

Book Review
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Orlich, Ileana Alexandra. *Subversive Stages: Theater in Pre – and Post – Communist Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria*. Budapest: Central European Press, 2017.

The theater is a curious stage for world politics as it occupies the space between visual art and literature since it can comment on current events with the speed of the former, while using the language of the latter. This flexibility lends itself to the creation of thought-provoking productions in the heat of the moment, as reflected in Ileana Alexandra Orlich's *Subversive Stages*, whose central topic is communism, as it transpired in its immediate wake.

Orlich's task is ambitious. She sets out to explore the different theatrical traditions of three disparate countries directly effected by communism – Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Without necessarily attempting to tie them together by genre, or approach, the author demonstrates how their underlying ideologies serve as the intertwining element.

The reader's prior knowledge is not taken for granted. The book begins by positioning the three countries in a global context, and situating them according to their perception from the outside. In the process, Orlich provides historical background while reinforcing the supposition that art, namely theater, can be regarded as an apolitical tool, but also as a means of regaining identity. In other words, she conveys that the theater is not only a means of disseminating thoughts on current events, but also a reflection of a people's culture.

The work shifts from a historical perspective to an engagement with current critical theory and rhetoric as Orlich efficiently positions her own work amongst other critiques, while providing a thorough review of present scholarship.

Finally, before engaging with specific case studies of playwrights and productions, she reveals her methodology in selecting different pieces and the means through which she will reveal them to the reader. She outlines the organization of her book to immediately elucidate the important components that will be addressed in each of the three parts comprised of eight total sections. With each concise description there already lies the connecting elements that will be explored and discussed in fuller detail in each of the subsequent chapters.

Additionally, underlying themes that serve to set the stage for comparisons between the three countries, which Orlich analyzes through the course of the book, also emerge. Such themes include the reliance upon Shakespeare by various Easter European playwrights as they reconstruct his works voice their own politics, whereas others rely on well-known and established bards in the French tradition to create a parallel for their own plights. Essentially, Orlich, in an exceptionally well-

organized and easy to follow fashion, parts the curtains to show the ways in which those well-wrought works from various previous eras have become the anchors for current concerns. But perhaps more importantly, she shines light on the messages contemporary playwrights are attempting to convey.

Biography:

Ileana Alexandra Orlich is a professor at Arizona State University where she is the head of the German, Romanian, and Slavic Faculty. She has had an incredibly productive career having published numerous books, translations, articles, and book reviews, while teaching dozens of courses, and participating in just as many interviews. She has been the recipient of several grants and scholarships, including two times the Fulbright.