

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON IRISH WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS' WORKS BY HUNGARIAN SCHOLARS

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<https://doi.org/10.56037/978-963-646-594-0-13>

Abstract

In 2007 an article was published on the subject of Irish Studies in Hungary, which assessed the critical reception of Irish literature by Hungarian scholars up to 2006. That article abounds in the names of Joyce, Yeats, Beckett and Brian Friel, while it cites only a few papers which analyze Irish literary works by women. To a measure, the present essay is a sequel to that article, finding that nearly two decades later the balance has fortunately changed since many Irish women authors' works have become the subject of Hungarian scholarship in the meantime. For the purpose of this essay, I have selected only around a dozen critical inquiries into the respective achievements of Irish women playwrights, given the richness of the material. The authors covered range from eighteenth-century Frances Sheridan to writers who began their career in the theatre world of the twenty-first century, for example Lucy Caldwell in Northern Ireland. This essay surveys monographs, articles and essays using a comparative approach where appropriate and attempts to offer a sound introduction to the selected critical texts.

KEYWORDS

Irish women playwrights, Irish theatre, Hungarian scholarship, monographs and shorter studies, critical approaches

In 2007 I was commissioned to write an article on Irish Studies in Hungary for the US-based journal *New Hibernia Review*, which would aim to assess the critical reception of Irish literature by Hungarian scholars up to 2006. That article abounds in the names of Joyce, Yeats, Beckett, and Brian Friel, while it cites only a few papers which analyze Irish literary works by

women.¹ To a measure, the present essay is a sequel to that article, demonstrating that nearly two decades later the balance has fortunately changed since many Irish women authors' works have become the subject of Hungarian scholarship in the meantime. This essay focuses on over a dozen critical inquiries into the respective achievements of Irish women playwrights, selected from a vast number of texts written by Hungarian scholars and published in Hungary or abroad. The authors of monographs and shorter studies covered in the critical material range from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first inclusive. I discuss the selected material following the chronological order of the studied Irish women authors and works to demonstrate that aspects of all the major periods of Irish theater history with a strong female contribution have been researched by Hungarian scholars. In sampling and assessing these achievements I focus on both thematic and theoretical issues as they appear in the Hungarian critical texts.

Gabriella Hartvig, scholar of primarily eighteenth-century literature, prose works in particular, has published on Frances Sheridan (1724–1766) and her contemporaries extensively. In her essay addressing Sheridan's first and lasting success, the epistolary novel *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), Hartvig writes: "Sheridan's other works remained advertised through *Sidney Bidulph*. This shows that Sheridan must have remained fairly known in the eighteenth century; but she could never exceed the success of *Sidney Bidulph* with her later works."² The latter include three plays and, in fact, the first of them, *The Discovery* (1763) did earn considerable success as a sentimental comedy, even though it was more complex than most contemporary representatives of that popular dramatic genre. In 2024, to mark the three hundredth anniversary of Sheridan's birth, Hartvig and Csaba Maczelka edited a collection of essays on Sheridan and her English contemporary, Margaret Cavendish for the journal *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies*. In their "Introduction" they note: "the theme of this issue is the work of female authors in England and Ireland during the period 1660–1837, commonly referred to as the long eighteenth century."³ Beside Irish scholar Clíona Ó Gallchoir's leading essay in *FOCUS* 2024, my contribution titled "From Frances Sheridan's *A Trip to Bath* (1765) to Elizabeth Kuti's *The Whisperers* (1999): Questions of Genre, Adaptation Strategies and Authorship" is a paper dealing with Sheridan's afterlife manifest in Elizabeth Kuti's (1969) completion of her unfinished

¹ Kurdi, Mária: Irish Studies in Hungary: Dreams and Reality, *New Hibernia Review* 11, 1 (2007), 137–151.

² Hartvig, Gabriella: Early Advertisements of *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, in Zsuzsa Csikai and Andrew C. Rouse (eds): *Critical Essays in Honour of Mária Kurdi*, Martonfa: SPECHEL e-editions, 2017, 60.

³ Hartvig, Gabriella – Maczelka, Csaba: Introduction, *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* XIV (2024), 9.

play *A Trip to Bath* (also known as *A Journey to Bath*) under a new title, *The Whisperers*. In this essay I survey Sheridan's works for the stage and examine the generic characteristics and relation to other eighteenth-century comedies of the unfinished and never produced *A Trip to Bath*. The main part of my essay is devoted to the analysis of the ways and modes in which Kuti re-imagines the missing fourth and fifth acts of the original and succeeds in keeping her textual intervention and work of completion to fit Sheridan's style and the possible direction of her play's plot. Relying on adaptation theories I also discuss the play as an adaptation, a unique kind of collaboration between women authors across the centuries. To sum up my investigation I claim that "By its devices and dramaturgical choices *The Whisperers* re-animates the social and emotional variedness of the best of eighteenth-century comedy, along with its embedded social critique."⁴

