

**Kurdi, Mária.** *Nemzeti önszemlélet a mai ír drámában (1960-1990)* [National Self-Observation in Contemporary Irish Drama 1960-1990]. Budapest: Akadémiai, 1999. 228 pp.

### Márton Mesterházi

As Mária Kurdi's monograph *National Self-Observation in Contemporary Irish Drama* was published three years ago, I think the best way to draw, or rather refresh professional attention to it is to present a short reader's report.

Between the introductory and the closing sections, the body of the book is divided into four substantial chapters, each of which provides an analysis of five plays.

II. National Identity (Thomas Murphy: *A Whistle in the Dark*, Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, John B. Keane: *The Field*, Frank McGuinness: *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, Thomas Kilroy: *Double Cross*)

III. Religious and Political Antagonisms and their Effects (Brian Friel: *The Freedom of the City*, Graham Reid: *The Death of Humpty Dumpty*, Martin Lynch: *The Interrogation of Ambrose Fogarty*, Tom Paulin: *The Riot Act*, Sebastian Barry: *Prayers of Sherkin*)

IV. History and Views of History (Thomas Murphy: *Famine*, Hugh Leonard: *The Patrick Pearse Motel*, David Rudkin: *Cries from Casement as His Bones Are Brought to Dublin*, Stewart Parker: *Northern Star*, Brian Friel: *Making History*)

V. Language and Traditions (Brian Friel: *Faith Healer*, *Translations*, *The Communication Cord*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Thomas Murphy: *Bailegangaire*)

Considering the sheer quantity of the material, the awesome amount of classic, modern, good, middling, and bad plays Kurdi had to read, the selection of the plays under analysis is proof of professional flair and good taste. Richer by ten more years of experience, we can find hardly any error in it: it concentrates on what is important, and gives practically no space for whatever might be superfluous or of dubious quality. The primacy of Brian Friel is still arguable, the presence of Thomas Kilroy and, especially, David Rudkin and Sebastian Barry, is more than welcome.

It goes without saying that the author is well-read in literary and drama theory and history. In her list of works cited we can find all the earlier works of those who, more recently, have come up with the most significant books on the subject: R. F. Foster, Nicholas Grene, Christopher Murray, Anthony Roche.

Kurdi's erudition is convincing, she places the second renaissance of Irish drama in the processes of social and literary history, the tradition created by Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey, with a sure hand. Another merit to be emphasized is that she views the twenty plays selected for analysis in an international context, never forgetting the most meaningful parallels with British theatrical developments. This fact also has a philosophical message: Mária Kurdi makes no concessions to any type of chauvinistic Irish isolationism.

The book has a very firm, even strict structure, which is an absolute requirement whenever the main method is textual analysis. The analyses themselves are wisely subordinated to the ruling train of thought: the various aspects of national self-observation (identity, religion, politics, history, language, and tradition).

Small nations that have suffered centuries of colonial oppression have a painful penchant for self-pity. National self-observation, which can lead to deep, sincere, and

strong national self-knowledge is the best antidote to that. (It is not by chance that Christopher Murray subtitled his book *Mirror up to Nation*.) Mária Kurdi's book clearly points out how much the Irish can thank their dramatists for teaching them this lesson.

Contemporary (Anglo)-Irish drama, however important it may be for readers and theatre-goers in English-speaking countries, is still very little known in Hungary. This fact can only increase the importance of this book, devoted as it is to a significant subject, providing a mass of information, conveying a message useful to be delivered to our part of the world, and written in clear, plain, readable Hungarian.

**Renwick, Roger deV. *Recentring Anglo-American Folksong: Sea Crabs and Wicked Youths*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001. 183 pp.**

**Andrew C. Rouse**

In the "Introduction" to this long-awaited volume, Roger Renwick provides us with what might be described as a definitive list of the important collectors and scholars of Anglo/American folk songs, beginning with D. K. Wilgus, whose "intellectual history of *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898*" (ix) was published in 1959, and continuing with Bronson, Coffin and Laws, all of them followers of the great nineteenth-century collector of Harvard University Francis James Child. Renwick's own book is not intended to follow suit with these names, all of them so familiar to the ballad scholar, but rather to examine why the study of folksong has lost the influence it once had, and why "increasingly it seems that the same fate may very well be in store for the supra-discipline, folklore itself" (xii).

I should perhaps point out from the very beginning that although the title of Renwick's book refers to "Anglo/American Folksong," many of his non-American—or rather, "pre-American" examples include songs that have variants all over the British Isles. Hence on page 62: "anglophone folksong: marriage between a young girl and an old man. The first is probably of Irish origin . . ." The adjective "British," though it may prove anathematic to other authors in this volume, is used freely and with some justice by Renwick to songs which have spread throughout all the geographical areas of the British Isles and later beyond, to America, Canada, Australia . . . , unintentionally but validly raising a question mark about the exclusive characters of different ethnic groups with what should be seen as a long common past within the British Isles. It is certain that the vernacular traditions of these peoples—English, Scots, Irish etc.—transgressed and trespassed the borders set up by administration and officialdom.

Renwick's opening premise is that the "raw and organized data, gathered under the pre-1970 way of thinking, [is] going to waste because it's incompatible with the post-1970 way of thinking" (xii). The following chapters of the book, originally written as individual essays, employ a variety of methods: "I draw upon any epistemological, theoretical, or methodological principles that can aid me in this task of gestalt-building [. . .] idealist or realist, pre-postmodern or postmodern, text-centered or performance-centered" (xv).

In the first of these, "On Theorizing Folksong: Child Ballads in the West Indies," Renwick refutes earlier ideas that Caribbean variants of British folk songs—specific-