irish theatre can be studied in at least two distinct yet complementary contexts: theatre that is made within Ireland for Irish audiences, and theatre that is made to tour internationally and which corresponds to non-Irish audiences' expectations about what an "Irish play" should be. On the one hand, two major developments—the movement referred to as the Irish Renaissance (from the late nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth), and the foundation of an Irish National Theatre in 1904—established an autochthonous national tradition; while on the other, the emigration and semi-provisional relocation of Irish authors (before, during, and after the Irish Renaissance) caused Irish theatre to be explored in the contexts of, for example, the nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle*, modernism in Europe, and Irish-America. Further to this, the diaspora of the Irish people, and tours by Irish theatre companies outside Ireland, expanded the range and recognition of Irish theatre in the international sphere, ranging from the plays of Dion Boucicault in New York in the second half of the nineteenth century, to the Abbey Theatre tours of the 1910s, to the present moment—which sees, for instance, plays by Irish writers on Broadway and in London's West End in early 2020.

Within the contemporary period, Irish theatre can also be seen in its national context—in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland—and in several

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worldwide contexts: in terms of internationalization and globalization; in terms of translation and adaptation; in terms of the emerging perception and practice of intercultural performance; in terms of the uniqueness of each receiving situation; or in terms of Irish plays being written by non-Irish-authors. In sum, Irish theatre is a distinctive tradition that is worthy of being considered in its own right—but it also operates as a fascinating case study that can be used to explore and explain many of the challenges faced by scholars and artists everywhere.

It was within this context that, in 2001, a group of scholars of Irish theatre came together under the leadership of Professor Nicholas Grene of Trinity College Dublin to form the Irish Theatrical Diaspora network. By setting up a network of co-operating scholars and institutions, initially across the English-speaking world, the objective of the project was to promote, develop and co-ordinate research on Irish theatre at home and abroad. The project was focused on the theatrical relations between regions and the capital within Ireland, and on the production and reception of Irish drama outside the country. The dramatic representation of Ireland was explored in the context of the social, cultural and political factors that condition it: theatre companies and their audiences; marketplace conditions; the impact of emigrant Irish communities overseas; local, national and international politics.

The network began its activities with a conference in the Royal Irish Academy in 2002. Opened by Seamus Heaney, the event featured papers about such prominent Irish theatres as the Abbey, Gate and Druid. In the following year, a second conference was held—this time at the National Portrait Gallery in London, where the major theme was an exploration of Irish theatre in Britain. During subsequent years, the activities of the network expanded to include non-Anglophone contexts, beginning with a conference in France and later taking in the countries of central and eastern Europe. These activities resulted in several publications, including the books *Irish Theatre on Tour* (edited by Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash in 2004), *Irish Theatre in England* (edited by Richard Allen Cave and Ben Levitas in 2007), and *Irish Theatre in America* (edited by John Harrington in 2009), as well as a special issue of *Études Irlandaises* (edited by Martine Pelletier—who is also a contributor to this volume—and Alexandra Poulain in 2008) about the interactions of French and Irish theatres.

In 2017, the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), through its Postgraduate Programme in English (PPGI) and its Nucleus of Irish Studies (NEI), hosted the 13th Annual Irish Theatrical Diaspora Conference, with the theme “Irish Theatre and Latin America” and participants from Ireland, Brazil, Peru and Argentina. The programme of the conference featured lectures, roundtables, interviews and two performances: a staged reading of *Eclipsed*, by Patricia Burke Brogan, translated and directed by Alinne Fernandes, with a cast of UFSC students; and a full production of the documentary drama *As Duas Mortes de Roger Casement/The Two Deaths of Roger Casement*, written and directed by Domingos Nunez, with music by Alberto Heller, and *Cia Ludens* cast. The conference had the format of previous ITD events, combining work by emerging

and established scholars, including live performances as well as academic papers, and featuring contributions by scholars and practitioners. But it also represented a significant new step for the ITD network, branching into work in Latin America and opening up exciting new areas of overlap and contrast—including such areas as the legacies of colonialism, the cultural impact of Catholicism and the importance of linguistic diversity, for example.

This thematic issue of *Ilha do Desterro* celebrates the importance, reach, and continuity of the Irish Theatrical Diaspora project and aims to respond to the purposes of the project, and the questions that it raises, by including nine articles by authors from Brazil, the United States, Canada, France, Japan and Korea. These articles discuss the presence of Irish theatre in countries as diverse as Brazil, Mexico, Canada, France, Korea, England, and the United States—also making comparisons with the contemporary Irish theatre that is vital and active in Ireland today. They are organized by geographical region and language-speaking context: six articles deal with Irish theatre in non-English-speaking environments, and three with Anglophone contexts.

