Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme

A powerful and subtle play, it follows the experience of eight men who volunteer to serve in the 36th (Ulster) Division at the beginning of the First World War. It reaches a climax at the start of the terrible battle of the Somme.

Frank McGuinness’s charged adaptation of Sophocles’ powerful tragedy was first performed at the Chichester Festival Theatre in 1997 and was revived at the Old Vic, London, in 2014.

Essays on contemporary Irish theatre

1980. It provides a privileged insight into the great moments of contemporary Irish theatre, marking the contributions of playwrights (Carr, Murphy, Friel, McGuinness), directors (Hynes, Byrne), actors (Hickey, McKenna), and designers (Vanek, Moon). The figures are more respected and quoted internationally than Fintan O’Toole, both as a controversial and provocative political commentator and theatre critic. This extensive collection brings together a wide range of his writings going back to 1980.

Common approach to staging the conflict and the peace process, with a distinct emphasis on utopian performatives and the possibility of positive change.

Seven years have passed since the end of the Trojan War and Menelaus, King of Sparta, concludes. He is determined to take I. He recommends the book especially to those who find McGuinness difficult, but all readers are likely to put it down enriched and with a reformed view of drama and theatre in general.

Reviewed by: Maria Kurdi, Drama League Magazine of Theatre and Drama

Diversity of the playwright’s work is well matched in the collection by the scale of the different approaches the authors of the essays and talks take. The collection covers playwrights, millennial dramatists, and actors while exploring the history of gay-themed theatre and drama, the breadth of stage roles, and the dramatic representation of homosexual characters from various perspectives. These include the impact of AIDS, contemporary American politics, images of homophobia, gay-themed plays aimed at Theatre for Youth, and the 1969 raid at the Stonewall Inn, which helped spawn a gay revolution.

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Reviewed by: Patrick Mason

Frank McGuinness’s drama in its richness and variety calls out for what this collection of essays supplies: A multi-authored volume by both practitioners and academics. A thoughtful, stimulating collection.

Reviewed by: Anthony Roche

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Dismemberment in Drama / Dismemberment of Drama is an essay collection which considers the dramatic possibility contained in the images and narratives of dismemberment frequently recurring on the western stage. The Classical Tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides, the Romanticism of Kleist, the surrealism of Artaud, and the contemporary drama of Suzan-Lori Parks and Marina Carr are just some of the fractured and fragmented bodies analyzed in this collection.

Both individually and in concert the contributors ask what a dismembered body means. Such an inquiry allows them to confront dismemberment as a theoretical category which understands such twentieth-century innovations as the Theatre of Cruelty, the Epic Theatre, the Open Theater, and documentary theatre as part of a long dramatic tradition. Dismemberment in drama examines the tenuous bond between representation and the object being represented by highlighting the dismemberment of drama as a form that occurs during drama’s repeated theorizations of its own enactment. There is a conflict between disintegration and unity inherent in mimesis, theatrical phenomenology, and performance. This work provides an overview of Irish theatre, read in the light of Ireland’s self-definition. Mediating between history and its production, between the cultural and the political, between the personal and the public, between the avant-garde and the establishment, it attempts to do justice to the enabling and mirroring preoccupations of Irish drama.

This book is about the Wildean aesthetic in contemporary Irish drama. Through elucidating a discernible Wildean strand in the plays of Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, Thomas Kilroy, Marina Carr and Frank McGuinness, it demonstrates that Oscar Wilde’s importance to Ireland’s theatrical canon is equal to that of W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge and Samuel Beckett. The study examines key areas of the Wildean aesthetic: his aestheticizing of experience via language and self-conscious performance; the notion of the dandy in Wildean texts and how such a figure is engaged with in today’s dramas; and how his contribution to the concept of a verbal theatre has influenced his dramatic successors. It is of particular pertinence to academics and postgraduate students in the fields of Irish drama and Irish literature, and for those interested in the work of Oscar Wilde, Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, Thomas Kilroy, Marina Carr and Frank McGuinness.

Seamus Heaney once described the ‘sense of place’ generated by the early Abbey theatre as the ‘imaginative protein’ of later Irish writing. Drawing on theorists of space such as Henri Lefebvre and Yi-Fu Tuan, Mapping Irish Theatre argues that theatre is ‘a machine for making place from space’. Concentrating on Irish theatre, the book investigates how this Irish ‘sense of place’ was both produced by, and produced, the remarkable work of the Irish Revival, before considering what happens when this spatial formation begins to fade. Exploring more recent site-specific and place-specific theatre alongside canonical works of Irish theatre by playwrights including J. M. Synge, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel, the study proposes an original theory of theatrical space and theatrical identification, whose application extends beyond Irish theatre, and will be useful for all theatre scholars.

The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre provides the single most comprehensive survey of the field to be found in a single volume. Drawing on more than forty contributors from around the world, the book addresses a full range of topics relating to modern Irish theatre from the late nineteenth-century theatre to the most recent works of postdramatic devised theatre. Ireland has long had an importance in the world of theatre out of all proportion to the size of the country, and has been home to four Nobel Laureates (Yeats, Shaw, and Beckett; Seamus Heaney, while primarily a poet, also wrote for the stage). This collection begins with the influence of melodrama, looks at arguably the first modern Irish playwright, Oscar Wilde, before moving into a series of considerations of the Abbey Theatre, and Irish modernism. Arranged chronologically, it explores areas such as women in theatre, Irish-language theatre, and alternative theatres, before reaching the major writers of more recent Irish theatre, including Brian Friel and Tom Murphy, and their successors. There are also individual chapters focusing on Beckett and Shaw, as well as a series of chapters looking at design, acting and theatre architecture. The book concludes with an extended survey of the critical literature on the field. In each chapter, the author does not simply rehearse accepted wisdom; all of the authors push the boundaries of their respective fields, so that each chapter is a significant contribution to scholarship in its own right.