

Hiberno-English, eventual handwritten insertions on the typed manuscript and cuts made for production or due to censorship. In line with Rita Felski's emblematic examination of gender and modernisms in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), the book engages in the hermeneutic movement of reconstructing the past from the point of view of the present, shedding light upon the discourses and paradigms of each play's immediate sociohistorical context. In other words, it assesses the major pressing issues of the 1920s and early 1930s in Ireland by demonstrating their political importance for Irish women's history then and now.

The historical, political and social context that provided the troubled and bloody grounds for the formation of the new Irish Free State is carefully discussed in the Introduction. Not only does it expose the legislative and material constraints under which women worked in the theatre industry of the time, but also how theatre 'was not subject to a censor in Ireland; instead, public opinion, self-censorship and the gatekeepers of cultural institutions prevailed' (p. 8). From an overview of the theatre stages and the types of plays that were selected to be staged, readers understand which theatres were more progressive, and thus more receptive to women's work and the counterculture that was developing despite the straitjacket imposed by the conservatism of the highly religious new Free State. This panorama illuminates many of the issues brought about in the plays to an audience not necessarily familiar with Irish history and the major tropes of Irish theatre. In the contextual overview section of Manning's play *Youth's the Season -?* (1931), the editors acknowledge how it exposes 'a crisis of possibility for the younger generation, while simultaneously exploring the stage as a space of resistance against normative identities in the independent State' (p. 142). I believe that this comment could very aptly refer to all plays in the anthology.

This anthology is a major contribution to the field in that it showcases the diversity and richness of works by early twentieth-century Irish women playwrights in an informed manner. In the Foreword to the pioneering *Women in Irish Drama* (2007), Marina Carr dares the reader to name the women in Irish theatre for the last century. The lack of critical attention to the women in the Irish theatre industry until the 1980s rendered their work almost non-existent. Luckily, though, part of the answer to a question that remains to be addressed is here.

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Performing Silence: Women in the Group Theatre Movement in Bengal. By Trina Nileena Bannerjee. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xxv + 354. ₹1795 Hb.
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Trina Nileena Bannerjee's *Performing Silence* stages a feminist intervention in the history of political theatre in India to recover the largely absent figure of the actress from the patriarchal history of the group theatre movement in Bengal (an offshoot of the left-aligned, anti-imperialist theatre of the Indian People's Theatre Association). While the focus of the study is the urban, educated, politically astute and creatively committed middle-class actress, the *bhadramahila*, it weaves a multi-layered narrative of how nationalist and revolutionary masculinity fashioned itself in theatre in twentieth-century India. The book illuminates how women's labour (theatrical, familial, social) in and outside the theatre remains buried in the masculinist archive, if not completely erased from it. Peering through the silence of theatre historiography, Bannerjee unearths aspects of female political imagination, agency and negotiations with power to explain the many points of tension between revolutionary ambitions of progressive cultural movements and their limitations. Her unequivocal, yet gentle, critique of political theatre's inability to accept the artistic autonomy and labour of women, despite its

broad allegiance to the left's ideological imperatives, is an important reminder for cultural praxis in our times.

Feminist scholars have argued that the left-aligned cultural movement both legitimized the presence of actresses while simultaneously disciplining and desexualizing them. *Performing Silence* contributes to this research by situating the experiences of actresses within the structure and ideology of group theatre. It demonstrates that women continued to occupy slippery ground, with their presence mediated constantly by dominant codes of permissible sexual and moral conduct, notions of respectability and perceptions of purity and chastity. Even while they carried out the work of the organizer (Anil De Silva), the director (Tripti Mitra) or of the cultural activist (Keya Chakravarti), their labour and creativity were negotiated through the limited and limiting frameworks of care, nurture and service. The revolution needed women and their affective labour onstage and within the political sphere, but required them to play second fiddle to the male director/the patriarch of the group/the leader of the movement. Bannerjee's appraisal of the histories of leading actresses, artiste couples and women cultural workers of the time develops from the feminist understanding that women's personal and professional lives and the economic and social struggles that governed their participation, success and sustenance in political-cultural arenas require a different valuation and a reconceptualization of (feminine) labour.

The book is organized in five chapters broadly covering four decades of the existence of group theatre to explore what it meant to be a full-time actress in the 1960s and 1970s. It draws upon a wide range of materials, where performance sits comfortably with letters, diaries, photographs, reminiscences, tabloid gossip, autobiographies and life histories as an equally subjective, unstable and subjugated form of knowledge. Bannerjee's interdisciplinary methodology engages textual and performance analysis and moves seamlessly from close readings of archival materials to an interrogation of the archive itself. It is a deeply moving exercise in listening to something that may be present but not shouting, an example of how to unearth what lies hidden in the thicket of silence and to amplify it. The appalling state of official archives in India today occasions alternative ways of looking at the past to mobilize feminist and radical forms of research and analysis that upend the solidity of the authoritative narratives of struggle and progress. The importance of Bannerjee's approach may be thought of as (re)writing history *obliquely*, or what Emily Dickinson would call 'the slant' – diminishing and ironizing the established and sentimental as well as making a permanent dent in the notion of a complete and comprehensive history. *Performing Silence* attempts 'not to plug the holes in the said discourse, but to make them starkly visible' (p. 23), illuminating the absence as a terrible presence that fundamentally and permanently transforms the image of the revolution.

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Masculinities and Manhood in Contemporary Irish Drama: Acting the Man. By Cormac O'Brien. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. Pp. vii + 292. \$109.99 Hb; \$84.99 Ebook.

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In *Masculinities and Manhood in Contemporary Irish Drama*, O'Brien effectively traces the production of masculine characters and narratives across a broad spectrum of historical time periods and theatrical genres. He does so by combining an astute and creative analysis of text with an insightful and illuminating identification of modalities of theatrical performance technique and aesthetics. Ranging from contemporary playwrights such as Nancy Harris to classic authors such as Martin McDonagh and Tom Murphy, O'Brien's book pays homage to