Domingos Nunez's and Peter James Harris's article, titled "Roger Casement in the Twenty-First Century: The Public and Private Faces of a Multi-Media Irish Hero," opens the volume with a comprehensive, well-documented study of contemporary renditions of Roger Casement's life, mostly for the stage. The first part of the article includes a critical overview of material published on Casement's life, particularly his time in the Congo and the Peruvian Amazon—biographies, Casement's own diaries and reports, and contemporary dramatizations of his life. The second part sheds light on Nunez's docudrama *The Two Deaths of Roger Casement*, a *Cia Ludens* production of 2016 in Brazil, and on the decisions that were taken in the creative process: a case study of an original "Irish" play written by a non-Irish author.

"Cultural Appropriation: Brazilian Stage Productions of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*," by Anna Stegh Camati, also focuses on Irish theatre in Brazil, by discussing the experimental features that Samuel Beckett imprinted in *Waiting for Godot* and a historical panorama of some of the most iconic stage productions of the play in Brazil, from the first 1955 *Godot*, in São Paulo, to productions in the 2000s. "The play has acquired mythical status, inviting theatre practitioners all over the world to find new localities and social contexts in which to translate the endless waiting of the two tramps," Camati concludes. Her article is informed by theoretical perspectives from sources such as Oswald de Andrade, José Roberto O'Shea, Patrice Pavis, and Peter Burke, among others; and by a contextual background of Brazilian social history.

Also in the area of cultural adaptation and appropriation, Jacqueline E. Bixler explores Marie Jones's international success with her masterpiece *Stones in His Pockets* (premiered in 1996 and then revised in 1999), in its adaptation by the well-known playwright Sabina Berman as *eXtras* (2003), in Mexico: "From Kerry to Chiconcuac: Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* and Sabina Berman's *eXtras*." Informed by the work of a range of established scholars in the field of translation

and adaptation studies, Bixler sheds light on the process used by Berman to “tradapt” and “glocalize” the Irish *Stones in His Pockets* to Mexico, where, in Bixler’s own words, “the combined forces of Hollywood and globalization have likewise ravaged the local economy, and where Jones’s tragicomic story of exploitation and anonymization played every bit as well as it did in Ireland.”

Adaptation and translation are indeed some of the more interesting ways in which Irish theatre has made a presence in non-Anglophone environments. These are the concerns of Aileen Ruane in her approach to Irish theatre in Quebec: “Language, Translation, and the Irish Theatre Diaspora in Quebec.” The article addresses particularly Olivier Choinière’s 2001 translation of Mark O’Rowe’s play *Howie the Rookie* (1999), arguing for the inclusion of contemporary Québécois translations of twentieth-century Irish plays as part of the Irish theatrical diaspora. In her words, “The Irish diaspora’s presence in Quebec presents a unique opportunity to examine the role played by language in the theatre.” While the presence of the Irish theatrical diaspora in North America is often the subject of academic studies, Ruane postulates that few scholars have investigated the changes that occur when that diasporic presence is translated, particularly in Quebec.

Martine Pelletier’s “Brian Friel on the French stage: From Laurent Terzieff to Women Directors of *Dancing at Lughnasa*” also explores Irish theatre in Francophone environments. Her essay focuses primarily on the association between Brian Friel and the late French actor and director Laurent Terzieff; and secondarily on *Dancing at Lughnasa*, often performed on French stages, with specific reference to productions twenty years apart by two women directors. According to Pelletier these two directors, Irina Brook (1999) and Gaëlle Bourgeois (2019), were able to find “the right rhythm and energy for their productions, translating with their own theatrical vocabulary and personal sensibilities the universality of the experiences, ideas and emotions that Friel located in 1936 Ballybeg.” Pelletier’s essay is part of a larger project on the translation, adaptation and reception of Brian Friel in France.

The reach of Irish theatre extends to countries as far from Ireland as Korea—as shown by the example of “Domesticity in the Trilogies of Sean O’Casey and Yu Ch’i-jin,” by Ji Hyea Hwang. This article examines the portrayal of the domestic realm in both Sean O’Casey’s 1920s Dublin trilogy—*The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), *The Plough and the Stars* (1926)—and Korean playwright Yu Ch’i-jin’s 1930s Nongchon trilogy—*The Shack* (1932), *Landscape of the Village with the Willow Tree* (1933), and *The Ox* (1934). The article argues that Yu echoes O’Casey’s staging of nationhood by focusing on the homeland and the home—which Hwang sees as Yu’s attempt to establish a transcolonial solidarity between Korean and Irish national theatre.

As well as approaching Irish theatre in Portuguese, Spanish, French and Korean-speaking contexts, this volume includes essays discussing Irish theatre in English-speaking environments: contemporary England and the US in the nineteenth century. Hiroko Mikami’s essay—“Richard Bean’s *The Big Fella* (2010) and Jez Butterworth’s *The Ferryman* (2017): Two Plays about the

Northern Troubles from outside of Northern Ireland”–deals with two Troubles plays written by non-Irish playwrights and challenges the assumption that drama about the Troubles means almost exclusively plays written by Northern playwrights. The essay examines whether, and to what extent, it is possible to say that theatre can transcend regional boundaries and become part of global memories–in the context of the periods since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, as well as the broader post-9/11 environment worldwide. Mikami’s main argument is informed by Pierre Nora’s contrast of memory (multiple, yet specific; collective, yet individual) with history (belonging to everyone and to no one; therefore universal).

