

broad allegiance to the left's ideological imperatives, is an important reminder for cultural praxis in our times.

Feminist scholars have argued that the left-aligned cultural movement both legitimized the presence of actresses while simultaneously disciplining and desexualizing them. *Performing Silence* contributes to this research by situating the experiences of actresses within the structure and ideology of group theatre. It demonstrates that women continued to occupy slippery ground, with their presence mediated constantly by dominant codes of permissible sexual and moral conduct, notions of respectability and perceptions of purity and chastity. Even while they carried out the work of the organizer (Anil De Silva), the director (Tripti Mitra) or of the cultural activist (Keya Chakravarti), their labour and creativity were negotiated through the limited and limiting frameworks of care, nurture and service. The revolution needed women and their affective labour onstage and within the political sphere, but required them to play second fiddle to the male director/the patriarch of the group/the leader of the movement. Bannerjee's appraisal of the histories of leading actresses, artiste couples and women cultural workers of the time develops from the feminist understanding that women's personal and professional lives and the economic and social struggles that governed their participation, success and sustenance in political-cultural arenas require a different valuation and a reconceptualization of (feminine) labour.

The book is organized in five chapters broadly covering four decades of the existence of group theatre to explore what it meant to be a full-time actress in the 1960s and 1970s. It draws upon a wide range of materials, where performance sits comfortably with letters, diaries, photographs, reminiscences, tabloid gossip, autobiographies and life histories as an equally subjective, unstable and subjugated form of knowledge. Bannerjee's interdisciplinary methodology engages textual and performance analysis and moves seamlessly from close readings of archival materials to an interrogation of the archive itself. It is a deeply moving exercise in listening to something that may be present but not shouting, an example of how to unearth what lies hidden in the thicket of silence and to amplify it. The appalling state of official archives in India today occasions alternative ways of looking at the past to mobilize feminist and radical forms of research and analysis that upend the solidity of the authoritative narratives of struggle and progress. The importance of Bannerjee's approach may be thought of as (re)writing history *obliquely*, or what Emily Dickinson would call 'the slant' – diminishing and ironizing the established and sentimental as well as making a permanent dent in the notion of a complete and comprehensive history. *Performing Silence* attempts 'not to plug the holes in the said discourse, but to make them starkly visible' (p. 23), illuminating the absence as a terrible presence that fundamentally and permanently transforms the image of the revolution.

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Masculinities and Manhood in Contemporary Irish Drama: Acting the Man. By Cormac O'Brien. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. Pp. vii + 292. \$109.99 Hb; \$84.99 Ebook.

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In *Masculinities and Manhood in Contemporary Irish Drama*, O'Brien effectively traces the production of masculine characters and narratives across a broad spectrum of historical time periods and theatrical genres. He does so by combining an astute and creative analysis of text with an insightful and illuminating identification of modalities of theatrical performance technique and aesthetics. Ranging from contemporary playwrights such as Nancy Harris to classic authors such as Martin McDonagh and Tom Murphy, O'Brien's book pays homage to

the respective textual analysis which has traditionally dominated academic criticism, and yet he manages to skilfully integrate the manifestation of text through performance theory and design technique. Thus O'Brien folds design into criticism in order to open up the world of theatre to a semiotic scenography that supports and transgresses cultural norms and expectations. In chapter 4, 'Men of the North', O'Brien offers a helpful description of set design to support his central thesis. He analyses the set's various spaces, evoking the visual as vital to a complete exposition of the conscious or unconscious meaning of the play. Thus this book contributes to advancing the discourse in Irish theatre studies in that it offers the reader a more comprehensive understanding of the fullness of the theatre.

O'Brien's perspective is innovative in that he invites a broader engagement with theatre that has the potential to impact teaching and learning. His illuminating in-depth textual analysis is compelling, well supported by ample theory, social science and the Irish theatrical tradition. The book does all this while simultaneously encouraging a deeper understanding of the creative expression of design, acting technique and aesthetic representation as artistically manifested in the material realization of the entire project we call theatre. I would assert that this book would be a useful tool for scholars and practitioners, and yet its structure and content would be fascinating for anyone interested in Irish theatre and drama.

O'Brien's interest in the social and cultural influences in Ireland, and their inscriptions on performance, are most original and innovative through his focus on the actor. In chapter 3, 'The Pathology of Patriarchy', he makes intriguing connections between the historical tradition of drama and the characters that have evoked Irish masculinity. He makes interesting connections in an analysis of heterosexuality using J. B. Keane's play *Sive* and Eugene O'Brien's play *Eden*. The book goes on to then seamlessly create a fundamental link between the actor's personal formation in the Irish idea of masculinity and its subsequent impact on performance. If we are to take O'Brien's word 'pathology' at face value, then he suggests that this combination of text and performance of Irish domestic masculinity is a widespread exposition of disease! O'Brien's historically specific analysis of character and embodied actor goes beyond a traditional inquiry of gender and performance in Irish theatrical criticism.

While naming the tradition as patriarchal is not a new revelation, and nor is that tradition's impact on women unexplored, O'Brien effectively advances the debate in the field. While I found the entire book interesting, and its arguments provocative for scholars and theatre devotees alike, I was particularly inspired by chapter 5, 'Masculinity without Men'. In this chapter O'Brien advances his analysis of J. B. Keane, Marina Carr, Nancy Harris and others to offer an interesting perspective of cultural masculinity beyond men. While at times the construction of the chapter drops into binary thinking, its insights into the patriarchal compliance of identity in Ireland offer a vigorous argument about the role of women characters both onstage and constructed within text. Leaning on Martin Esslin, O'Brien's analysis in this chapter faithfully fulfils his intention in the Introduction to unfold the theatre as portrayal, evidence and pattern in what he calls 'decoding' masculinity in text and performance. The reader can expect what the author promises to be fulfilled.

My overall assessment of the book is that it makes a good contribution to the field, but I wish it had gone further. The introduction of the concepts of post-dramatic theatre is useful and yet not fully unpacked for its potential. Admittedly, O'Brien's book is focused on masculinity and the ideological construction of gender in Irish drama through Irish culture. Consequently, the book promises more insight from the author in the form of research and writing. The intersection of design in its full manifestation of set, lighting, sound and props offers a materialist gateway to a deeper undertaking of what O'Brien calls the pathology of patriarchy. I am certain that this book has the potential to inspire vision and practice that unites the page and the stage in Irish drama.