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
thematical 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:**

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Case Study: Beckett, Samuel, *Come and Go* (entire play) |

An examination of 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.


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.

Week 3 | The Scene | • Walsh, Enda. *Disco Pigs and Sucking Dublin, Two plays*, HNB, 2005.  
Case study: 3 scenes from *Disco Pigs* by Enda Walsh – play |

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.
### 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 *Krapp’s Last Tape*, 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.

**References**

Case study: McGuinness, Frank. *Someone who’ll watch over me*, 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.

**References**
- McPherson, Conor: *St Nicholas*, in *Four Plays*, NHB, 1999
- Murphy, Elaine: *Little Gem*, NHB, 2006 (entire play)

Case study:
- Conor McPherson: *St Nicholas* (excerpts)
- Elaine Murphy: *Little Gem*
- James Joyce: *Ulysses* (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 *Faith Healer* (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.

**References**
- O’Rowe, Mark: *Terminus*, NHB, 2009 (entire play)

Case study:
- Brien Friel: *Faith Healer* (excerpts distributed in class)
- Mark O’Rowe: *Terminus*
- Conor McPherson: *This Lime Tree Bower* (in *Four Plays*, 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

**References**
- Friel, Brian: The Cherry Orchard (excerpts distributed in class)
- Heaney, Seamus: The Burial at Thebes (excerpts distributed in class)
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<th>Interim Workshop and Discussion of Student Writing</th>
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| 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: The Cure at Troy |

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<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Laughter in the Dark</th>
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<td>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.</td>
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| Case study: Beckett, Samuel: Waiting for Godot, Faber and Faber, 2008 (entire play)  
Endgame, Faber and Faber, 2008 (entire play) |

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| 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. |

| Case study: | Mc Cabe, Patrick: The Butcher Boy (2 scenes from the novel)  
Frank Pig Say Hello (stage play- 2 scenes) |
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<th>Week 11</th>
<th>“Writing is Re-Writing”</th>
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<td>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</td>
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| Case study: | Patrick McCabe: The Butcher Boy (2 scenes from the novel)  
Frank Pig Say Hello (stage play- 2 scenes) |
and structure. They will be asked to address the issue of whether what they have written is site-specific or site generic.

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Beckett, Samuel. *Endgame*, Faber and Faber, 2008 (entire play)
- 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)

RECOMMENDED READINGS: