

detailed reference to the realities of Dublin tenement life, O'Casey's internationalist and socialist stance led him, particularly in the Dublin trilogy, to question not nationalist politics *per se*, but rather the concept of the nation which had become hegemonic and which grossly ignored the plight of the workers. Other critical voices, such as J. Joyce's in *Ulysses*, S. O'Faolain's, P. Kavanagh's, F. O'Brien's, and that of *The Bell*, are also discussed.

An objection to be made to *Writing Ireland* is that, despite the authors' highlighting the central role of the discourse of sexuality in the constitution of the Irish people-nation, there is an almost complete absence of the women's contribution to the cultural struggle the book masterfully explores. A similar complaint is made by K. Barry in a recent review of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature* (1991), where he notes the «lamentable dearth of scholarship about women's writing in Ireland» (*The European English Messenger*, (1992), 1, 3: 47). In Cairns and Richards's study, some women's names are merely dropped, none of them belonging to the contemporary scene, where they include B. Friel, S. Heaney, T. Murphy and T. Paulin among others, and only the canonical Lady Gregory and Maud Gonne are given more attention. To compensate for this, the reader will have to turn to other sources, such as P. Boumelha and T. Foley, *In the Shadow of his Language* (1987); C.L. Innes, *Women, Ireland and Literature* (1989); and the anthologies A.A. Kelly (ed.), *Pillars of the House: An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the Present* (1987); and A. Smyth (ed.), *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women's Writing* (1989).

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G. AUSTIN, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990. 139 pages.

Starting off from the belief that a feminist approach to anything means paying attention to women as characters, writers, readers or audience members, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* is a lucid attempt at demonstrating the usefulness as critical tools for the analysis of drama of feminist theories drawn from four areas of study: literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, and film theory. As Austin points out, the field of dramatic criticism has been relatively slow to acknowledge the work of feminist theorists and to incorporate it, so that her book, combining a theoretical and a practical side, stands both as a welcome synthesis of the work done in the four selected areas of study, and as a demonstration of its possibilities when applied to drama. It is also a useful companion piece to S.-E. Case's feminist revision of theatrical history, *Feminist Theatre* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988).

In the opening chapter, the author is explicit about the aims and limitations of her project. Thus, she discusses the advantages and shortcomings of the three major political branches of feminism, liberal, cultural/radical and materialist, and overtly identifies herself as a materialist feminist. She also states that her purpose is not to develop a monolithic theory of feminist dramatic criticism, or indeed any new theory, but rather to present a number of theories in the four fields of study since the latest wave of feminist scholarship began (approximately in 1970) and to apply some of them to specific plays drawn from contemporary American drama, both by playwrights in the traditional canon (Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman and Sam

Shepard) and by women who would not normally be placed there (Jane Bowles and Alice Childress). Austin advocates selective pluralism as regards feminist theories, as well as pointing out the problems and advantages of drama as an object of feminist study. One of the advantages, the fact that written plays provide the framework for productions that can bring out many of the issues feminism finds pressing, is well illustrated in chapters 2 and 3, which contain discussions of the ways in which O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1940) and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) might be deconstructed in performance through feminist intervention. This ties in with Austin's conviction, repeated at the beginning and end of her book and derived from Case's *Feminism and Theatre* and J. Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), that from a feminist perspective the stage should not be considered as a mirror of «real life», but rather as an empty frame or laboratory in which gender categories may be exposed and, hopefully, dismantled and removed.

As is made clear in the first chapter, Austin's stance is not prescriptive: her aim is not to say how «good» or «bad» the plays are from the point of view of feminism, but to show how using a feminist theory can illuminate the plays. She devotes considerable space in chapter 1 to a discussion of the issues raised by lesbian and black feminist criticism, particularly to the challenge the latter poses to the white-dominated field of feminist theory. This points forward to chapter 5, where insights drawn from feminist film theory are applied to both Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* (1972) and, by way of contrast, to black playwright Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969). Drawing on a number of feminist theorists, Austin also makes a distinction between first-, second-, and third-stage feminist work on drama, respectively defined as the task of exam-

