

*Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi, ed.*

Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland

Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015. 251p. €25.00

ISBN: 978-1-909325-75-3

When #wakingthefeminists insisted that the Irish theatre hierarchy recognize the contributions of female performance-makers, ironically, the movement gathered international recognition. Haughton and Kurdi's book on the radical in contemporary Irish female performance is a timely confirmation of the unassailable contributions of women in this regard, while amplifying the political necessity of #wakingthefeminists. The collection documents female cultural producers across interdisciplinary practices, while examining the proximities of feminism, post-feminism and queer theory to Irish female concerns of religion, reproductive justice, sex work, economic crisis, immigration, post-conflict drama, acquired disability and lesbian-aging. Haughton and Kurdi curate practices that identify as female as much as feminist in order to expand the parameters of what may be deemed radical.

The radical, then, is filtered through the intentions, affect, and form of art works enabling wide-ranging discussions such as, Olwen Fouéré's performance virtuosity as an 'excription' of the inscribed female body to Áine Phillip's digestion of a fetal cake; Amanda Coogan's urinating vagina as sympatico with the self-birthing tragedy of Annie Lovett; Stephanie Preissner's rhymed responses to abuse and, the self-dispossession of Veronica Dyas in the face of single female debt. The collection charts the about-face of recent Irish politics situating the apparent excesses of the Celtic Tiger (in Leeny's reading of *Sodome, My Love*) alongside post-feminism's embrace of hyperfemininity. In devastating contrast the histories of religious institutional and state enslavement of women in the Magdalene Laundries underpins several chapters and is made harrowing in the prose of Haughton's recollections of ANU's *Laundry*.

Creedon's reading of *Taking Back our Voices* infuriated me but was also my highlight. The self-inspection of historical representations of sex work at the Abbey theatre led to an anti-sex work production with sex workers. Creedon does not explicitly tackle the Abbey for a single-sided staging or for their disavowal that the decision was political, rather, merely aesthetic in purpose. Instead, she interposes with the Sex Workers' Alliance Ireland and their self-advocacy decriminalization project, and in doing so, implicitly shows how institutions disallow certain female voices, while permitting others on a depoliticized basis only. It showed me how Irish cultural institutions continue to excel at moral constructions of the feminine. This book is useful for scholars and practitioners interested in contemporary women's performance culture and their responses to the political issues of Irish womanhood with respect to reproductive injustice, the myths of Irish femininity constructed through the moral barbarism of the Irish catholic church, and the legal position of women with respect to the Irish state.

Lynne McCarthy