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Book Review: Staging Intercultural Ireland: New Plays and Practitioner Perspectives

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Political Phantasy in One-Act, 1923, and in Paul Vincent Carroll's later *Coggerers*, 1937. Set in 1923, O'Casey's Kathleen "is safely protected within the family home and doted upon by her parents. With the fighting over and recruits no longer needed, she excludes the citizens from a safe hearth and prefers to keep them outdoors to fend for themselves." Carroll's play, set in the first day of the Easter Rising, has its Kathleen character, Brigid Galgooley, resembling Yeats-Gregory's Poor Old Woman—but unlike the Yeats-Gregory play, Carroll's play "makes the demand that previously fallen leaders be held accountable for the sacrifices made in their names. Like the suitors of *Kathleen Listens In*, *Coggerers* insists that those left behind question the ramifications of following fallen leaders."

Mannion then moves into a chapter titled "Public Spaces," and encounters plays such as St. John Ervine's *The Critics, or a New Play at the Abbey*, 1913, Lennox Robinson's *The Critic*, 1931, Roger McHugh's *Trial at Green Street*, 1941, and Hugh Hunt and Frank O'Connor's *The Invincibles*, 1937. The chapter is followed by one on "Domestic Settings," with plays that mostly explored the Dublin tenements in plays ranging from A. P. Wilson's *The Slough*, 1914, to Bernard McGinn's *Remembered For Ever*, 1941. Mannion argues effectively that the tenement setting was well

established before O'Casey's trilogy by Wilson and the 1917 *Blight*, by Joseph O'Connor and Oliver St. John Gogarty. In the process, Mannion further sets a valuable context to O'Casey's Dublin plays that allows us to see them as emerging not just out of the 1920s political strife, but also out of the growing societal awareness of working-class housing—which was also helped by the Abbey's Labor plays coming from the 1913 Lockout.

Chapter 7, "Labor Pains," traces the Lockout beginning with socialist-leaning *The Lord Mayor*, 1914, by Bernard Shaw's boyhood friend Edward McNulty, which was directed by A.P. Wilson—who in addition to having worked at the Abbey Theatre, was a columnist with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union's newspaper *The Irish Worker*. The play's lead, O'Brien, was originally played by Sean Connolly, a captain in the Irish Citizen Army. The play echoed some of the rhetoric of James Connolly when it is stated that patriotism has little value "if it does not raise" wages. But a play directly representing the Lockout was Wilson's *The Slough*, which includes a labor leader named Allen who was reminiscent of James Larkin. However, as Allen, and Larkin, is portrayed negatively, it is revealed that Wilson "challenged union leadership"—or at least challenged Larkin's leadership, which historically

was being done by many within the ITGWU during the Lockout, and when O'Brien's play premiered, James Connolly was leading the union and Larkin was in America. Mannion does not miss pointing out that *The Slough* followed Wilson's one act *Victims*, performed in Liberty Hall in 1912 by the newly formed Irish Workers' Dramatic Company. The chapter also considers J. A. O'Brennan's *Scrap*, and sees similarities with *The Slough* in portraying the Lockout as dividing families. However, the leaning in Wilson's play to depicting a character strongly resembling James Larkin, blends into the book's last chapter, "Getting Personal."

Mannion's last chapter considers biographical urban plays, or "biodramas," which portrayed iconic figures of Irish history and literature, including Robert Emmet, Jonathan Swift, James Clarence Mangan, and Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. The first in the early Abbey repertoire was the 1909 *An Imaginary Conversation*, authored by Conal O'Riordan (who wrote as Norreys Connell). Mannion suggests that as a politically themed play, the Abbey directors (which at the time included O'Riordan), went against the Theatre's patron Annie Horniman's ban on political plays. In fact, O'Riordan resigned as an Abbey director when Horniman objected to actor Sara Allgood reading a short work at a private

suffragette meeting in London. Emmet would be revisited as a subject in Lennox Robinson's 1915 *The Dreamers*. Mangan is the subject of Louis D'Alton's *The Man in the Cloak*, 1937, while Swift is the focus in G. Sidney Paternoster's *The Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral*, 1913, and Arthur Power's *The Drapier Letters*, 1927. The year 1945 saw Roger McHugh's *Rossa*, as the chapter details the Abbey's pattern of biodramas.