Arguably, the tradition of Irish women's writing for the stage began during the period of the Irish Dramatic Revival, continuing from 1900 onwards. The first major female playwright was Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932), one of the first directors of the Abbey Theatre and an acclaimed writer for the Irish stage. Probably the first book-length study on Lady Augusta Gregory in Central Europe was a doctoral dissertation at Pázmány Péter University of Budapest, written by Mária Margit Flachner Szekeresné and published in 1931, still in Gregory's lifetime. Gregory's pivotal role in the foundation of the Irish national theater is duly presented in the book along with central features of the Cultural Revival that triggered the renaissance of the genre of the drama. Regarding the oeuvre of Gregory, the author's discussion of the plays in groups according to their sources highlights diversity while their chief value is shown to be the intimate and complex insight they offer into the communal life of rural Irish people. The choice of Gregory, a cultural nationalist in colonized Ireland for the topic of a dissertation in post-Trianon Hungary where national feelings had just been reawakened by the wound of losing more than half of the former territory of the country, comes as little surprise. Both countries shared an interest in how literature and theater could contribute to raising the nation's consciousness of its own history and cultural worth. At the same time, concerning the politics of the Abbey Theatre, Szekeresné highlights that the managing trio, Yeats, Gregory, and Synge insisted on maintaining artistic value against the claims of political propaganda, and she pinpoints the satirical vein in Gregory's representation of Irish colonial society.⁵

⁴ Kurdi, Mária: From Frances Sheridan's *A Trip to Bath* (1765) to Elizabeth Kuti's *The Whisperers* (1999): Questions of Genre, Adaptation Strategies and Authorship, *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* XIV (2024), 53.

⁵ Szekeresné Flachner, Mária Margit: *Lady Augusta Gregory: Az ír nemzeti színpad megalapítása* (Lady Augusta Gregory: The Foundation of the Irish National Stage), Budapest: Magyar Királyi Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Angol Philológiai Intézet, 1931, 17.

Decades later, Márton Mesterházi wrote about Gregory as playwright in a chapter of his book *Ír ember színpadon* (The Irish on the Stage, 2006). Working as a dramaturge of the Hungarian Radio for many years, literary scholar and translator Mesterházi developed a fine sense of what made a good play and recognized the merits while also the occasional flaws of Gregory's one-act comedies. He compares *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906) with the more widely known *Spreading the News* (1904) and prefers the former for the greater subtlety of its farcical techniques while considering *The Workhouse Ward* (1908) as, perhaps, the best of this genre by Gregory.⁶ Mesterházi translated both *The Gaol Gate* (1909) and *The Rising of the Moon* (1907), which he also adapted for the Hungarian Radio. Discussing these plays, he focuses mainly on the artistic use of language: the keening in *The Gaol Gate* and the power of a popular song in *The Rising of the Moon*.⁷ Of the mythology-based plays he chooses *Grania* (1912) for a detailed scrutiny in terms of its dramaturgical innovations, examining its structural principles and the stunning *coup de théâtre* turns of the plot including Grania's sudden decision to become Finn's wife at the end.⁸ Surprisingly, Mesterházi pays a considerable amount of attention to *The Golden Apple* (1920), one of Gregory's plays for children, tracing its similarities with the Hungarian Mihály Vörösmarty's poetic play *Csongor és Tünde* (*Csongor and Tünde*).⁹ Less is written in the book chapter about Gregory's religious plays, of which only one seems to have merit for Mesterházi, namely the miracle *Dave* (1927), the writer's last drama. In his opinion, the fate of Dave, a young servant despised by all in a squire's house except for the master's wife, allegorizes the destiny of the Irish people who, like Dave, see a vision in a dream which finally enables them to free themselves from oppression.¹⁰ One of the biographers of Gregory, Mary Lou Kohfeldt claims that this last play has a narrative arc suggestive of what motivated the writer's deeds through her life.¹¹

Eglantina Remport's monograph, *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre: Art, Drama, Politics* (2018) is a pivotal work in Hungarian scholarship about Irish women playwrights. It differs from the previous three monographs on Gregory by Anglophone authors in its more specific approach, which is interdisciplinary, intra- and intercultural. Remport's ambitious description of the intellectual and cultural developments in England and Europe which Gregory became familiar with during the years of her marriage to the art lover Sir William Gregory, is

⁶ Mesterházi, Márton: *Ír ember színpadon* (The Irish on the Stage), Budapest, Liget Alapítvány Műhely, 2006, 93–95, 101.

⁷ Ibid., 96–100.

⁸ Ibid., 116–18.

⁹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰ Ibid., 106.

