

Mark Brown. Modernism and Scottish Theatre since 1969: A Revolution on Stage. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, xvii + 254 pp., € 80.24 (hardback), € 24.99 (softcover)

Pattie, David

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Mark Brown. *Modernism and Scottish Theatre since 1969: A Revolution on Stage.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, xvii + 254 pp., €80.24 (hardback), €24.99 (softcover).

Reviewed by **David Pattie**, E-Mail: D.Pattie@bham.ac.uk

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The need for a book like this is clear. Although Scottish theatre has come in for a great deal of reevaluation in the 21st century and is now thought of as a secure part of the cultural landscape of the country, we still lack good, clear, theoretically informed analyses of the general development of the field that move beyond the usual touchstones of the Traverse, the Citizens Theatre, 7:84 and Wildcat, and the National Theatre of Scotland. Mark Brown's book promises to make up for that lack. He takes an interesting approach to the development of Scottish theatre, placing it squarely within the mainstream of European modernism. This means that, from the first, the book tells a different story to the one that foregrounds the idea that Scottish theatre can be understood primarily as a political response to the changing nature of the UK as a country and as a sign of the growing political divergence of Scotland and England. It allows Brown both to touch on developments in Scottish theatre that are uncontestedly important (chapter 3 on The Citizens) but also to discuss companies whose influence on Scottish theatre has been equally important, but whose work has not perhaps received the attention that it deserves (chapter 4 on Comunicado).

This is welcome, and the chapters on The Citizens, Comunicado, the National Theatre of Scotland (chapter 6), and the interviews with key practitioners go some way towards making good on the promise of the book. However, the central thesis is obscured by some rather awkward choices. Firstly, the discussion of the theatre companies relies more on interview material and reviews than it does on analyses of the performances themselves. This is most glaring in the chapter on Comunicado. The company, led by Gerry Mulgrew, mounted two productions in the 1980s and 1990s that were, by any measure, seminal (Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* in 1987 and Mulgrew's and Lochhead's *Jock Tamson's Bairns* in 1990). They should, one feels, form an important part of any chapter on the company, but here they are relegated to relative obscurity. Secondly, the structure of the book is rather awkward. An introductory chapter does set out the theoretical and historical scope of the study distinctly (although one might wish for a clearer discussion of the postmodern, which seems rather tacked on to the end of the section). Then we move to The Citizens and to Comunicado; however, after this, the study jumps to a series of inter-

views, which are interesting in themselves, but which leave essential aspects of the development of modernist Scottish theatre uncovered. For example, the study elides a generation of writers – Chris Hannan, Peter Arnott, Lochhead – whose work would be key to a full understanding of the subject.

The book has many incidental insights and pleasures. Brown makes good use of his journalistic background and is able to quote from and contextualise first-hand testimony from those concerned with the development of Scottish theatre. I would also agree with the conclusion that, at the time of writing, Scottish theatre has to an extent lost the momentum it built up in the early years of the 21st century. However, the book itself represents something of a lost opportunity. Scottish theatre's renaissance, post-1969, has been remarkable; but by now it is a well-established cultural narrative. It would be useful for that narrative to be examined rigorously from a variety of different perspectives, one of which would be the debt Scots theatre-makers owe to European modernism. Brown provides some insight into this, but the book's unhelpful structure, and the oddly skewed choices he makes in dealing with specific instances of theatre work, means that the argument he wishes to make never fully coheres. The history of the relation between European modernism and the modern Scottish theatre, regrettably, remains to be written.