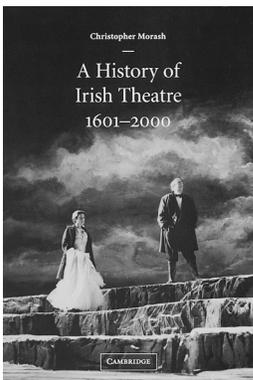


contribution to the discussion of the positive connections between women's performances on the stage and in the streets while remaining somehow outside the context of theatre history and feminist scholarship on performance and performativity.

Like feminist theatre and dance historians, Glenn recuperates women's presence in theatre and cultural history by collating records, descriptions, and images of women in performance and proposes a greater coherence and visibility for women than was generally acknowledged in histories written before 1980. Writing outside the ongoing conversation, Glenn may be seen to avoid taking certain ways of looking at women's performance for granted—in particular, as she draws the lines between theatrical and political exhibitionism. At the same time, however, in failing to engage explicitly with the developing canon of feminist theatre, dance, and performance scholarship, Glenn—inadvertently or not—undermines the voices of other feminist scholars and seems to deny them their rightful place on the academic stage, and she diminishes the authority of her own research by appearing to have, for whatever reason, skipped a few steps.

—Sharon Mazer

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**A History of Irish Theatre 1600–2000.** By Christopher Morash.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; 340 pp.; illustrations; index. \$60.00 cloth.

“Irish theatre” is a loaded phrase. It assumes there is such a thing and that it came from “Ireland,” an assertion tangled with British colonialization and the debatable existence of a “pure” Irish identity. Traditionally, Irish dramatists were relegated to “English” volumes or studies of “Irish drama” focusing on the late 19th and 20th centuries. The assumption was that pre–Abbey Theatre performances in Ireland were merely entertainment for the English. Consequently, Irish playwrights premiered their work in London or New York. Little has been done to challenge these presumptions since W.S. Clark’s *The Early Irish Stage* (1955); exceptions include Fletcher (2000) and Wheatley (1999).

Christopher Morash’s *A History of Irish Theatre 1600–2000* is a much-needed study. Yet because Morash includes only theatre performed on proscenium stages, his work collaborates in obscuring the full scope of the theatrical history of Ireland by dismissing in a mere mention the “rich tradition of performance,” the catchphrase that too often constitutes the entire discussion on Ireland’s oral cultures. To barely acknowledge the legacy of orature in Irish theatre (with only a nod to the *druth* [Gaelic clown] at Dublin Castle in 1601 [3]) is negligent.

Morash wants to “reconstruct a reasonably accurate picture” of Irish theatre over the centuries, of “what those vanished audiences expected” (1). He includes seven “Nights at the Theatre,” each chapter covering a key premiere. But the first audience Morash describes, in 1601, didn’t even sit in a theatre. Lord Deputy of Ireland, Baron Mountjoy, invited guests to a candlelit Dublin Castle where “wild men [...] dressed only in clusters of leaves” appeared in a

pantomime of *Gorboduc*, a “tragedy in which a divided kingdom descends into fratricide, rebellion, and civil war” (2). This strategic production of a kingdom in disarray enabled Mountjoy to reinforce his authority over the competing interests of his guests, the Gaelic aristocracy and “New English” plantation owners. And so begins Irish theatre’s political leanings.

Morash successfully captures the specific and changing relationship of Irish theatre and politics over time. Whereas *Gorboduc* endorsed the crown’s power, controversies shifted as theatre moved from the court to the public sphere. A theatre opened in 1635 on Werburgh Street, near Dublin Castle, establishing a body of theatre-goers, albeit an elite group:

[W]hile the audience [...] was by no means a representative sample of the predominately Irish-speaking population of the island [...] it did bring together the tight circle of courts, castle and college that would form the foundation of Irish theatre audiences for almost two centuries. (6)

This audience cheered for some and rioted for others for hundreds of years—but always for very different reasons. Reflecting shifting conceptions of the Irish nation, nationalism on Irish stages had completely different meanings in 1754 than it had in 1899, and again in 1904, 1980, and 2000. In the mid-18th century, for example, landowners in Ireland were loyal to the king but didn’t believe their allegiance necessitated “subsidising their English counterparts” (59); hence the 1754 riot in Smock Alley during a production of Voltaire’s *Mahomet* “which showed that the Irish theatre had the potential to expose the gulf between the rhetoric and the reality of Irish liberty; [...] it showed that when that gulf became too great, Irish people would see the theatre as a forum for pursuing their rights, even to the point of violence” (66).

The Catholic Emancipation of 1829 brought some relief from religious discrimination, making room for a new class of Irish audience members with new reasons to riot. Ireland had even bigger problems ahead; by 1845 the first signs of potato blight appeared. The resulting famine, however, barely affected theatre, which had “drifted from the rest of Irish culture in the 1840s” (92). Around the same time, Dublin-born Dion Boucicault was having some success in New York with plays featuring the bumbling “Stage Irishman” stereotypical characters. His popular plays, which were not seen in Ireland until the 1860s, offered “rebel heroes”: rogues and outlaws who were “reckless, hearty, honest” like Myles-na-Coppaleen in *The Colleen Bawn*, the New York hit that he restaged in London (88). These characters could get the girl and make peace with the British—indicating a “parable of reconciliation” between conflicting characters (91).