¹¹ Mary Lou Kohfeldt: *Lady Gregory: The Woman behind the Irish Renaissance*, London, André Deutsch, 1985, 291.

exceptionally rich in detail. An Anglo-Irish landowner, Lady Gregory was also interested in how the arts could contribute to the improvement of the quality of life, which reflected her concern with the needs of ordinary people, especially in Ireland. Rempert claims that “her views on the social function of the arts and the social responsibility of the artist were shaped, in large measure, by Ruskin’s social and political thought”.¹² Gregory’s participation in the Irish Literary Revival was not separable from this influence, Rempert opines, as in the Irish milieu “she felt that the possibility of establishing a theatre along lines proposed by Ruskin and his disciples was far greater in an archipelagic capital than in the centre of the British Empire”.¹³

About a dozen of Gregory’s plays are tackled in the monograph, partly different from Mesterházi’s selection. They are discussed in loose groups to provide an informed analysis of their concern with social issues, their connection with the fine arts, history or contemporary politics, and at times a mixture of these. The premiere of Gregory’s first play of single authorship, *Twenty-five* (1903) coincided with the passing of the Wyndham Land Act (1903), a political event instigating her “to draw attention to the problems faced by the rural population of Ireland” at that time, as Rempert points out.¹⁴ Also, Gregory became aware of a developing co-operative movement for the improvement of Irish agriculture and welcomed it especially because of its potential to effect personal and moral advancement. Writing about *Hyacinth Halvey*, Rempert claims that Gregory placed “the question of Halvey’s character formation at the centre of the play” while in *The Jackdaw* (1908) she “contrasts sharply the co-operative ideal of achieving a special status within a community through honest endeavour, and the inflated egoism displayed by the self-professed ‘hero’ of the community”.¹⁵ Rempert notes that sophisticated visual qualities appear in, for instance, the plays *The Image* (1909) and *The Full Moon* (2010), which import aspects of the “painting-in-the-painting” device into drama. She points out that in *The Image* each of the characters’ stories about the whales lying stranded on the seaside is different yet they all contribute to “representing the main scene of a painting” while the mountain man, Malachi Naughton’s “tale of Hugh O’Lorrha, about whom nobody seems to know anything, begins first to penetrate and then to take over the main story of the play”.¹⁶ Likewise, Rempert continues, in *The Full Moon* the background story is by Cracked Mary, the traditional wise woman figure known from folklore as Melissa Sihra

¹² Rempert, Eglantina: *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre: Art, Drama, Politics*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102–103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

refers to her,¹⁷ whose story “about a supernatural dog begins to take over the foreground story of the young man waiting for the train to leave the village”, turning the man into a raging and barking mad dog.¹⁸ In the analysis the “narrative-in-the-narrative” term would work just as well, I believe.

The monograph focuses on the pictorial, artistic, and social significance of Christian and biblical symbolism of certain works by Gregory. In *The Travelling Man* (1905), the author explores the connections between religion and the peace-making value of art (originally an idea of Yeats), highlighting that the visitor, Jesus in disguise, “transforms into an artist in the instance of building the paradise-like garden with the plates of the child’s mother” and gives the boy a beautiful, magic branch. Thus, the artist can become a facilitator of changes, Rempfort suggests, claiming that Gregory, like Ruskin, possessed a Christian sense of responsibility to do good which she “carried over into her work for the Abbey Theatre”¹⁹ with the aim to educate the people. The book draws a convincing parallel between Gregory’s Christian plays and those of the 1916 martyred writer, Patrick Pearse, who also used Christian symbolism and artist figures; in his *The Singer* (1915) the singer can be identified with Jesus. However, Rempfort clarifies the difference in the two writers’ approach to the theme: as a revolutionary, Pearse believed in the necessity of blood sacrifice therefore inevitable self-sacrifice, while “Gregory’s visionary Christ-figure [in *The Travelling Man*] was a bearer of good news and the bringer of a living branch”.²⁰

Turning to Gregory’s historical plays, an example Rempfort succinctly highlights is *The Wrens* (1914), which Gregory wrote during the third Home Rule debate in the British parliament. Establishing a historical analogue, the play is set during the heated milieu of deciding about the independence of the country just before voting on the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland in 1800. First performed in London, it was, in Rempfort’s opinion, a kind of appeal to the British that the failure of passing the Home Rule Act the third time might result in armed rebellion by Irish republicans,²¹ which actually did happen in 1916. As in *The White Cockade* (1905) and *The Canavans* (1906), “the theme of domestic preoccupations outweigh[ing] national sentiment” governs the plot in *The Wrens* too, the scholar claims, which is a sound observation, yet Rempfort does not seem to notice Gregory’s ambition to represent history as experienced by the lower groups of the society. Instead, Rempfort underscores

¹⁷ Melissa Sihra: *Spinning Gold: Thread of Augusta Gregory and Marina Carr*, in D. Clare – F. McDonagh – J. Nakase (eds): *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights, 1716–2016. Volume Two (1992–2016)*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2021, 228.

