

Theatre and Archival Memory: Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories, 1951–1977

By Barry Houlihan. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021; pp. xiv + 275, \$109.99 cloth, \$109.99 paper, \$84.99 e-book.

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Both the title and subtitle of Barry Houlihan's *Theatre and Archival Memory: Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories, 1951–1977* are particularly apt. An archivist himself, Houlihan draws on a host of primary and archival sources as well as articles and reviews in several newspapers and periodicals. The central impulse of the book is to examine ways in which the Irish theatre of the post–World War II (or, in the Irish phrase, “post-Emergency”) era addressed issues of nationality, class, gender, race, and religion—and the ways in which conservative forces sought to suppress those expressions.

Houlihan's stated goal is to “offer[] a focused study of plays, playwrights, artists and events which are largely outside the canon of Irish drama but which have served to shape this critical period of the 1950s through to the 1980s, and which also had a profound influence on Irish theatre-going audiences” (3). Houlihan is primarily interested in plays produced in Ireland, irrespective of the nationality of the playwright. Hence, in addition to discussing works by Irish dramatists, Houlihan also looks at the Dublin productions of such works as Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and J. P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*, whereas Irishman Samuel Beckett is mentioned only in passing. Of course, part of the reason for this distinction is that the plays just mentioned are fundamentally realistic and deal directly with the sociopolitical issues that interest Houlihan the most, whereas Beckett's work addresses such topics only indirectly, if at all.

After an Introduction, Houlihan proceeds generally thematically, with chapters devoted to family dynamics onstage, internationalization, censorship (both literal and de facto), and explicitly political considerations. The argument throughout the book is that whereas the Irish theatre in the generation under consideration was dominated by conservative forces with respect to gender, religion, race, and class, works outside those archetypical constraints did indeed exist, and have been inappropriately omitted from the canon.

Running somewhat counter to the book's focus is a useful chapter, “Staging the Memoryscape of Middle-Class Ireland,” which offers a long overview of the contributions of playwright Hugh Leonard, author of some two dozen plays but who is known outside Ireland almost exclusively for *The Patrick Pearse Motel*, *Da*, and *A Life*. Whereas there is passing mention of productions, including those outside Ireland, Houlihan concentrates his analysis here on the dramatic texts.

The period under discussion here is hardly bereft of significant Irish plays and productions, but certainly scholarship has paid it relatively little regard. The apparent gap is in some ways understandable, to be sure. The most important works of Seán O'Casey, Denis Johnston, and Teresa Deevy all came out before the war. The other chronological endpoint occurs before Tom Murphy, Brian Friel, and Stewart Parker have staged their most mature work, and Marina Carr, Enda Walsh, and Christina Reid haven't even started their careers.

There are, of course, a number of useful books and articles about this period in Irish theatre history—the works of Christopher Murray, Nicholas Grene, and Chris Morash come to mind—but there can be no question that Houlihan explores plays, companies, and productions that have received little scholarly attention. Indeed, even scholars of Irish theatre, especially those outside Ireland, are likely to know little if anything about plays like Máiréad Ní Ghráda's *On Trial (An Triail)* or Carolyn Swift's *The Millstone*, companies like the Pike Theatre, or productions like *Oda Oak Oracle* at the Peacock Theatre. Houlihan's comprehensive research thereby serves two purposes: not only to begin to fill in the chronological and demographic gaps in the study of Irish theatre history, but also to provide other scholars with potential topics and starting places from which to launch their own investigations.

Houlihan deftly describes the social and cultural structures that defined Irish life in the generation under discussion. If there's a criticism, it is that he moves rather too quickly from the general to the specific. It would be all but impossible, for example, to argue with Houlihan's point that in many ways the Irish theatre of the period "reflected the misogynistic and systemic structural order maintained in Irish society by male dominated institutions, from Government to Churches to local and domestic settings" (24). Still, this does not necessarily mean that every negative review of a play by a woman was "symptomatic of the institutional dismissal of female artists" (50), an argument that is stated or implied several times in the book. This is especially true since the subject of this commentary is a play in performance (in some cases, there is no extant copy of the text), so the reader, or indeed Houlihan himself, cannot judge the legitimacy of the criticism. Thankfully, these instances of overreach are both qualitatively and quantitatively minor.

More troubling, albeit in a different way, is the egregious lack of editing and proofreading. There are dozens of errors of grammar, punctuation, italicization, and the like. Formatting is inconsistent; there are obvious factual inaccuracies (Federico García Lorca's first name was not Gabriel) and at least one malapropism. Usually, the errors interfere little with the reader's ability to navigate the text, but there are several occasions in which such mistakes render a sentence utterly incomprehensible. The book is thus a more difficult read than it should be. The result is that readers perceive themselves to be looking at something akin to the first draft of a doctoral dissertation: a work of considerable potential, but still in need of considerable revision. The folks at Palgrave Macmillan do neither Houlihan nor the scholarly community any favors by releasing the work in this form.

For all this, the book's merits are palpable, the breadth of the study impressive, and the subject matter long overdue for the kind of analysis Houlihan provides. He is a thorough historian and a perceptive critic, and the potential of a work such as

this to open new avenues of scholarly inquiry are immense. It has its problems, but it is above all a potentially very valuable resource.

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Staging Lives in Latin American Theater: Bodies, Objects, Archives

By Paola S. Hernández. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2022; pp. viii + 219, 13 illustrations. \$99.95 cloth, \$34.95 paper, \$34.95 e-book.

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Many contemporary Latin American theatre artists are drawing from documentary theatre traditions to make the effects of neoliberal economic policies, uneasy transitions from dictatorship, and other structural inequities legible to domestic and international audiences. Paola S. Hernández creates a compelling snapshot of this moment in her thoroughly researched book, *Staging Lives in Latin American Theater: Bodies, Objects, Archives*. Hernández centers her monograph around the practices of four of Latin America's most notable and studied artists (Vivi Tellas, Lola Arias, El Teatro Línea de Sombra, and Guillermo Calderón) in order to consider the ways that they use “the affective hold of the real” to “transform private and public memories, modes of participation, and the kinds of truth claims theater can make” (2). Each of the artists featured use biographical narratives and archival materials to explore how the use of material objects and personal narratives can complicate an understanding of the past.

Hernández situates herself as part of academic lineages that are attentive to Latin American theatre of the twenty-first century, memory studies, and the emergence of innovative documentary practices in theatres across the globe. The book nicely threads the needle between focusing on the local political and cultural contexts in which the artists make their work and the ways the performances are received when presented internationally. Moreover, Hernández has a keen eye for the details of production, describing the performances and the artists' interactions with material objects onstage in a way that brings readers, who may not have seen these works staged, into a deeper understanding of those performances.

The book begins with an analysis of playwright, director, and producer Vivi Tellas's biodramas, particularly her *Proyecto Archivos*, which highlights Tellas's

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