Irony and the Modern Theatre

Irony and theatre share intimate kinships, regarding not only dramatic conflict, dialectic, or wittiness, but also scenic structure and the verbal or situational ironies that typically mark theatrical speech and action. Yet irony today, in aesthetic, literary, and philosophical contexts especially, is often regarded with skepticism – as ungraspable, or elusive to the point of confounding. Countering this tendency, Storm advocates a capacious, wide-angle view of this master trope, exploring the ironic in major works by playwrights including Chekhov, Pirandello, and Brecht, and in notable relation to well-known representative characters in drama from Ibsen’s Halvard Solness to Stoppard’s Septimus Hodge and Wasserstein’s Heidi Holland. To the degree that irony is existential, its presence in the theatre relates directly to the circumstances and the expressiveness of the characters on stage. This study investigates how these key figures enact, embody, represent, and personify the ironic in myriad situations in the modern and contemporary theatre.

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Volumes for Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre explore the political, social, and cultural functions of theatre while also paying careful attention to detailed performance analysis. The focus of the series is on political approaches to the modern theatre with attention also being paid to theatres of earlier periods and their influence on contemporary drama. Topics in the series are chosen to investigate this relationship and include both playwrights (their aims and intentions set against the effects of their work) and process (with emphasis on rehearsal and production methods, the political structure within theatre companies and their choice of audiences or performance venues). Further topics will include devised theatre, agitprop, community theatre, para-theatre, and performance art. In all cases the series will be alive to the special cultural and political factors operating in the theatres examined.

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For Deborah
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