

Abstract

This dissertation examines a very popular and widespread trend in contemporary British and Irish theatre – monologue plays. One of the reasons of the recent boom of monologue-based theatre performances might be the fact that the condensed theatrical form presents a challenge for everyone involved – the playwrights, actors, and crucially also for the audience. The diversity and quantity of such plays present an obstacle that has deterred most theatre scholars from systematic analysis as it is difficult to decide on what ground such widespread phenomenon might be critically approached. Given the essential role the audience have as the only communication partner of the lonely monologists on stage, this work attempts to analyse the contemporary boom of monologue plays in the U.K. and Ireland by using a systematic framework, based on the various incorporations of the monologue, which enables examination of how specific strategies of the realisation of the monologue elicit audience engagement. First it explores monologue plays in which one actor/actress performs one character, then it deals with plays in which the performer re-enacts other characters, subsequently this work focuses on very rare experiments in the monologue form, where the performer re-enacts conflicting versions of their split selves and the audience are allowed insight in the monologists' consciousness. The discussion continues with examination of documentary monologues in which the performer re-enacts characters based on real-life models and autobiographical monologue plays in which the actors are replaced by the author. Finally, this dissertation analyses monologue plays that feature two or three actors who deliver alternating monologues without much interaction with each other. Regardless of the variation of the employment of the monologue, the backbone of any successful monological theatre performance is productive audience engagement. This dissertation comes to the conclusion that although for some critics monologues are a sign of an anxiety about theatre as a medium of communication, what happens during the actual presentation of a monologue play is personal interchange between actors and audience that heightens its communicative function.