The 20th century brought an end to melodrama and “parables of reconciliation.” Irish nationalists were gaining ground, forming strong political alliances and a cultural movement to restore the decimated Irish language and culture. On a famous afternoon at Duras House, Galway, Lady Augusta Gregory, W.B. Yeats, and Edward Martyn conceived of an Irish theatre:

We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory. [...] We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery or of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. (Gregory in Morash 116)

These famous words marked the beginning of the Abbey Theatre, ushering in a new phase of Irish theatre.

Morash smartly dethrones the Abbey by explaining that the founders' obsession with documentation contributed to their long undisputed status in Irish drama. The group was "caught in a tangle of contradictions from the very outset"; Yeats, Gregory, and J.M. Synge were members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy representing peasants as the "real Ireland." From Yeats's *Countess Cathleen* to Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, the Abbey faced protests of their staged "ancient idealism." Morash even challenges the established criticisms of these productions. Going beyond the accepted Catholic protest against a soul-selling Cathleen, Morash points out that the landlord Cathleen symbolized those who let the Irish starve and that by allowing her to "become the savior of her people by offering her soul in exchange for those of all her tenants" amounted to "blasphemy" (119).

In detailing the many riots in Irish theatres since the 17th century, Morash confronts the authority of the riots in reaction to Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. Caused by the word "shift" (underwear) the 1904 riots have enjoyed a rarely challenged infamy. The events are a classic example of a nation performing itself; but so are the myriad other protests in Irish theatres across many decades. Morash's attempt to place the episode on equal footing with others throughout history gives Irish theatre greater accuracy and balance.

Morash provides the historical and cultural context for 20th-century Irish theatre. Beginning with Sean O'Casey's antinationalist plays of the 1920s, through the 1930s queer reign of Hilton Edwards and Micheál Mac Liammóir at the Gate Theatre, through the unlikely Beckett/Behan combination of the 1950s, Morash's narrative culminates with the All-Ireland Drama Finals first held in the 1950s. The "amateur" All-Ireland, he argues, bred new artists like John B. Keane and Tom Murphy. Regional theatres also emerged, decentering the Dublin theatre scene. In 1964 the former schoolteacher Brian Friel premiered *Philadelphia Here I Come* and yet another era of Irish theatre began. The last "Night" chapter covers the 1980 premiere of Friel's *Translations* by the Field Day Theatre Company in Derry's Guildhall, near the site of Bloody Sunday in 1972. By performing a play about Catholic nationalists seeking shelter from British military gunfire inside a traditional stronghold of Protestant loyalist power, Field Day changed the very function of the Guildhall for Derry's people, both Catholic and Protestant.

Morash traces his history of "theatre" in Ireland since the 1600s with sound and detailed research. His definition of Irish theatre as one that includes performances sponsored by the British colonial machine at Dublin Castle contributes to a complicated definition of "Irish." However, his study lacks coverage of the wider spectrum of performance in Ireland, from storytelling to dance to music to sport; a study that could potentially reconcile both strands of history would therefore be most welcome.

—Sara Brady

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**Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre.** By Freddie Rokem. Iowa City: The University of Iowa Press, 2000; 215 pp.; illustrations. \$42.95 cloth.

The title of this book suggests another general theoretical discussion of Aristotle's dictum that history cannot appear in drama unless it is staged at the very moment of presence incorporated by the actors. Freddie Rokem seriously questions Aristotle's conclusion that poetry is something more philosophical and worthy of serious attention than history as it deals with universal truths rather than particular facts, for Rokem's approach is very poetic, and consciously subjective. Rokem considers a limited number of performances about the French Revolution and the Shoah, which have been produced in different contexts and for diverse aims. Avoiding a survey of post-World War II historical drama, Rokem's inquiry revolves around the way in which the theatre during this period has presented different aspects of the French Revolution and the Shoah, not only exhuming the ways in which such historical pasts have been represented, but also examining the significance of such representations in different national contexts.

Rokem discusses Yehoshua Sobol's *Ghetto*, Dudu Ma'ayan's *Arbeit macht freivom Toitland Europa*, Hanoach Levin's *The Boy Dreams*, Peter Brook's *Marat/Sade*, Ariane Mnouchkine's *1789*, Ingmar Bergmann's *Madame de Sade*, and the adaptations of *Danton's Death* by Orson Welles, Herbert Blau, and Robert Wilson in the contexts of Israel, Europe, and the United States. Even more important to Rokem than Aristotle is Walter Benjamin, who serves as an important point of reference for his (who am I to say this) brilliant and impressively set out work on textual and performative energies. Rokem quotes a passage from Benjamin's *Arcades Project* which is crucial as a precondition for his whole enterprise: "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (Benjamin 1999:463). The notion of different kinds of theatrical energies that emerge when past and present come together in a "flash" of constellation—which can, for example, be the "now" of a theatre performance—is central for this study. It underscores the restorative potentials of theatre in counteracting the destructive forces of history: "The creative energies of the theatre not only are central to the impact of a performance on its spectators, but are crucial for the ways in which such a performance confronts the issues of collective identity and transgression" (7).

The strength and the newness of this book are in its approach to old questions by way of the new voice given to its examples. What is theatre supposed to be? What is it actually that theatre can do? Is it capable of changing the world, or is it to put forward that it's still worth trying? In what ways can theatre be political? Does theatre go over and over the same stuff without having any effect? Rokem's writing is wondrously subjective, philosophical, theoretic-