Clearly the Abbey's patterns of urban plays are well-established by Mannion's book. A few copyedits exist, such as listing Synge's death as 1908, when it was 1909. The back cover's notation for the front cover photograph as "from under O'Casey Bridge" may need clarification. While the photo was presumably taken from under Dublin's O'Casey Bridge, the image depicts a glance from below to the Samuel Beckett Bridge.

The Urban Plays of the Early Abbey Theatre represents a major contribution to Irish theatre scholarship. By detailing and defining the urban traditions of the early Abbey, we gain a fuller understanding of the Theatre's changing repertoire—reminding us that as an urban theatre, the Abbey, while richly founded on rural plays, was mindful of the urban tastes of its audiences. As Mannion states in her Introduction, "setting lingers." Indeed. •

—Massachusetts Maritime

The Immigrant Experience in Ireland

BY KATHLEEN HEININGE

ALL SCHOLARS OF world literature, especially those trained in the traditions of Western thought, must ultimately grapple with the question of privilege: In opening up a space for all voices to be heard, care must be taken to avoid coopting those voices. Academics must always be aware of our own motivations so that discussions of multi-cultural literature do not appear anthropological, mere examinations of other cultures from a worldview that seems ubiquitous but which comes from a place of unconscious—perhaps—superiority. Critics from Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, to Gayatri Spivak, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to Chinua Achebe in "Image of Africa" have famously warned against such tendencies, as the perspective of Western privilege encourages us to remain external to our projects, never fully committing ourselves to learning from others, so convinced are we that we are teachers.

Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler, Editors

STAGING INTERCULTURAL IRELAND: NEW PLAYS AND PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES
CORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014, \$57.95

Thus it was with some trepidation that I approached *Staging Intercultural Ireland: New Plays and Practitioner Perspectives*, a unique collection by editors Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler. The project itself gathers eight plays and six interviews with various playwrights and practitioners

who are working in Ireland, all of whom focus on the migrant and immigrant experience, and some of whom are immigrants themselves. I need not have feared. The book was compiled with an eye toward genuine understanding of the difference between multicultural approaches (those which might focus on how "different" such plays might be) and intercultural (those which allow for voices and techniques to enhance each other in order to highlight the importance of context for both author and audience). It is also refreshing in its inclusion of more than merely authorized texts: in addition to photographs from various productions, providing visual contexts, the essays preceding each play establish the context for the play both historically and theatrically, and the interviews address issues of theatre practice that we don't often see in anthologies of plays. These wider discussions allow for a more complete and comprehensive understanding of just how innovative these projects are, especially in a country where theatre is so tied to national identity. As Kasie Lech notes in one of the interviews included, "Irish theatre for a long time was very self-focused because it was creating itself. Now, it has to focus on the outside and it's hard because you have to do that without losing yourself and there is obviously the whole postcolonial fear that, if we allow the foreign influence, we're going to get colonised again to some extent" (372).

The first play included is *Cave Dwellers*, by Nicola McCartney, first produced in 2001. In it, a Man, a Young Woman, a Boy and an Old Woman are seeking their escape from conflict at home,

and they wait in a cave for the man to come who will transport them to a new life. With a nod to *Waiting for Godot*, we see their inability to connect with each other, to trust one another, or to save themselves. They are existentially torn between wanting to help each other, recognizing their humanity regardless of political side, or wanting to take from each other in order to survive. It is a poignant reminder of the challenges facing immigrants who are not only othered in their new countries, but have been marginalized in their home countries simply by virtue of wanting to leave.