¹⁸ Rempfort: *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre*, 139.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172–173.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

the presence of alcoholism as a crucial subject in these plays because, along with the quarrelsome nature of the Irish, it impacts the fate of the country.²² The problem with her remark is that singling out these thematic elements without suggesting their relation to colonial oppression seems to interpret the writer's critique of national flaws in terms of anti-Irish stereotypes. Similarly, in the play *McDonough's Wife* (1913), Rempert considers the drink the protagonist has taken on the way home from the fair as a deed leading to the ruin of family life,²³ disregarding the more conspicuous fact that he is a piper who, with the mesmerizing power of his art, manages to bring people together to take part in the funeral procession and give his beloved wife a proper burial. In her monograph Ann Saddlemeyer sees in McDonough's figure an evocation of the ancient artist who can have unique power over the people, not unlike Yeats's Seanchan in *The King's Threshold* (1904).²⁴ An unquestionable merit of Rempert's book is, however, that it calls attention to the uncommon variety in Gregory's dramatic oeuvre and inspires scholars to investigate the rarely analyzed pieces as well.

Of the other writings on Gregory by Rempert, I have selected a more recent article with an unusual comparative approach, entitled "Mimesis, Diegesis, and Narrative Frames: Gregory, Beckett, McGuinness". The main, though not the only theoretical source the author relies on here is Michael Issacharoff's "theory of mimetic and diegetic dramatic spaces"²⁵, which can be applied to the analysis of most plays in world theater as the side-by-side or joint use of showing and telling has been known in this form of art since the Greeks. This time, Rempert has chosen *The Workhouse Ward* from the oeuvre of Gregory, which is an excellent example in terms of containing a lot of references to places other than the one in the title, given that it is a "talky" play with little movement. In the introductory part the author posits that the article looks at the significance of the localities coming up in the characters' dialogue of the three plays, and also "investigates the ways in which universal human themes play out in these locations: whether they be in Ireland, continental Europe or the Far East".²⁶ Rempert pays attention to Cloon, the fictional small town which is often the scene of the writer's comedies, and so of *Workhouse Ward* too, placing it in the context of Gregory's larger canvas and her creation of a stage version of the Galway dialect.²⁷ Throughout her analysis, the scholar refers to Gregory's own lectures and articles on the genre of drama and its European tradition.

²² Ibid., 190–91.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ann Saddlemeyer: *In Defence of Lady Gregory, Playwright*, Dublin, The Dolmen Press, 1966, 74.

²⁵ Rempert, Eglantina: *Mimesis, Diegesis, and Narrative Frames: Gregory, Beckett, McGuinness*, *Open Library of Humanities* 10, 1 (2024), 2.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

The example by Beckett in the essay is *Waiting for Godot* (1949), no doubt full of references to the places remembered or conjured up by the characters; the emphasis on Lucky's monologue in this regard is well justified. Finally, McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) is treated as a memory play, with a sharp eye for the historical and cultural complexities of its spatiality, both physical and imagined. The links between the three plays are duly identified in the conclusion, which ends with the sentence: "[w]hether written during the Irish Revival, after the Second World War in Europe, or during the Ulster Troubles, the three plays discussed share vital denominators in their treatment of locality and universality."²⁸

Between Lady Gregory and the women playwrights of our period from the 1980s on, Teresa Deevy stands out as an author who made her mark in Irish theater, whom Anthony Roche refers to as "the second lady of the Abbey"²⁹ – the first having been Lady Gregory, of course. However, after her early success at the Abbey in the 1930s, Deevy's work was rejected by the conservative theater management. Nowadays there is a kind of renaissance of scholarship on her oeuvre; in 2025 the first book addressing her versatile achievement was published.³⁰ I joined the line with my essay "Taking the 'Black Stick': Ageing Husbands and Fathers in the Plays of J. M. Synge and Teresa Deevy", which explores representations of ageing fathers and husbands in J. M. Synge's and Teresa Deevy's theater. In Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903) the old husband threatens his young wife with a black stick, a phallic motif symbolizing impotence, and the father, a religious fanatic in Deevy's *Katie Roche* (1936), wants to punish his daughter who seeks to have some autonomy, by flogging. *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by Synge and *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935) by Deevy also use the motifs of the stick and domestic violence. In my essay I study the ways in which the ageing male characters in the four plays mirror the destructive nature of patriarchy and its concomitant paralyzing ideologies which determined the fate of many young people, especially women in early twentieth-century colonial Ireland and 1930s post-independence Ireland, respectively. The theoretical underpinning of the essay is provided by scholarly works which probe into the background of conflict-ridden colonial/postcolonial phenomena in the joint fields of gender and generation.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁹ Anthony Roche: *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899-1939*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, 150.

