

Preface

FOCUS 2012: Interfaces between Irish and European Theatre

The present issue of the biennial journal, *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* contains papers from the sixth conference of the Irish Society for Theatre Research. Hosted by the Department of English Literatures and Cultures of the Institute of English Studies and the Irish Studies Research Centre at the University of Pécs, the event took place on 29-30 April 2011. Since it was the first time that the conference was held outside Ireland, indeed, well into mainland Europe, relations and interfaces between Irish and European theatre became chosen as the general theme. To the delight of the organizers, the event succeeded in bringing together a good number of academics as well as PhD students who conduct research in the broadly informed field of Irish theatre and drama studies.

Following the now established pattern of ISTR conferences, one invited plenary speaker was an international theatre specialist, the other an Irish expert on drama. Distinguished Professor Marvin Carlson, from Graduate Center CUNY, gave his talk under the both timely and intriguing title “Space and Theatre,” while Dr. Paul Murphy, from Queen’s University Belfast, spoke on the subject of “Ireland’s Haunted Stages.” The latter title, thought-provokingly, recognized a connection between Professor Carlson’s theoretical work and the twentieth-century history of Irish drama by carrying reference to his seminal book, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory-Machine* (2001). These two major papers have been placed at the head of the present collection to offer the reader an appropriate introduction to the multi-faceted interests and challenges of ISTR, its members and the contributing fellow-scholars as demonstrated at the conference in Pécs.

Eight papers follow the major ones, each of which deploys theoretical or historical frames of reference and discusses a work or works by Irish playwrights from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, in terms of their ties with social and intercultural contexts. Michael McAteer revisits G. B. Shaw’s *Man and Superman*, exploring the ways in which it responds to the various movements and ideologies of its time. In the paper of Sandra Mayer the colourful afterlife of Wilde is scrutinized, taking account of the (re)politicization and (re)sexualization of his work in the twenty-first-century Viennese theatre. The rest of the essays focus on more contemporary plays. Eamonn Jordan applies Foucault’s theory of heterotopia and aspects of the Irish funerary traditions to his analysis of Martin McDonagh’s *A Skull in Connemara*, a biting subversive play which has received little scholarly treatment so far. McDonagh, or rather his drama *The Pillowman* is also in the centre of another essay, by Miriam Haughton, which uses illustrations from a particular production of this more widely appreciated work of the playwright.

Csilla Bertha’s paper addresses the use of metatheatrical layers in Jim Nolan’s *Blackwater Angel*, referring to both century-old and contemporary parallels and pretexts like Friel’s *Faith Healer* to explore the function of play-within-the-

play and the links between art, the self and healing. Derrida's term, *hospitality* (coined from the fusion of "hospitality" and "hostility") is deployed by Péter P. Müller in his survey of the dramatic foregrounding of the subtly alternating roles of guests, hosts and ghosts in modern and contemporary plays written for the Irish and the continental theatres. Reconsidering these roles, the paper of Brenda Donohue compares the representation of liminality in Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and the Italian Emma Dante's *Vita mia*. Closing the section of essays, Anikó Bach looks at Friel's version of *A Month in the Country*, originally Turgenev's play, to investigate the ways in which the Irish adaptation resonates with late twentieth-century debates on gender relations and the issue of divorce in Ireland. The individual papers, even when not side-by-side in the volume, tend to enter into meaningful dialogues with each other, for instance the question of adaptation, corresponding to Professor Carlson's idea about the continuous hauntedness of the stage again, recurs in the arguments. The volume closes with some reviews of books published in Ireland and Hungary which, partly or entirely, belong to the intersecting domains of theatre- and/or comparative studies.

I feel greatly honoured to have been acting as editor of the 2012 issue of *Focus*, which features a collection authored by experts and students from several countries. In this capacity I express special thanks to all the contributors for submitting their papers to be included in the present representative collection. Also, I owe gratitude to my colleague Dr. Andrew C. Rouse for doing the job of language editing as well as to PhD students Anikó Bach and Lilla Kolos, who worked with me in other stages of the editorial process. Finally, I acknowledge the generous financial assistance of the University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities, and that of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland Cultural Grant-in-Aid, which made the publication of this volume possible.

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Editor
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