Hurl, by Charlie O'Neill, was initially presented by Barabbas in 2003. I was especially delighted to see the inclusion of this play, as it was one of my favorites at that year's Dublin Theatre Festival, although, as is so often the case, the humor of the production is largely lost by merely reading the script. The story of a group of asylum-seekers who, while awaiting the slow churning of bureaucracy to decide their fate, start a hurling team, is a delightfully wry take on the cultural assumptions behind the most minute facets of life. Among the Irish characters in the play, amusement is quickly followed by outrage to think of non-Irish men—and women—being interested in and then finally good at such a quintessentially Irish sport as hurling. Stereotypes are thrown around and then dispensed with as quickly as the hurl itself zips around.

Also in 2003 was the production of Ursula Rani Sarma's *Orpheus Road*, the third play included. While the play addresses more traditionally "Irish" themes of Protestant/Catholic tensions, the repre-

sentation of two young lovers, Finn and Emma, from opposite sides of community violence, uncovers the extent of misunderstanding that arises when cultures remain so distinct, especially when the understanding of one's own culture is not especially deep. One simply goes along with what one knows, and transcending that, even for love, is a very difficult thing to do.

The Cambria is Donal O'Kelly's 2005 depiction of Frederick Douglass's voyage to Ireland. Exploring racism, cultural assumptions, status, and the fickle nature of allegiances, the play allows Douglass to be honored upon his entry into Ireland, seemingly valorizing the Irish as being above the bigotry Douglass faced on his voyage. But the narrative frame undercuts this bucolic view, as the story is ultimately being told by an Irish secondary school history teacher who has just seen her Nigerian student being deported. The juxtaposition of Irish acceptance with Irish bigotry is provocative.

Bisi Adigun, founder of Arambe Productions, is a Yoruban immigrant who provides a new lens for thinking about Irishness. In *Once Upon a Time & Not So Long Ago* (2006), he explores creation myths, both the narratives we traditionally associate with "creation myth" and the way we use modern media to perpetuate new myths about where we all come from and how we present our story. Where the first half of the play provides the narration of various folk myths, the second half is a television talk show where the participants in the play respond to questions about their own immigrant experiences. Story functions to reveal truths that compel us to ask each other, as the TV Host asks, "That did not

really happen, did it?"

Mushroom, by Paul Meade (2007), suggests that the perception of what "really happens" is filtered by our expectations, by our upbringing, and by seemingly accidental circumstances. The stereotypes that we use to encounter each other create their own reality; the metaphor of mushroom farms is apt in that mushrooms require no light but much compost, as they grow best in conditions of decomposition, and they reproduce asexually. There is little light of understanding between the characters, and there is much that appears to be decomposing in their lives; their sexual encounters are anything but fruitful. As the characters encounter each other, there is a sense that they bump up against each other, perhaps bruising slightly, but otherwise have no effect on one another. Their cultural identities remain intact, and the play becomes an instance of how intercultural connection can miss.

Understanding the migrant experience in Ireland requires a consideration of the traveler experience as well, a perspective given in *Rings* by Rosaleen McDonagh. In a

style reminiscent of Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*, two characters, Father and Nora, narrate their lives together, revealing the ways they have been marginalized and the ways they marginalize each other. Nora, lured by the chance at an Olympic gold medal, chooses the boxing ring over a wedding ring, to the chagrin of her family. The fight within her is against the expectations of race and gender that would otherwise hem her in, and she remains outside every culture around her.

Finally, in Mijana Rendulic's *Broken Promise Land*, those gendered expectations are exploited by Tea, the Croatian immigrant who realizes the money to be made in the sex market, and who learns how to manipulate the rules of crossing borders both geographical and cultural as she sells herself to find herself. Refusing to allow moral judgements about Tea, Rendulic forces an examination of the conditions in which the sex market is truly the most viable option for a young female immigrant.