³⁰ Úna Kealy – Kate McCarthy (eds.): *Active Speech: Critical Perspectives on Teresa Deevy*, Cambridge, UK, Open Book Publishers, 2025.

³¹ Kurdi, Mária: Taking the 'Black Stick': Ageing Husbands and Fathers in the Plays of J. M. Synge and Teresa Deevy, in M. Schlage-Früh – T. Tracy (eds.): *Ageing Masculinities in Irish Literature and Visual Culture*, London, Routledge, 2022, 17–32.

The contemporary woman playwright whose work shows affinities with both Gregory and Deevy as “foremothers” is Marina Carr. The “Coda” closing *The Golden Thread Volume 2* which collects essays on playwrights’ works written over the span of more than two centuries is by Melissa Sihra. She underlines an important aspect of the kinship between Gregory and Carr through their respective plays *The Full Moon* (1910) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998): “The Irish tradition of wise-women healers and visionaries is deeply embedded in these plays by Carr and Gregory to access such hidden histories of female knowledge.”³² Regarding the Deevy – Carr relationship suffice it to quote here the focus of Cathy Leeney’s essay titled “Ireland’s ‘exiled’ women playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr” in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*.³³ The heroine of my book, *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women* (2010) is also Marina Carr as her major plays written before 2010, *Low in the Dark* (1989), *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), *On Raftery’s Hill* (2000), and *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) all feature across the chapters. As it appears in the title of the first chapter, I also thought it important to ground my point of departure in the great Irish women forerunners of modernism: “The Legacy of Foremothers and Contexts for the Development of Women’s Playwriting in Ireland”.³⁴ In addition to Marina Carr, the following writers are included in *Representations*, focusing on one or two plays by each: Patricia Burke Brogan, Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy, Charabanc Theatre Company, Anne Devlin, Emma Donoghue, Stella Feehily, Miriam Gallagher, Jennifer Johnston, Marie Jones, Elizabeth Kuti, Paula Meehan, Gina Moxley, Christina Reid. Chapters from two to seven are arranged in view of the themes, dramaturgical strategies, and techniques deployed in the plays, resulting in each work being discussed in more than one chapter. The chapters are framed by theoretical ideas, most of them from international scholars on theater, while for charting the plays’ social, cultural, and ideological embedding mainly Irish critical material is used.

One of Marina Carr’s plays, *On Raftery’s Hill* is also analyzed in a comparative journal article by Csilla Bertha from a special angle as indicated by the title, “The House Image in Three Contemporary Irish Plays”. Concerned with space in three Irish dramas, the article also links up with Rempert’s above-introduced shorter study. In Bertha’s discussion the Carr play is flanked by two

³² Sihra: Coda – Spinning Gold: Threads of Augusta Gregory and Marina Carr, in D. Clare et al. (eds.), 233.

³³ Cathy Leeney: Ireland’s “exiled” women playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr, in S. Richards (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 150–163.

³⁴ Kurdi, Mária: *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010, 15–37.

seminal works of contemporary Irish theater, Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987) and Tom Murphy's *The House* (2000). The theoretical framing of the article draws on the Gaelic tradition of joining place and identity which formed the foundational concept of the lore of place, while Bertha also quotes modernist inquiries into the significance of space, for instance Gaston Bachelard's relevant ideas about the strong links between the house and memories. In contrast with *Pentecost*, Bertha writes, the house in *On Raftery's Hill* does not become the home of transformation.³⁵ Importantly, she points to the possible implied parallel between the Raftery house and Olympus, to conclude that Raftery with his monstrosity may be seen "as a grotesque inversion of Zeus" and that the play itself lacks the mythical level present in the writer's Midlands Trilogy. Bertha refers to the role of home and nature in the earlier plays, where "[t]he place really does embody part of the characters' selves" as an alternative space, totally missing from *On Raftery's Hill*.³⁶ In the Midlands Trilogy and *Ariel*, Melissa Sihra claims that "water is a central aesthetic and conceptual motif" a metaphor of "the resistance to fixity", therefore an alternative space for the heroines who feel constricted or entrapped by the patriarchal world.³⁷ Bertha's corresponding observation stresses the lack of this female element in the play she analyzes: "[t]here is no water in any form in *On Raftery's Hill*, while the house's solid walls and the garden gate stop all efforts to find a less confined life."³⁸ In fact nature is destroyed by Raftery, who tortures and kills animals on his farm, leaving their dead bodies unburied and festering on the land. While Bertha's critique states that the play does not engage with social issues of contemporary Ireland,³⁹ in her monograph on Carr Sihra suggests an ecofeminist reading of the play, which could broaden the scope of critical perspectives on this work.⁴⁰

Another article by Csilla Bertha, *Crossing Borders in Irish Drama and Theatre. Art, Artist and Sacrifice*⁴¹ focuses on respective works by five modern and contemporary Irish playwrights including Marie Jones, a female author from the North. The drama Bertha has chosen for an analysis fitting the subject announced in the title is *Stones in His Pockets* (1999) which, like one of the selected four plays by men, Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979), has been translated into many languages (including Hungarian) and has travelled to numerous

³⁵ Bertha, Csilla: The House Image in Three Contemporary Irish Plays, *New Hibernia Review* 8, 2 (2004), 71.

