

Introduction:
New Perspectives in Irish Theatre
by Chiara Sciarrino

The idea for a book of essays which would reflect current thinking from a variety of points of view on the state of Irish Theatre today was first mooted on the occasion of a meeting with some Italian colleagues with whom the first Italian University Centre of Irish Studies (CISIRL) has been recently founded. About a year ago, consideration was given to the idea of publishing some papers which could reflect the interests of some Italian and international scholars on the work of playwrights, directors, theatre makers and theatre culture in Ireland. The aim of this special issue is to honour the amplitude, the richness and particularity of Irish Theatre and afford a space for a close engagement with new plays and new critical perspectives.

The essays gathered in the present issue of "*InVerbis*," as they stand, are written by a variety of people, from different countries. The variety of their reading methods and philosophical discourses aptly concurs in establishing some concerns of recent (and non recent) productions: forms of renewed identities, configurations of new spaces, new translation results, inherited and adapted histories and traditions.

Some of the contributors are eminent critics and scholars who have already published extensively on Irish theatre and produced plays themselves. Two distinguished playwrights, Marina Carr and Dermot Bolger have kindly and generously accepted to participate with two poems and a personal reflection on the difficult experience of adapting James Joyce's *Ulysses* for the stage. Marina Carr's *Cygnum Canticum* is a moving response to the tragedy of losing her mother. Bolger's "Making things happen" serves as a good introduction to his short essay on staging Joyce's masterpiece.

Eamonn Jordan's *Capital and Class in Irish Theatre: A Twenty-First Century Critical Introduction* is an insightful reflection on the different aspects and faces of being a critic and commentator of modern and contemporary Irish theatre. Following Brah's discussions about a diasporic consciousness, the author of many essays on Irish theatre focuses on concepts such as class and capital which have affected specific ways of living his experience as a scholar.

Special attention is given to 21st century Irish theatre and its sense of heritage, its sense of the present, its use of memory, the duty and challenges of recollection and theatre's capacity for independent action. In *From the Stage of the Abbey to the Streets of the Monto: The Development of "immersive" Theatre in Ireland*, Shaun Richards offers an original insight into the development of several contemporary Irish theatre productions that break with the conventional realist stage set and with the whole division between the stage and auditorium, so that the audience is actively engaged in the "the real" rather than being spectators of its on-stage representation. His interest is in the socio-political implications of the so-called "immersive" theatre in contemporary Ireland.

General reflections on how Irish theatre survives these difficult times and how we ourselves read under our current circumstances the resulting social and economic disruptions could be made. The theatre industry has been particularly hit by Covid-19 restrictions and the closure of the theatres. Irish artists, playwrights and actors have showed a strong determination to make theatre work again in the most challenging circumstances. New opportunities to increase reach and access have been opened up through streaming even though emphasis on live performance has been placed with audiences gathering again only recently. In *I cannot place you: Dementia and the Pandemic experience in the Visiting Hour by Frank McGuinness*, I describe a new play which was streamed to audiences in April 2021 and analyse how the theme of dementia offers a creative opportunity to assert the importance of arts and theatre as a means for repossessing a comforting sense of emotional authenticity in a time of great difficulties and social distancing.

Other essays attempt to single out the influence that Greek and Russian literatures have had on different Irish playwrights. Giuliana Bendelli's essay, on Brendan Kennelly's exploration of his adaptation of three Greek tragedies, *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* focuses on the ways in which women characters whose lives are torn apart by war, family conflict and despotic regimes, differ from other

interpretations made by other Irish writers. "*Hibernicising the Russians*" by Nicholas Grene investigates the role that Russian literature has played in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century drama. Through a careful scrutiny of a vast variety of plays written by Friel, Murphy and McGahern, the author shows how themes and motifs from Russian literature have been adjusted to suit an Irish context.

Another group of essays aims to register new critical perspectives on well-known author Samuel Beckett and on an Italian production of an Irish play "*The state of us*": *Wars of Partition in Beckett's Endgame* by Ashley Taggart focuses on the perceived "incomprehensibility" of Beckett's *Endgame* as it relates to lateralised faculties within the human brain, inner "borders," taking into consideration the playwright's experience of violent partition in Ireland and his own clandestine border-crossing to "Free France" in the Second World War.

The final contribution in this volume turns our attention to the Italian context. Monica Randaccio's essay focuses on the comparison between two Italian translations of *The Weir* by Conor McPherson (the one produced by Anna Parnanzini and Maggie Rose in 1999 and the one undertaken, some years later, by the acclaimed Italian director and playwright, Fausto Paravidino). Starting from Farzaneh Farahzad's view of intertextuality in Translation Studies she provides with and comments on concrete examples of renderings in the target language.

All in all, the articles included in this volume seek to illustrate, through a variety of critical proposals and differing viewpoints, that Irish theatre deserves a constant place in our life as researchers and lovers of the stage.