The added treat of interviews with theatre practitioners is where the intercultural project comes to light most

effectively, and provides a frame of reference for the plays. Bairbre Ni Chaoimh, formerly the artistic director of Calypso Productions, explains the motivation behind her move from Abbey Theatre actor to artistic director to community outreach organizer: "We were keen to use our imaginative resources as a professional theatre company to devise an integrated cross-cultural arts programme that would develop and showcase the talent and skills of young people from minority ethnic communities living in Dublin side by side with their Irish counterparts" (345). Similarly, John Scott founded the Irish Modern Dance Theatre, which is now John Scott Dance, with an eye toward allowing "fragments of humanity under a microscope" (351) to be performed in a nonverbal way. He stretches the definition of "dancer" to make room for a less formal articulation of bodily communication that transcends language.

Declan Gorman and Declan Mallon, with Upstate Theatre Project, admit that their project was a response to the fact that "the old bipolar obsession with the

Catholic-Protestant or the North-South was being surpassed by the reality that on the streets around us, and in the shops, and in the community centres, there was growing evidence that there were people from other societies and other communities and other nations and other races living among us" (362-363). The founders of Polish Theatre Ireland (Anna Wolf, Kasia Lech and John Currihan) as well as Polish actor Alicja Ayres and Chilean actor and director José Miguel Jimenez address the challenges faced in such projects, as they strive to overcome the stereotypes assumed about them while creating connections to and with their new homeland.

The anthology is a remarkable achievement in world literary studies, as it begins to bridge that gap between the academic voices and the voices of practitioners and immigrants themselves; each perspective adds to the nuances of the others, and the book itself becomes a step on the way to true intercultural understanding.

—George Fox University

All the World's a Stage

BY KELLY MATTHEWS

In *All Dressed Up: Modern Irish Historical Pageantry*, Joan Fitzpatrick Dean traces the evolution of Irish pageantry from Gaelic League Language Week Processions in the early twentieth century to the Macnas parades in Galway that continue into the twenty-first. Dean has compiled a detailed history of various performances in this genre, which became a popular form of participatory drama and, she argues, a key factor in the construction of post-independence Irish identity. Historical pageants, which sometimes numbered as many as two thousand participants and were greeted by audiences of over 35,000 spectators, were powerful forces in telling the Irish who they were, with processions of Irish history as their centerpieces from Pearse's time into the present.

Joan Fitzpatrick Dean

ALL DRESSED UP:
MODERN IRISH HISTORICAL PAGEANTRY
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014

Indeed, Pearse serves as a starting point for the trajectory of Irish pageantry: his pupils at St. Enda's school performed an elaborate, Irish-language tribute to Cúchulainn in 1909, "an equestrian pageant staged in the open air" with the title character in a horse-drawn chariot. Notable audience members included Standish O'Grady, Edward Martyn, the Count and Countess Markievicz, and W.B. Yeats. *All Dressed Up* traces the lineage of Celtic and Christian pageantry from the Gaelic League and Pearse's puritanical idolatry of Ulster Cycle heroes, to the Aonach Tailteann and the Dublin Civic Weeks of 1927 and 1929, to the 1932 Eucharistic Congress, to Micheál MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards' ambitious productions for the Tóstal festivals of the 1950s. Dean is at her best when describing each pageant's elaborate choreography, as in her description of the 1954 *Pageant of St. Patrick*, a watershed moment in the development of the pageant

genre. It was after this point in contemporary history that pageantry turned its sights on audiences external to Ireland, a tradition that continues in today's medieval dinners at Bunratty Castle, within driving distance from Shannon Airport, an example of "history without tears," as Dean describes most historical pageants of the modern era.

