



CW/LT 348 IRISH PLAYWRITING: A CREATIVE INTRODUCTION
IES Abroad Dublin

DESCRIPTION: Irish dramatists have for many years been held in high esteem on the world stage. Students will study the development of this success and gain an insight into subject matters which inspire Irish Playwrights. Through focused study of selected plays, students will better understand the linguistic primacy in writing for the stage, not only to enhance analytical and creative understanding, but for students to learn themselves the fundamental practice of writing for the stage. The aim, using thematically structured classes, will allow students to project their new understanding of dialogue, character, action into their own work, and to gradually build up a short play set in Ireland using these techniques. Some intensive one-on-one sessions with the tutor will facilitate this process. These student pieces will be read/performed in a showcase using acting students from the Gaiety School of Acting, the National Theatre School of Ireland, at the end of the semester.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

Students will investigate weekly topics through guided discussion, short lectures, pair work, and writing exercises. Theatre visits, focusing on new and classical Irish Playwriting, will be important, as will script analysis of these works. There will be some one-on-one sessions with the instructor, to revise and tighten student written scenes. Students from the Gaiety School of Acting will perform readings of the students work at the end of term showcase.

Depending on the time of year it is run, the course will take advantage of:

- Dublin International Theatre Festival (Fall)
- Dublin Fringe Festival (Fall)
- Scene and Heard New Writing Festival, Dublin (Spring)

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Class participation – 10%
- Portfolio – 30%
- Mid-term assessment – 20%
- Final showcase submission – 40%

Participation

Structured debate, pair-work, writing improvisation exercises

Portfolio

10 short scene-work assignments in-class

Mid-term

Students will be asked to finely hone two scenes from their portfolio or present two new scenes for assessment.

Final showcase submission

Students will be asked to craft an original short play. Plays will be approximately 10 minutes in length but will be a complete play, rather than a scene. This play will be submitted and assessed and the students' final work will be read/performed in a showcase using acting students from the Gaiety School of Acting, the National Theatre School of Ireland

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Write a short play, under close supervision, utilising the knowledge gained during the course.

- Articulate the crucial role of editing/rewriting in the production of successful scripts, both for stage.
- Understand the respective demands of playwriting in relation to dialogue, pacing, character and structure.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

IES Abroad Dublin courses are designed to take advantage of the unique contribution of the instruction and the lecture/discussion format, regular class attendance is mandatory. Any missed class, without a legitimate reason will be reflected in the final grade. A legitimate reason would include: documented illness or family bereavement. Travel, (including travel delays) is not a legitimate reason.

CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 1	An Extraordinary History What are the factors – social, historical or otherwise about Ireland that have made Dublin the “Nobel prize for Literature” capital of the world, and a UNESCO-designated “City of Literature”? Why has this outpouring of creativity often taken the form of writing for the stage? Introducing some of the outstanding names in the field, and the state of contemporary Irish Drama.	• O’Toole, Fintan. <u>Irish Theatre: The State of the Art</u>, in <u>Theatre Stuff: critical essays on contemporary Irish theatre</u>, Carysfort Press, 2000. Pp 8- 59. • Chambers, Lilian, ed. <u>Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners</u>, Carysfort Press, 2002. Pp 17-75. • Murray, Christopher, <u>Twentieth Century Irish Drama</u>, Syracuse University Press, 2000. Pp223-247. Case Study: Beckett, Samuel, <u>Come and Go</u> (entire play)
Week 2	Theme An examination of previous and current Irish dramatic preoccupations - including emigration, freedom, family and the church. From a creative standpoint, we will scrutinize theme as a starting-point for the writing process. The need to know where you want to go with your script. How theme can subsequently act as an ongoing “criterion of relevancy” for your writing. Practical exploration of themes for a short dialogue exchange –to be written in class, after debating the issue of what makes for promising material.	• Ayckbourn, Alan. <u>The Crafty Art of Playmaking</u>, Faber and Faber, 2002. Pp. 3-96. • Jordan, Eamonn. <u>Dissident Dramaturgies</u>, Irish Academic Press, 2010. Pp. 19-80. • Grene, Nicholas. <u>The Politics of Irish Drama</u>, Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp 211-218 • Morash, Christopher. <u>A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000</u>, Cambridge University Press, Pp233- 241
Week 3	The Scene A look at how this fundamental building block varies across genre. What, exactly constitutes a scene in drama? How can we know how to maintain the momentum of the story? A discussion of where scenes are placed in the narrative arc. Students will be asked, in-class, to write a short play scene.	• Walsh, Enda. <u>Disco Pigs and Sucking Dublin, Two plays</u>, HNB, 2005. • Chambers, Lilian, ed. <u>Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners</u>, Carysfort Press, 2002. Pp 471-480. Case study: 3 scenes from <u>Disco Pigs</u> by Enda Walsh – play