ining images of women within the canon, that of expanding the canon by focusing on women writers, and that of exploding the canon by questioning underlying assumptions of an entire field of study, including canon formation. As opposed to fiction and film, where serious first-stage work began in the early 1970s (e.g., K. Miller's *Sexual Politics* (1969); M. Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (1973) and M. Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1974)), the exploration of first-stage topics in dramatic criticism began later, in the early 1980s, and still has a long way to go. The groundwork involved in the second stage began in the mid 1970s with the publication of the first anthologies of plays written by women, while third-stage work emerged in the late 1980s, and began to modify some man-made tools, such as semiotics and deconstruction, for the purposes of feminist dramatic criticism, as well as to develop feminist perspectives on traditional dramatic concerns such as realism, narrative and mimesis. *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* combines the three stages. Austin is basically doing first-stage work when examining work by O'Neill, Miller, Hellman and Shepard, second-stage when dealing with Bowles and Childress, and, albeit less centrally, third-stage both when discussing how some of the feminist theories she draws on have undermined male-constructed systems and when writing about aspects of the formation of the American dramatic canon, such as the problem for women that *Death of a Salesman* should have become the paradigm for what «the serious American play» should be.

Each of the four chapters after the opening one is devoted to one of the four selected fields of study—literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, and film theory—and all follow the same pattern: they begin with a succinct survey of the work done in the field since the 1970s,

then one single theorist is selected and an account is given of one central concept she has formulated, and finally that concept is applied to one or two plays. Thus, chapter two moves from a survey of the rich field of feminist literary criticism, to J. Fetterley's «resisting reader», to an application of this concept to a reading of *The Iceman Cometh*; chapter three follows suit with feminist anthropology, G. Rubin's «traffic in women», *Death of a Salesman* and Hellman's *Another Part of the Forest* (1946); in chapter 4 Austin deals with feminist psychology and psychoanalysis, N. Chodorow's work on the mother-daughter bond, and Bowles's *In the Summer House* (1953); and in chapter 5, the reader finds the tools of feminist film theory, particularly L. Mulvey's concept of «woman as image, man as bearer of the look» applied to Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* and Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness*. Some of the analyses offer more insights than others, the use of film theory being particularly illuminating. All in all, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* is a solid introductory guide to the field of feminist dramatic criticism, and as such can be recommended to anyone interested in feminism, dramatic theory and American drama. To university teachers too: Austin not only brings to light the relationship between theory and the real world of dramatic productions, but also between theory and teaching by prompting the reader to use feminist theories in order to begin asking questions such as what are we teaching and why? What are the plays saying to the students about women? Are there any other possible messages? The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography which will be of use to any reader who wants to delve more deeply into the issues raised in it.

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JAMES ENGELL and DAVID PERKINS
 (eds). *Teaching Literature: What Is Needed Now*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988. 198 pages.

«In extending our invitation to contribute to this volume, we did not seek to represent only a particular point of view and neither did we especially attempt to represent all that are now active within the profession. The only criterion of this kind was that the younger as well as the older generations should be heard.» (p. v)

Engell and Perkins make it clear enough at the very beginning of the preface: heterogeneity is going to be one of the most recurrent features in this book, for it is descriptiveness — as opposed to prescriptiveness — that lies at its very core. Maybe the title might be said to be slightly over-ambitious: *Teaching Literature: What Is Needed Now* seems to point at a thorough piece of work dealing with all the major aspects in current Literature teaching, as well as providing an exhaustive representation of the major figures in this professional field. Neither one nor the other are entirely true: what we do have in our hands is a collection of strikingly personal essays which represent a wide range of often clearly opposed views on different aspects of the Literature issue. What we do not by any means have is a huge piece of work in which all current views and opinions are conscientiously represented. Nor is this the aim of the book.

Even though heterogeneity is the most outstanding aspect of the book, we should not overlook the work's extremely coherent organisation, which serves its purpose in allowing us to have access to an acceptable wide range of topics: we begin by a brief, though at the same time serious outline of the main difficulties experienced by freshmen students at the very beginning of their academic life when encountering poetical texts and having to express their views about them. The