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Irish Arts: New Contexts

Patrick Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*

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The translator has drawn out what she must feel is the unsaid of the original and created a fine but very different poem in English. Should we read it as a translation from Irish to English and, at the same time, a translation from a male perspective to a female one? I cannot help but feeling that Mac Conghail is paying for the sins of the poetic father, Yeats, and his rejection of the mature, accomplished and decided Gore-Booth sisters.

Poetry anthologies, as well as poetic translations, are designed to spark curiosity, debate and a good row if at all possible. *Calling Cards* is an attractive, affordable volume that considerably widens the audience for these young Irish-language poets. There is much that is captivating and will arouse curiosity here, and the publishers should be saluted for the enterprise. It is to be hoped that readers, like so many Pharaoh's daughters, follow the cue, pick up the calling cards of these ten poets and go on to pay them a visit, in poetry readings and happenings around the country and, above all, in their solo published collections.

Pádraic LAMB

Patrick Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, London, Methuen Drama, 2019, 263 p.

Patrick Lonergan's latest book offers a well-informed survey of Irish drama and theatre in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, from the 1950s to the present. It looks at a wide range of plays, productions, and theatrical initiatives and provides its readers with valuable, up-to-date information on the latest developments of Irish theatre. The originality of *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950* lies in its interest in broadening our conception and understanding of what constitutes Irish theatre. The book argues for a more comprehensive, capacious definition – especially one which would embrace the internationalisation of Irish theatre. The influence of foreign playwrights and directors on Irish dramatists and theatre practitioners, and the role played by international audiences on the reception of Irish plays are thus consistently emphasised. Suggestion is even made that Irish productions of non-Irish plays could be considered as an integral component of Irish theatre. The notorious staging of Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo* by the Pike Theatre Club in 1957 as part of the first Dublin Theatre Festival is here a case in point. Lonergan argues that the controversy generated by the showing of a (non)condom on stage at a time when contraception was illegal may be regarded not so much as symptomatic of "what was wrong in Ireland at the time", but as an "act of resistance" which proved instrumental to "the dismantlement of Irish censorship" (p. 52-53): the work of Pike's co-founders Carolyn Swift and Alan Simpson had a significant bearing on the subsequent developments of Irish theatre and society, especially as regards its secularisation.

The shift away from an exclusively text-based approach to Irish theatre and the inclusion of the work of some actors, directors, and theatre ensembles is probably one of the most interesting attempts that the book makes at complicating the generally accepted narrative in histories of Irish theatre. As a survey, the book does not purport to be exhaustive or encyclopedic. The examples chosen are necessarily subjective. It is nonetheless refreshing to have our attention drawn to the work of actresses such as Siobhán McKenna and Olwen Fouéré, for example, and to that of stage directors such as Lynne Parker (*Rough Magic*), Garry Hynes (*Druid*), and Louise Lowe (*ANU*), for instance. The deliberate choice of female and feminist voices, perceptible also in the choice of playwrights whose works are looked at, is another instance of the book's striving to revise the accepted narrative of Irish theatre history. The inclusion of Irish-language material, such as for instance Brendan Behan's *An Giall* (1957) (*The Hostage*, 1958) or Mairéad Ní Ghráda's *An Trial* (*The Trial*, 1964), is a welcome addition to this narrative as well.

Furthermore, the book invites reconsidering the widely accepted view according to which the "Second Irish Renaissance" happened in the 1960s, highlighting instead the pivotal importance of the 1950s. One is thus reminded that the period saw the expansion of an amateur sector, the multiplication of theatre clubs – such as, for example, the Lyric Players' Theatre in Belfast, the 37 Theatre Club, and the Pike in Dublin, which were all established in 1951 –, the creation of the Dublin Theatre Festival and the emergence of new voices, prominent amongst which was Tom Murphy's.

Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950 comprises seven chapters. The first six are broadly organised in a chronological order. Each chapter focuses on what Lonergan identifies as a salient, characteristic feature of Irish theatre. It provides historical contextualisation and several case studies. The seventh and last chapter comprises three essays, written respectively by Finian O'Gorman, Áine Phillips and Siobhán O'Gorman. Its aim is to open things up by proposing other possible ways of looking at Irish theatre: through the prism of "the art of the amateur", "the incomplete history of performance art" and the importance of "stage design".

Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950 is a very accomplished book, which enthusiastically supports Irish theatre in its different manifestations. The optimism as to what the theatre can achieve can be felt throughout, as for instance in the analysis of the last scene of Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987): "Here the theatre again becomes a space of ritual, in which the creation of art – music by the characters, theatre by the actors – offers the possibility of transcendence: of history, politics and religious division" (p. 65). Or as in the note on which the narrative concludes: "[The] aim here has been to show how theatre matters in Ireland: it is a driver of change, a source of consolation and entertainment, and a reflection on the country's best and worst elements" (p. 204). Yet one cannot help but wonder at this unflinching optimism, especially in a period of such dire climatic, social and economic emergencies. This narrative indeed begs certain questions. One such question could touch on the book's embracing of a forward-looking agenda, and the underlying imperative to keep going and do more with less. If the bearings

of economics on theatrical productions are mentioned several times, the lack of funding is never seen as potentially problematic or damaging for the community of theatre practitioners. If anything, the emergence, during the post-Celtic tiger period of austerity, of the self-employed “theatre-maker”, who “has written a play” and who is now “producing, acting in, directing, marketing and otherwise staging their own works” (p. 201) is hailed as unambiguously positive.

Hélène LECOSSOIS

***Anthology of Young Irish Poets*, Ingrid Casey (ed.), Athens, Vaxikon Publishers, 2019, 124 p.**

With great anticipation and curiosity I received the *Anthology of Young Irish Poets* published in 2019 by Vakhikon and edited by Irish poet and visual artist Ingrid Casey who undertook the task of harvesting representative new Irish poetic voices for the purposes of this collection. The volume reflects the need to maintain representational gender balances by showcasing modern Irish poetry as a “living art” (p. 7) with agents of this representation eleven Irish poets: Doireann Ní Ghríofa, Ingrid Casey, Alice Kinsella, Rob Buchanan, Dylan Brennan, Colin Dardis, Stephen Sexton, Jessica Traynor, Elaine Feeney, Seán Hewitt, and Annemarie Ní Churraáin. Casey’s springboard for collecting the content of this anthology evolved from the digital platform of social media following an open call that invited Irish poets to express interest in featuring their work in this publication. The radical process of scouting new creative writing talent through social media spaces does not just provide new sets of tools to both writers and readers; it expands a nuanced rethinking of sites of agency and the democracy of representation while revolutionising poetry as an art form that remains powerful in the digital age.

The poetic ideograms anthologised here from the North, the South but also from migrant poets across the Irish borders, construct a co-operative aesthetic repository that bridges the past with the present in political terms. The anthology opens up a bold poetic universe that, while emanating from a solid literary tradition that maps modern Irish writing, is retested as a linguistic, historical, and social transmitter of the art of empathy in the 21st century. Against this aesthetic backdrop and its multivalent artistic aims, Manuela Palacios’s introduction and Lucy Collins’s concluding note both reiterate the pioneering aim of the trilingual anthology to present a generation of emerging Irish poets to a Greek audience. With the Greek translations, the volume naturally becomes the textual meeting ground for Greek readers opposite contemporary Irish poetry and culture; translated into Greek from English and Gaelic, the anthology acquires an intercultural force located both in the terrain of language and in the conscious engagement with issues that resonate with readers from source and target cultures. An anthology that decidedly