The year 2020 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Dion Boucicault, and thus it is appropriate that the last two essays in a collection dedicated to the Irish theatrical diaspora pay tribute to this fascinating playwright and man of the theatre. “Dion Boucicault’s *Robert Emmet*?: The Question of Authorship and the Season Premiere at the McVicker’s Theatre, Chicago, on November 5, 1884,” by Fernanda Korovsky Moura, discusses the question of the authorship of the play *Robert Emmet* and investigates the reception of the production in its unsuccessful opening season at the McVicker’s Theatre in Chicago in November, 1884. The article argues that analysis of theatrical productions is a reconstructive task. Even if the *Robert Emmet* Chicago premiere is untraceable, Moura proposes, critical interpretation of the theatrical event is possible based on the study of secondary sources. Her analysis of the reception of the play draws from sources such as newspaper archives and theatrical reviews of the period.

Maureen Murphy’s “Dion Boucicault: Showman and Shaughraun” closes the section of articles in this volume, with an analysis of how Boucicault’s Irish characters owe their origins to American native heroes like Sam Patch, Davy Crockett and Mose the Bowery B’hoj, as much as to native Irish heroes of romantic nationalism, such as Myles Murphy or Myles na gCopaleen (Myles of the Ponies). In Maureen Murphy’s view, while some critics have also identified the origin of Boucicault’s Irish characters in the parasite-slave characters in Roman comedy, “there were more recent antecedents in certain native Irish characters who appear in Irish pre-famine fiction and in the heroes of nineteenth-century American drama who appeared on the stage to dramatize American romantic nationalism.” Murphy concludes that it was Boucicault’s American experience that was the catalyst for this dramatic development.

Irish theatre now constitutes a thriving field of research worldwide. This volume of *Ilha do Desterro* recognizes this status by including reviews of five of the most significant recent publications dedicated to Irish theatre; and this introduction highlights some of the main points raised by these reviewers. Luke Lamont’s review of Miriam Haughton’s *Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) argues that the book examines contemporary performance in the UK and Ireland as attempts to stage the experience of trauma and its aftermath, stressing that Haughton’s case studies “are notable for their contemporaneity, and for their formal and thematic variety.” The book also maps

the history of Trauma Studies and provides critical context for the four case studies that comprise the body of the monograph, as shown by Lamont.

José Lanter's *The Theatre of Thomas Kilroy, No Absolutes* (Cork UP, 2018) is described by Dawn Duncan as an essential study "for anyone studying contemporary theatre." Duncan shows how Lanter examines Kilroy's writing and theatrical process for ten plays, positioning Kilroy "as an Irish writer who blends global influences, works cooperatively with production teams, and is postmodern in thematic sensibility and experimental stylizing." Lanter divides her study into three sections—"Nationalism and Identity," "Gender and Sexuality," and "Art and Mysticism"—carefully examined by Duncan in the review.

Shaun Richards's reading of Patrick Lonergan's *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950* (Methuen Drama, 2019) points to the author's objective: "to bring often-forgotten plays and productions to critical attention and shed light on what they reveal about the society in which they were staged," by giving "credit to actors, audiences, directors and companies, as well as plays and playwrights." The volume covers the period from 1950 to the 2000s and makes an essential addition to criticism for all those who are interested in Irish theatre, in Richards' view.

Ian Walsh's review of *The Theatre and Films of Conor McPherson: Conspicuous Communities* (Methuen Drama, 2019) presents Eamonn Jordan's book as "a masterful and refreshing study of McPherson's work." In Walsh's assessment, "Jordan's comprehensive book is wide-ranging in not only addressing McPherson's theatre and films as promised in the title but also his work for television and his musical." Walsh concludes that this companion is essential reading for all those with a special interest in McPherson, but also as a thoughtful, authoritative and inspiring analysis of theatre and film.

Melissa Sihra's *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown* (Palgrave, 2019) pays due tribute to the work of "one of Ireland's most celebrated dramatists," as remarked by reviewer Patrick Lonergan. Sihra, he notes, "has long been admired as the leading interpreter of Carr's theatre," and her new book "pushes our knowledge of Carr into new territories," with "a sustained re-interrogation of her status within the Irish and international theatrical traditions." The subtitle—*Pastures of the Unknown*—actually indicates how much we still have to learn about Carr's work, Lonergan suggests.

Our aim in preparing this volume is to point to the wealth of scholarship currently being carried out on the subject of Irish theatre in its international contexts—and, in particular, to the existing richness and future potential of the joint Irish-Brazilian approach to preparing this collection of essays. As the Irish Theatrical Diaspora project reaches its twentieth anniversary, we now have an opportunity to reflect upon what we have achieved thus far—and what we might yet do together in the future. These articles, both individually and collectively, provide compelling evidence of possible ways forward.

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