Most twentieth-century historical pageants, Dean explains, took as their centerpiece the "March of the Nation," a sanitized procession of Celts, Vikings, Normans, and modern-day heroes, with free association between historical personages and legendary figures. A costumed

Cúchulainn might well be followed by Red Hugh O'Donnell or Patrick Sarsfield; as Dean points out, "The chronological procession offered no distinction whatsoever between mythological figures and persons from recorded history; this version of the Irish past subsumes them equally." In cataloguing the many versions of historical re-enactments that comprised this heyday of the pageant genre, Dean documents how often Ireland's mythic past was conflated with its history. More surprising was the fact that most pageants of the post-independence era, such as the 1927 *Grand Pageant of Dublin History*, took liberty with the factual record and completely eradicated any English presence from the portrayal of historical events. As Dean explains, "the pageants appear at ease with the hybridity brought by waves of influences, invaders, and immigrants. What was excluded, both the past century and a quarter and virtually any detail of the English colonial presence, is as significant as the romanticization of the select mythic and historic figures that did appear."

In chronicling the hey-day of historical pageantry, Dean brings to the fore several colorful personalities who played significant roles in the perpetuation of this curious dramatic art form. Earliest among these is Louis Napoleon Parker, English dramatist, who set conventions for the pageant that were to resonate beyond the settings of rural Dorset, where he staged his first production in 1905. Parker's rules dictated the amateur status of pageant performers—he quipped

"Nobody is too good to be in a Pageant and almost everybody is good enough."

that "Nobody is too good to be in a Pageant and almost everybody is good enough"—and he declared that each performance should end with a communal singing of the national anthem. Dean reaches into pageantry's origins to chart the distinct nature of this genre as compared to other

forms of drama (I confess I yearned for a mention of the bazaar that inspired James Joyce's "Araby"). Parker's influence was to be felt far and wide, and it soon impacted Irish practitioners such as Fred Morrow, one of eight brothers from Belfast and a leading force in the Ulster Literary Theatre for over thirty years. As Dean tells it, "Fred Morrow's enthusiasm for Irish historical pageantry crossed disciplinary lines between theatre and the visual arts, the political no-man's-land between Ascendancy and advanced nationalists, and the religious divide between Protestants and Catholics." In the Free State, Micheál MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards were to become two of pageantry's leading lights. In addition to founding An Taibhdhearc and the Gate theatre companies, MacLiammóir (born Alfred Willmore and a seasoned expert in self-creation, as Dean notes) and Edwards created or assembled three large-scale nationalist pageants during their illustrious career, including one, *The Pageant of the Celt*, that was produced in Soldier Field, Chicago in 1934.

After the mid-twentieth century, cinema and, later, television arose and developed into significant competition for pageant audiences. It was not until the 1980s, as Dean documents, that the Macnas theatre company was able to re-cast the pageant genre as populist street theatre, challenging the boundaries between spectators and performers. As Dean notes, regarding Macnas's award-winning stadium show *The Táin*, "This Ireland was lusty, pagan, and valiant. It was as if de Valera had never existed." Dean views Macnas's *Táin* as culmination, vindication, and redemption of the pageant genre: "Macnas took theatre out of theatres by bringing it directly to the larger community, enlisting large numbers of volunteers, developing performances that were not based on a playwright's text, and amusing all they encountered with aggressively anti-elitist entertainments."

This book contains an impressive number of stunning illustrations, including black and white stills showing throngs of spear carriers and other pageant participants, as well as eight full-color plates of program covers and costume sketches, one by MacLiammóir and two richly detailed pen and ink drawings by the accomplished costume designer Seamus MacCall. An appendix provides an English translation of Pearse's *Macghníomhartha Chúchulainn* ("The Boyhood Deeds of Cúchulainn") by Irish language scholar Seán Ó Briain. Theatre specialists as well as anyone interested in twentieth-century Irish cultural history will be grateful for Dean's extensive archival research. As she notes in her introduction, "Historical pageants typically leave only fugitive traces: programs, posters, photographs, costume designs, reportage." Her work to unearth and assemble these traces into a coherent assessment of the genre will undoubtedly serve as a valuable guide for generations to come.

—Framingham State University