Week 4	Character in Limbo One of the truly distinctive features of Irish writing in the last century is the predominance of monologue. From the relentless self-scrutiny of Beckett's <u>Krapp's Last Tape</u> , to the violent humour of Mark O'Rowe or Conor McPherson, the use of monologue has had a crucial role in the artistic development of leading Irish writers. Students will write short improvised monologues in class on given topics.	- Carr, Marina. <u>By The Bog of Cats</u>, Gallery, 1998 (entire play) - Sihra, Melissa, ed. <u>Women in Irish Drama</u>, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Pp 201-215 Case study: McGuinness, Frank. <u>Someone who'll watch over me</u>, Faber and Faber, 1992 (entire play)
Week 5	Character in Limbo (continued) Because of the prominence of monologue, we will spend two weeks, both examining the form, and asking students to emulate it – to develop their own short monologues. During this process, a number of questions will be asked: is the monologue form inherently “anti-dramatic,” as Marina Carr and a number of other writers claim? In an Irish context, has monologue functioned as a transitional platform towards more complex forms? Is it possible for film to deal with the “interiority” of monologue? Students will work on viable ways to render the following in visually satisfying ways.	- Mc Pherson, Conor: <u>St Nicholas</u>, in <u>Four Plays</u>, NHB, 1999 - Murphy, Elaine: <u>Little Gem</u>, NHB, 2006 (entire play) Case study: - Conor Mc Pherson: <u>St Nicholas</u> (excerpts) - Elaine Murphy: <u>Little Gem</u> - James Joyce: <u>Ulysses</u> (Molly Bloom's monologue)
Week 6	Towards a Tentative Dialogue One of the initial devices writers have used to escape the constraints of the form is to deploy interlinked or overlapping monologues, almost as a staging-post towards full-blown dialogue. The model for such attempts is Brien Friel's <u>Faith Healer</u> (1979), and was later emulated by, amongst others, Mark O'Rowe and Conor McPherson. Students, as their mid-term exam, will be asked to submit what they see as their two best short, interlinked monologues.	- O'Rowe, Mark: <u>Terminus</u>, NHB, 2009 (entire play) Case study: - Brien Friel: <u>Faith Healer</u> (excerpts distributed in class) - Mark O'Rowe: <u>Terminus</u> - Conor McPherson: <u>This Lime Tree Bower</u> (in <u>Four Plays</u>, above)
Week 7	Making the Leap: Initial Attempts at Adaptation What parts of the original play script have survived the transition? Why? What clearly fails? In class, students will be presented with one scene, and, in pairs, asked to offer alternative routes that the adaptation could have taken. From Brian Friel to Seamus Heaney, what is the pre-occupation with Irish	- Friel, Brian: <u>The Cherry Orchard</u> (excerpts distributed in class) - Heaney, Seamus: <u>The Burial at Thebes</u> (excerpts distributed in class) - Jordan, Eamonn ed. <u>Theatre Stuff</u>, Carysfort Press, 2000. Pp16-26 - Murphy, Mike: <u>Reading the future</u>. Liliput Press, 2000. Pp 59-97

