

**Ondřej Pilný, ed. *Irish Theatre & Central Europe*.
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The special issue of *Litteraria Pragensia*, titled *Irish Theatre & Central Europe*, edited by Ondřej Pilný, examines the presence of Irish drama on the stages of Continental Europe in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The volume, exploring this mostly uncharted territory, gathers together scholars of Irish literature as well as theatre practitioners, whose essays shed light on the intriguing ways in which Irish drama has been received, interpreted, and transformed in various theatre productions in Central Europe. Here, outside the “comfort zone” of English-speaking countries, Irish drama is offered to audiences in translation, and where a further challenge for both theatre practitioners and audiences is posed by the receiving culture’s relative unfamiliarity with the phenomenon of Irish theatre as a distinct tradition well-established within the Anglophone world.

The essays in this special issue evolved from papers given at the conference “Irish Theatre and Central Europe,” an event initiated by The Irish Theatrical Diaspora project’s leaders and hosted by Charles University in Prague in 2014. The volume offers a thorough examination of the import of Irish drama into countries that together may be loosely called Central Europe: Poland, Austria, Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Italy.

Three essays deal with productions of Irish plays in Poland. Barry Keane examines why various Polish productions of Sean O’Casey, Brendan Behan and Brian Friel in the second half of the twentieth century never really became successful, instead, often faced rejection due to their perceived staleness and lack of novelty despite the familiarity of Polish audiences with the aforementioned playwrights’ central concern with topics like occupation and social conflict. Interestingly, emerging playwrights like Martin McDonagh, Conor McPherson, Mark O’Rowe, Marina Carr, and Enda Walsh were welcomed as novel and universal and thus appealing to Polish theatergoers.

Michał Lachman is concerned with what becomes of the “Irishness,” that is, the various markers of Irish identity of contemporary Irish plays in their production by Polish companies. He concludes that the success of numerous productions of Irish plays in Poland since the 1990s is rooted in their perceived universal themes instead of their “Irishness,” which was lost in the process of successful domestication for the target audience. Kasia Lech looks at the reverse flow of interaction between Polish and Irish theatre—she discusses Polish theatre productions in Ireland between 2004-2015.

Lech observes that despite the significant number of Polish plays staged in Ireland, the productions' encounters with audiences in Ireland were not wholly successful. She adds that despite the presence of Poles as the largest minority in Ireland, the potential for real Irish-Polish theatrical interaction remained unfulfilled due to, at least partly, the cultural differences in terms of what constitutes entertainment value in theatre, and also because of Irish theatres' unwillingness to take the risk of staging foreign drama.

The surprisingly unperceptive reception of Synge and O'Casey in Vienna between 1917-1969 is examined by Dieter Fuchs, who argues that despite the century's political upheavals shaping the future of Austria as well as most European countries, critical reception distanced and neutralized the relevant political parallels detectable in the Irish plays. Elements of political satire and the revolutionary dimension of the plays were not recognized. They perhaps were even deliberately ignored by both conservative, bourgeois reviewers and progressive left-wing ones while artistic value and the mystifying Irishness of the plays were foregrounded in reviews.

The Hungarian reception of Irish theatre is discussed in two essays in the volume. Mária Kurdi gives a detailed description of numerous Irish plays successfully produced by Hungarian theatres in Hungary and neighboring countries. Kurdi looks at the different, and often highly inventive, experimental approaches of staging and reviving classics as well as contemporary authors. What transpires from her essay is that staging Irish plays has proved to be an attractive and rewarding task for Hungarian theatre-makers, who created a range of outstanding productions whereby well-informed decisions governed the domestication process.

In their examination of the fate of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in Hungary, Csilla Bertha and Donald E. Morse discuss the impact on Hungarian theatre of *Godot*, a play that became a theatre classic for decades in a translation from the original French text. The essay also examines the impact on the reception of the play with a new, more scholarly translation coming out in 2010, which foregrounds the Irish cultural references in the play. The authors argue that Beckett's play became a means of resistance in the discourse on the totalitarian communist regime in Hungary from the 1960s on, including a discussion of Géza Páskándi's sequence to the play as one of the crucial instances using *Godot* to reflect on the absurdities of life in authoritarian states.

Directing the focus to another former Eastern Bloc country, the Czech Republic, James Little's essay discusses the rich historical context of Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe*, both in terms of its inception and early productions, and shows how the author's only play inspired by a political event remains none the less an "unpolemic polemic," resisting explicitation within the text. Leaving the former Eastern Bloc behind, Monica Randaccio's article is concerned with the successful Italian language production of Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* through what she calls the "accommodation" of the play. She refers to a process by which Irish-English dialect and realia are not fully assimilated into the receiving culture, but rather, the space of the play is recreated so that it is neither wholly Irish nor Italian.

The volume closes with the transcript of a thought-provoking, exciting panel discussion about Irish theatre in Europe conducted by Ondřej Pilný with theatre practitioners Tilman Raabke (a German dramaturge of several theatres in Germany

and Switzerland) and László Upor (a Hungarian dramaturge, translator and lecturer in contemporary drama), who share their own experiences in staging Irish drama in German-speaking countries and Hungary, respectively. One of the conclusions discernible from this informative and engaging conversation is that the Irishness of the plays is not of primary importance for theatre practitioners. Instead, it is the essential elements of great theatre that attract directors and audiences to a play.

What seems to be the overall conclusion of the many intriguing and richly informative essays exploring the rather understudied topic of Irish drama's crossing to non-Anglophone countries in Europe is a curious combination of success and failure. While it is clear that Irish theatre has enjoyed a significant and most successful presence on Central European stages, a high number of the essays reflect a sense of thwarted expectations and unrealized potentials in terms of fruitful engagement between Irish drama and the receiving cultures. Most significantly, there seems to be a lack of appreciation of Irish drama on its own terms, that is, a lack of European audiences' perception of Irish theatre as a distinct tradition. In line with this, the success of Irish plays on Central European stages stems not from their specific Irish characteristics but certain perceived universal features and the plays' artistic values, their poignant take on the human condition as such. As the present volume demonstrates, Irish drama's loss of "Irishness" in the process of being transplanted onto the stages of non-English speaking countries, and thus becoming framed outside the established critical discourse of the Irish dramatic tradition bring along welcome, fresh approaches to the critical appreciation of the international relevance of plays produced by Irish playwrights.