³⁶ Ibid., 72, 74.

³⁷ Melissa Sihra: Renegotiating landscapes of the female: voices, topographies and corporeality of alterity in Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan*, *Australasian Drama Studies* 43 (2003), 16–31.

³⁸ Bertha: The House, 77.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Melissa Sihra: *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown*, London, Macmillan, 2018, 182.

⁴¹ Bertha, Csilla: *Crossing Borders in Irish Drama and Theatre. Art, Artist and Sacrifice*, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* 10, 1 (2018), 7–23.

theaters in other countries (including Hungary). Bertha's firm theoretical framing of her investigations refers to the most influential experts in theater studies, for instance Peter Brook, Erika Fischer-Lichte, and Gay McAuley to support her own ideas about Irish *kunstlerdrama* in which "sacrifice is frequently related to the artist figure even in today's secularized world".⁴² She argues that *Stones in His Pockets* is one of the experimental, border-crossing works on the contemporary scene because it demonstrates the ways in which "postmodernist theatrical tools can be used *not* to deconstruct identity, but to expose the disrupting effects of globalization as neo-colonialism with its construction of false identities".⁴³ The false Irish identities are constructed by a team of Hollywood filmmakers who exploit the locals of a village in County Kerry to play the extras in their would-be film. Bertha underscores that both the comic and the tragic are present in the drama; the two narrators' often hilarious role-playing takes a new turn after the suicide of one of the local young men due to his sense of humiliation. This tragic death constitutes the sacrifice Bertha relates to the birth of art: the narrators become artists who plan to make their own film based on their own story about Irish realities as "a form of resistance: in an attempt at cultural re-territorialization".⁴⁴

Place and space form an important thread in Krisztina Kodó's essay *Multicultural Identities in Elizabeth Kuti's Dramatic Writing*, which focuses on the issue of identity in relation to the characters' multiethnic background and liminal state of being. Rightly, Kodó starts by exploring Kuti's sense of belonging to Ireland too, although she was born in England as the daughter of an English mother and a Hungarian father. The play *Treehouses* (2000) is a projection of the writer's Hungarian identity, Kodó claims,⁴⁵ which is justified by much of the play enacting Young Magda's story taking place in Hungary. *Treehouses* is introduced here as a memory play, the characters' recollections evoking coordinates of place and time which, in Eva's case for instance, mean the Eden-like garden and the treehouse among the branches of a tree that her father built for her when she was a little girl.⁴⁶ Regarding the plural of 'treehouse' in the title, Kodó dwells on its possible multiple meanings as it can signify a place of refuge in several different contexts of the present, past, and the future.⁴⁷ As for the significance of Hungary in the play and for the writer herself, Kodó writes: "As the play progresses, the key, the music box and the song gradually link the stories [...] to Hungary, which is featured as an idyllic place of beauty

⁴² Ibid., 8.

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁵ Krisztina Kodó: *Multicultural Identities in Elizabeth Kuti's Dramatic Writing*, *Freeside Europe Online Academic Journal. Modern Cultural, Literary and Linguistic Perspectives* 7 (2017), 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4–5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5–6.

and wonder”, although memories of this place do not lead to a happy ending but the realities of life.⁴⁸ The essay tackles Kuti’s *The Sugar Wife* (2005) as another play about questions of identity relating to place and memories, but allows the reader or audience to realize that it is a play of more complexity than *Treehouses*, given that the characters are from different cultures, lifestyles, and religious affiliations. *The Sugar Wife* manages to reflect on multicultural aspects of Ireland and its history, especially the contribution of the Quakers to the Irish economy. The issue of “insider” or “outsider” trails through Kodó’s essay, who opines, importantly, that the later play “does not treat the question of belonging to a specific nation to such an extent as *Treehouses*” but chooses the grounding of individuals in relationships,⁴⁹ which seems to be closer to human experience in our time.