	Dramatists in adapting the works of others into an Irish context. Students will undertake a writing exercise which obliges them to write a brief scene based on an adaptation.	Case study: Heaney, Seamus: <i>The Cure at Troy</i>
Week 8	Interim Workshop and Discussion of Student Writing Partly as a dry run for the end-of-semester showcase, students will be asked to share their interlinked monologues, to critique one-another's writing and to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the monologue form, as they encountered it through their own efforts. These student pieces, edited and expanded to incorporate dialogue, will form the basis of the final submission.	
Week 9	Laughter in the Dark It is remarkable how much of Irish literature – across genre - can be characterized as “black comedy”. Many, indeed, would see it as a defining characteristic. In Beckett's caustic formulation, “nothing is funnier than unhappiness...” Consequently, we will examine, over two weeks, this tragicomic tradition, some of the possible cultural reasons for it, and some outstanding exponents. Students will examine what it means to be funny in the face of adversity, and to collaborate, in pairs in devising a tragi-comic scenario for stage.	- Beckett, Samuel: <u><i>Waiting for Godot</i></u>, Faber and Faber, 2008 (entire play) <u><i>Endgame</i></u>, Faber and Faber, 2008 (entire play) Case study: Samuel Beckett, <i>Waiting for Godot</i> (play)
Week 10	Laughter in the Dark (continued) Humor is often a coping mechanism, faced with the unacceptable – physical or emotional violence. This class will look at the transformative effect of fiction, and the often difficult choices made when adapting prose – first of all for the stage. Creatively, students will adapt their own short play-scene.	- McCabe, Patrick: <u><i>Frank Pig Says Hello</i></u>, in: <u><i>Far From The Land, Contemporary Irish Plays</i></u>, Methuen 1998. - McCabe, Patrick: <u><i>The Butcher Boy</i></u>, Picador, 1992. Case study: - Patrick McCabe: <u><i>The Butcher Boy</i></u> (2 scenes from the novel) <u><i>Frank Pig Say Hello</i></u> (stage play- 2 scenes)
Week 11	“Writing is Re-Writing” In their own time, students will give editorial feedback on the students written scenes. Each draft will be presented by its author to the tutor in a one-on-one intensive session. The student might be asked to focus on staging and casting, in addition to dialogue	

and structure. They will be asked to address the issue of whether what they have written is site-specific or site generic.

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Ayckbourn, Alan. The Crafty Art of Playmaking, Faber and Faber, 2002. Pp. 3-96.
- Beckett, Samuel. Waiting for Godot, Faber and Faber, 2006 (entire play)
- Beckett, Samuel. Endgame, Faber and Faber, 2008 (entire play)
- Carr, Marina. By The Bog of Cats, Gallery, 1998 (entire play)
- Chambers, Lilian, ed. Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners, Carysfort Press, 2002. Pp 17-75.
- Jordan, Eamonn. Dissident Dramaturgies, Irish Academic Press, 2010. Pp. 19-80.
- Mc Cabe, Patrick. Frank Pig Says Hello, in: Far From The Land, Contemporary Irish Plays, Methuen 1998.
- Mc Cabe, Patrick. The Butcher Boy, Picador, 1992.
- Mc Pherson, Conor. St Nicholas, in Four Plays, NHB, 1999
- Murphy, Elaine. Little Gem, NHB, 2006 (entire play)
- O’Rowe, Mark. Terminus, NHB, 2009 (entire play)
- O’Toole, Fintan. Irish Theatre: The State of the Art, in Theatre Stuff: critical essays on contemporary Irish theatre, Carysfort Press, 2000. Pp 8- 59.
- Walsh, Enda. Disco Pigs and Sucking Dublin, Two plays, HNB, 2005.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Chambers, Lilian, The Theatre of Martin McDonagh, Carysfort Press, 2006.
- Culleton, Jim, Fishamble First Plays, New Island, 2002.
- Culleton, Jim, Contemporary Irish Monologues, New Island, 2005.
- Culleton, Jim, Tiny Plays for Ireland, New Island, 2013.
- Greene, Nicholas, The Politics of Irish Drama, CUP, 2002.
- Mc Cafferty, Owen, Plays and Monologues, Lagan Press, 1998.
- O’Connell, Diog, New Irish Storytellers, 2010.
- Roche, Anthony, Contemporary Irish Drama, Gill and Macmillan, 2005.
- Morash, Christopher, A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Vogler, Christopher, The Writers Journey. Pan, 1999.