

Venn's book is the beginning of an overdue conversation in theatre and performance studies about the nature of madness and the stage, and opens up fruitful avenues for further investigation.

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*Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris, eds.*

**Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Plays by Women: The Early Twenty-First Century**

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021.

316 p. \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-472-05435-0.

Capturing the hugely diverse body of contemporary plays by women across the globe is an ambitious undertaking, even if the aim is to cover as short a period of time as the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Editors Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris have approached this task with care, curating a cohesive volume which builds on their collaborative work as part of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) and their previous publication on *Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the Twenty-First Century* (Palgrave, 2013). Taking a consciously intersectional approach, this edited collection covers a range of themes such as environmental risk, indigenizing colonial narratives, race and protest, the mythic migrant, gender, and class-based violence, to mention a few. The geographical scope of the essays is wide-ranging as they bring together playwrights from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Italy, New Zealand (Aotearoa), South Africa, the US, and the UK. Although the majority of plays discussed refer to the UK and North America, the playwrights' cultural identities reveal the strong cultural heterogeneity of these particular contexts which reflects the volume's intersectional ethos.

The collection is comprised of twenty-eight short essays which are divided into seven sections: replaying the canon, representing histories, staging lives, re-imagining family, navigating communities, articulating intersections, and new world order(s). This curatorial choice sharpens the book's focus on distinct topics and the aesthetic approaches the playwrights adopt. The thematic frames bring the works discussed into dialogue with past feminist theatre legacies from women's loaded relationship with the theatrical canon to their exploration of issues of contemporary global importance such as Elfriede Jelinek's irreverent *Am Königsweg* [*On the Royal Road: The Burgher King*] (2017), as analyzed by Sue-Ellen Case. Each essay examines one key play-text with the aim of providing 'a resource for students at all levels'. This is one of the main strengths of the collection, as it can be readily integrated in undergraduate and post-graduate literature and theatre studies curricula.

The essays offer original close readings of the plays in question which have not yet received much scholarly attention, with some due consideration of staging choices.

The editors advocate for the creation of 'a level playing field' and for this, Ferris's 'Afterwords' section pays a brief tribute to women in theatre, from María Irene Fornés and Elyse Dodgson to Sahar Speaks, in order to conclude with a call to arms for persisting to improve women's representation in the theatre industry. The book certainly achieves its aim of creating an appetite for discovering hidden and emergent theatrical voices; in doing so, it provides a wealth of material for amplifying the canon of plays encountered in theatre scholarship. Although the term 'women' mostly appears as an uncontested identity category, the collection creates a fertile ground for further discussions around decolonization, equality, and diversity in the theatre and in the classroom.

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*Antonio Bibbò*

**Irish Literature in Italy in the Era of the World Wars**

Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 304 p. £89.99.

ISBN: 978-3-030-83585-9.

Antonio Bibbò's meticulous analysis of the reception of Irish literature and theatre in early twentieth-century Italy is an outstanding example of some of the newest directions in Irish studies and comparative literatures. Recent changes in scholarship demonstrate a growing concern with the after-life of literary texts and translation history. Since the early 2000s, the transnational approach has become a prevalent alternative to the traditional study of national literatures. Irish theatre studies, for instance, display an increasing interest in the circulation abroad of Irish theatre to stress its global potential and the topicality of modern Irish plays for various European and non-European contexts. Bibbò's study also embodies a growing concern with explorations of cultural mediators, publishers, and the literary archives of translators.

To nuance our understanding of the national aspects of modern Irish literature, Bibbò guides the reader through the relationship between Irish and Italian literatures of the early years of the twentieth century until the end of the Second World War, illustrating how various observers employed or reversed colonial images of Ireland, appropriating those stereotypes to Italian political and aesthetic contexts. However, *Irish Literature in Italy* is not merely an exploration of the binary influences between the two countries. Through detailed archival research, Bibbò examines the perception and diverse (often highly political) use in

Italy of literary texts by such canonical writers as W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, Seán O'Casey, George Moore, G. B. Shaw, and Oscar Wilde, as well as the surprising interest in non-canonical writers such as Lord Dunsany, Lennox Robinson, James Stephens, Edward Martyn, or Brian Oswald Donn-Byrne.

In terms of mediators, the central protagonist of this book seems to be Carlo Linati, whose endeavours to promote Irish drama in Italy would influence future mediators and intellectuals. Also of great value is the book's acknowledgement of Emma Gramatica's long and complex involvement with Irish theatre, which was unrelated to Linati's systematic dissemination strategy. Gramatica was the first to stage Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* with a travesti casting, which caused significant debate among Italian theatre critics of the time. Bibbò's study thus encourages new research into Gramatica's unorthodox interpretation of Synge's *Playboy* and the relationship between gendered images of Ireland and Italy's gender politics of the time. Along with Gramatica's efforts, Bibbò also discusses Eleonora Duse's significant interest in Irish drama and her unrealized plans for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* and Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. As he argues, 'the history of literature should pay more attention to failure

and to the roads not taken, to what does not quite work out, in order to make sense of the needs of, and gaps in, the system'.

By outlining the ways in which both fascists and anti-fascists turned to Irish drama to represent their respective arguments and political aims, Bibbò flags the role of ambiguity in translating and producing Irish plays in Italy. Ireland's liminal political status, and the resulting ambiguity that permeates modern Irish plays, 'made it an ideal object of both political and aesthetic manipulation'. The journey this book takes the reader on illustrates that the Irish canon in Italy also conveyed ambivalence, as it was 'at once narrow and broad, fascist and anti-fascist, employed for political purposes and appreciated for aesthetic reasons'. Besides being an outstanding example of thorough archival research, this book exemplifies, through its cross-disciplinary approach, the entanglement of politics, history, literature, modernism, and the book market in the early twentieth century. *Irish Literature in Italy* therefore offers novel explorations for modernist studies, theatre and performance history, translation studies, and for Yeats studies, too, as Yeats directly fostered the dissemination of Irish drama in Italy, and thus served as an influence for some of the most prominent Italian mediators of Irish literature.

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