Among contemporary Irish woman playwrights Deirdre Kinahan’s popularity rests on the fact that most of her plays focus on issues with strong social relevance while she chooses different strategies in each of them. Significantly, her works bring to the fore problems which arise from narratives that tend to be suppressed in contemporary Ireland, enabling the renegotiation of value systems related to family, class, and gender. Kinahan began her playwriting career in 1999 when she wrote *Bé Carna* (meaning women of the flesh, in fact prostitutes in Early Irish) at the request of the group called Ruhama Women’s Project which supported women earning a living as sex workers in Dublin. Regarding her plays’ relation to Irish dramatic traditions, Patrick Lonergan says: “Conor McPherson, Mark O’Rowe and Deirdre Kinahan are developing the form by building on the achievements of earlier writers.”⁵⁰ In 2022 Irish scholar Lisa Fitzpatrick and I co-edited a collection of essays on Kinahan’s work for the stage and an interview with the playwright.⁵¹ The overall aim of the collection is to enhance the general understanding of and further inspire the academic research into Kinahan’s drama. Authors of the collection represent several countries: Ireland, the UK, Hungary, the USA, Nigeria, Canada, and Taiwan; overall they display a considerable range of critical ambitions to address various aspects and segments of Kinahan’s oeuvre.

One of the two Hungarian contributors to the Kinahan collection is Lenke Németh, who is known for her research on American drama, which mainly targets the contemporary period. In “Moments that Matter: *Hue & Cry* and *Moment* by Deirdre Kinahan and American Family Drama” Németh argues that American domestic drama, having been defined as a subgenre by Arthur Miller, and Kinahan’s plays in the focus of the essay share certain paradigmatic

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁰ Patrick Lonergan: *Irish Drama and Theatre since 1950*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, 7.

⁵¹ Lisa Fitzpatrick – Mária Kurdi (eds.): “*I love craft, I love the word*”: *The Theatre of Deirdre Kinahan*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2022.

features. Németh places her discussion in the context of interfaces between American and Irish drama, which date back to Eugene O'Neill who attended and expressed fervent admiration for the touring Abbey Theatre's performances in New York. Németh's discussion of family problems as they appear in *Hue & Cry* and *Moment* points to American parallels in the works of Sam Shepard and David Mamet as well as in those of women playwrights like Marsha Norman, Adrienne Kennedy, and Susan-Lori Parks, who deploy and also alter the conventions of family drama through a variety of dramatic techniques that range from absurdist to postmodern.⁵² Nevertheless, the distinguishing feature of the two Kinahan works is, Németh claims, that in spite of the deep-rooted conflicts and traumas they dramatize, the plays conclude on a note of some hope that family members may develop a better understanding of each other. Concerning elements of the dramaturgies Németh calls attention to the healing power of the Kriyah dance in *Hue & Cry* and the therapeutic role of art in *Moment*.⁵³ Apart from being a co-editor of the volume I am also the other Hungarian author who contributed with the essay "An Act of Love? Filicide and Child-killing in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* and Deirdre Kinahan's *Spinning*", which delves into and compares the possible motives behind the terrible deeds committed in the two plays by departing from the socio-cultural contexts drawn up in them.⁵⁴

Zsuzsa Csikai, an expert on Irish adaptations of Russian works for the stage, has published two journal articles on aspects of the subject recently, both texts being about young Irish female authors' rewritings of famous male Russian classics. The first one is concerned with Nancy Harris's adaptation of a major novella by Tolstoy under the original title, *The Kreutzer Sonata* in 2009 with Peter Reid's adaptation of another Tolstoy novella, *The Devil* renamed as *Desire* in 2014. Csikai places them in the context of the century-long urge in Irish theater to retranslate and adapt classics, saying: "[w]hile the rewriting of Russian literature, mainly Chekhov, in the 1980s served as a means of resisting British cultural influence through the re-appropriation of Chekhov for Irish audiences, the Tolstoy adaptations produced in the 2000s [...] by Harris and Reid [work] without such a public agenda and instead they focus on private issues of individual lives".⁵⁵ The plays deploy the monologue form, the advantages of which have been discussed in many theater studies recently, confirmed also by Csikai who claims that "[t]he monologues can offer a kind of rejuvenation of theatre, as it is

⁵² Németh, Lenke: Moments that Matter: *Hue & Cry* and *Moment* by Deirdre Kinahan and American Family Drama, in Fitzpatrick and Kurdi (eds.), 206–208.

⁵³ Ibid., 212–220, 225.

⁵⁴ Kurdi, Mária: An Act of Love? Filicide and Child-killing in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* and Deirdre Kinahan's *Spinning*, in Fitzpatrick and Kurdi (eds.), 183–204.

