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Nicholas Grene

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Nicholas Grene : The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel (Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel (Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Welcome study of the context for recent Irish playsBy John L MurphyProfessor Grene of Trinity College, Dublin has written widely on drama; this text gives twenty-odd close readings of plays chosen to symbolize how Ireland, in his terms, undergoes "theatrical revisionism" as it's portrayed on

stage. That is, playwrights strive to show an Ireland truer to reality than that previously shown by stereotypical "stage Irish" caricatures or plots. Thus, Grene argues, his selection of plays attempt to realistically capture Irish life for audiences expected to be familiar with both its distorted enactments and the more accurately dramatized Ireland that replaces it, generation after generation, in the corrective plays that supersede the earlier inaccuracies. This daunting thesis Grene illustrates by a variety of plays, familiar as Synge's *Playboy* and unfamiliar (at least to me) as Tom Murphy's *A Crucial Week*. Most exciting for me are his discoveries within the historical distortions placed into *Translations* by Brian Friel, the autobiographical elisions applied by Sean O'Casey, the Tuam, Co Galway work of Murphy, the making of Behan's *The Hostage* vs. its Irish-language precedent, and the possibilities for a change from the usual Irish themes in Yeats' *Purgatory* and Beckett's *All That Fall*. Grene avoids pedantry, trendy critical jargon, and keeps the reader in mind as he studies such works honestly. He credits other scholars thoughtfully, brings in the historical and political contexts but never allows them to overshadow the actual plays, and summarizes earlier debates about them well. One shortcoming: as if sensing that students might be using his book as a crib to avoid reading the plays, he does shy away more than once from examining their endings. While he exerts much effort in establishing the background and conflicts emerging from many play's earlier plots, he tends to duck out before bringing some of his close readings to a dramatic close.

In this book Nicholas Grene explores political contexts for some of the outstanding Irish plays from the nineteenth century to the contemporary period. The politics of Irish drama have previously been considered primarily the politics of national self-expression. Here it is argued that Irish plays, in their self-conscious representation of the otherness of Ireland, are outwardly directed towards audiences both at home and abroad. The political dynamics of such relations between plays and audiences is the book's multiple subject: the stage interpretation of Ireland from *The Shaughraun* to *Translations*; the contentious stage images of Yeats, Gregory and Synge; reactions to revolution from O'Casey to Behan; the post-colonial worlds of *Purgatory* and *All that Fall*; the imagined Irelands of Friel and Murphy, McGuinness and Barry. With its fundamental reconception of the politics of Irish drama, this book represents an alternative view of the phenomenon of Irish drama itself.

"...in addition to surrounding the works with new historical material, Grene's close readings are startlingly good, and the constellations of plays he creatively arranges shed new light on texts that have been studied time and time again." Paige Reynolds, *James Joyce Literary Supplement* "...excellent study of Irish drama." *The Boston Irish Reporter* "...a useful introduction to the field. Strongly recommended for upper-division undergraduate and graduate collections." *Choice*