⁵⁵ Csikai, Zsuzsa: "Telling My Side of Things": Tolstoy Novellas into Monologue Drama, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 23, 1 (2017), 191–192.

a form able to create immediacy, direct intimacy with the audience, rendering the experience of the individual self the monologue conveys more tangible, more readily accessible and credible.”⁵⁶ Csikai admits that although the two contemporary Irish adaptations of Tolstoy have similarities, they much differ as to the changes they make in the originals works: Harris’s play does not alter the setting in terms of time and place while Reid’s shifts the plot to Ireland in our time. However, a major change in the Harris text is, Csikai continues, that it omits the listener to the protagonist’s confession of having murdered his wife which, thus, seems to be addressed to the audience, enhancing the theatricality of the monologue-form adaptation. Another significant addition by Harris to the original is “a layer of intense irony” which detaches her play from Tolstoy’s outlook on sexuality governing the protagonist’s narration, and brings the work closer to audiences of our time.⁵⁷ All in all, Harris’s transposition virtually does not move away from the nineteenth-century milieu which is the setting of the novella, yet a conspicuous addition to the Tolstoy work lies in its language of poetic intensity, Csikai argues.⁵⁸

“Suspended Lives: Lucy Caldwell’s *Three Sisters* in Post-Agreement Belfast” also by Csikai begins with a panoramic picture of Chekhov in the Irish theater through translations and adaptations from the early twentieth century on. Caldwell’s *Three Sisters* (2016) is set in Belfast and, as Csikai notes, “once again [the playwright] discovers in Chekhov’s vision of human life powerful material for representing the human condition in her own cultural and political contexts, exploring young women’s lives in suspension between past and present, desire and reality”.⁵⁹ Since the time of the plot is the 1990s, the years leading to the 1998 Belfast Agreement, the author opines that “in addition to the intertextual dialogue with the original Russian play, Caldwell also creates a dialogue between the recent past and the present of its Northern Irish audience”.⁶⁰ A major difference from the original is the addition of an outsider woman from a far-away country to the three sisters, who is to become their sister-in-law, thus the play also voices issues of the immigrant experience in the context of potentially erupting racism, Csikai claims.⁶¹ Taking the sisters as representatives of young people of their troubles-ridden homeland, the conclusion of the essay is that “The sisters’ failure to ‘move on’ in terms of either their private relationships or their plan to literally move on and start a new life in the US corresponds to Northern Irish society’s incomplete achievement of genuinely moving on.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 194–196.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁹ Csikai, Zsuzsa: *Suspended Lives: Lucy Caldwell’s Three Sisters in Post-Agreement Belfast*, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 28, 2 (2022), 358.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 361.

⁶¹ Ibid., 365.

⁶² Ibid., 368.

Csikai contextualizes Caldwell's *Three Sisters* in two major ways: relating it to the writer's other Belfast-set works and relating it also to similar pieces in the Northern Irish theatre. She mentions Caldwell's 2007 play *Leaves*, in which the protagonists are also three sisters surrounded by the traumatized milieu of post-Agreement Belfast and refers to Brian Friel's version of *Three Sisters* (1981) as an obvious antecedent of Caldwell's. Moreover, she calls attention to another Northern Irish woman playwright's "three sisters" (actually two sisters and their sister-in-law), the protagonists of *Ourselves Alone* (1986) by Anne Devlin. Bence Gábor Kvéder's essay "The Witness, the Silenced, and the Rebel—Women in Search of Their Voice: Female Characters in Brian Friel's *Translations* and Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*" traces parallels between the play by Devlin and *Translations* by Friel (1980) with which the Field Day Theatre in Derry opened, and where Friel's Hibernicized *Three Sisters* was later also performed. Kvéder explores the significance of Friel's heroines, Brigit, Maire, and Sarah as forerunners of the historical/political experiences and the search for individual solutions embodied by Devlin's three female protagonists, Josie, Frieda, and Donna, in a way descendants of Friel's female characters. Comparing them in pairs, for instance Maire in Friel with Frieda in Devlin as rebels the author finds that, at some points in history, "a nation's state of political affairs and its people's collective mind can be analyzed quite effectively by taking account of the plights and chances of women as represented across time".⁶³

Although the content within this paper offers the reader only a selection of the published critical material, I hope it testifies to the committedness and richness of the multisided research of Hungarian scholars into women's work for Irish theater. The number of books, articles, and book chapters published in English and the reviews of and quotations from them in many critical platforms in or outside Hungary testify to the established presence of Hungarian scholars among international researchers within this area of scholarship. All of the texts surveyed here place their subject in the relevant contexts of Irish socio-cultural history and Irish playwriting more generally while providing comparative readings of Irish plays by women in dialogue with other Hungarian or non-Hungarian researchers and critical approaches. It is these broad perspectives which ensure that investigations will not only continue but will generate other investigations, resulting in new insights for scholars and students interested in the receptionist aspects of Irish theater and the discovery of unusual vistas for further dedicated explorations of the field.

⁶³ Kvéder, Bence Gábor: The Witness, the Silenced, and the Rebel—Women in Search of Their Voice: Female Characters in Brian Friel's *Translations* and Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*, *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies*, XI (2018), 18.

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