

ENGL 235.01
PERFORMING NATIONS:
BRITISH, IRISH, AND ANGLOPHONE DRAMA
Spring 2012, MWF 12:00-12:50, Palmer 211

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Office Hours: M, T, W 2-3 and by appointment

Overview

This course will explore major works of twentieth-century British and Irish drama by focusing on competing performances of national identity and cultural tradition. We will explore the shifting significance of terms like “Celtic,” “Anglo-Saxon,” “English,” “British,” “Irish,” and “Gaelic” in a wide range of cultural performances, from Revival pageantry to the wearing of a bowler hat, but we will pay special attention to what happens to such performances when they enter the space of the theatrical stage. What happens when certain culturally-loaded gestures are repeated? What happens when certain scenes, horrifying or infuriating outside the theater, are made morally uplifting or even pleasurable by their presentation on stage?

As we read, watch, hear, and rehearse scenes, we will test out some of the important methodological tools drawn from three distinct intellectual fields: performance theory, theater history, and literary studies. We will study dramas from the heart of British imperial culture (Shaw’s *John Bull’s Other Island*, Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*) to its dangerous extremities (Synge’s *Riders to the Sea*, Walcott’s *The Sea at Dauphin*, Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*). We will examine uses of drama as political weapons (Pearse’s *An Rí*) and as acts of cultural memory (Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*, Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*).

Required Texts:

- Shaw, *John Bull’s Other Island* (Penguin)
- Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World & Riders to the Sea* (Dover)
- O’Casey, *The Plough and the Stars* (Samuel French)
- Eliot, *The Murder in the Cathedral* (Houghton Mifflin)
- Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Grove)
- Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain & Other Plays* (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux)
- Soyinka, *Death and the King’s Horseman* (Norton)
- Churchill, *Cloud 9* (Theatre Communications)
- Stoppard, *Arcadia* (Faber & Faber)
- Friel, *Translations* (Faber & Faber)
- McDonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (Dramatists)
- McPherson, *The Weir & Other Plays* (Theatre Communications)
- (there will also be selected readings sent out via email or Moodle)

Course Requirements:

Participation	15%
Group Project	15%
Midterm Exam	10%
Essay 1 (Performance/Text Analysis, 5-7 pp.)	15%
Essay 2 (Performance/Text Analysis, 5-7 pp.)	15%
Essay 3 (Interpretive Essay, 8-10 pp.)	30%

Participation

I expect regular participation in class discussions—which means that you’ll have read the relevant texts for the dates assigned. Participation in this class will also include a number of “rehearsal investigations”—working out the uses and affordances of specific scenes by experimenting with in-class performances. The purpose of these rehearsals is to test out interpretations of scenes: that means that you might easily participate by offering strong readings to guide volunteer performers or by closely critiquing what they are or are not able to accomplish.

Of course, I expect everyone to stand up and try performing at some point, if only to understand the kinds of skill and practice required to make theatrical events work. But don’t worry—I also expect that we will all garble lines, feel ridiculous, and make fools of ourselves: the most spectacular *failures* and *difficulties* of performances are usually the starting point for the best discussions.

Group Project

Early in the semester, you will sign up to do a group project with 3-4 of your classmates. You will prepare and perform a scene from one of the assigned plays and open class discussion that day (usually the second day scheduled for that play).

You can divide the following tasks up however you want (and according to the needs of the scene you’re working on). Obviously some require more time, practice, and/or resources than you’ll have, but you should be prepared to discuss what you *would* do.

At the end of class, you will turn in a breakdown of each group member’s assignments and contributions to the project. Barring exceptionally productive or unproductive contributions, each group member will receive the grade assigned to the whole group.

1. Direction: ideas; coherence; visibility; blocking
2. Acting: ideas; visibility; coherence
3. Design: ideas; coherence; manufacture
4. Synopsis: prior and following action; themes
5. Analysis: image; language; production emphases; appeals and estrangements
6. Problems: textual; performance
7. Discussion: relevant contexts; further questions

Essay 1 Text Analysis (5-7 pp.)

Citing specific examples, analyze at least three of the following aspects of a play's text: use of stage directions, use of language as setting, use of language in character development, use of language to create emotional appeal or tone, tension-building or estrangement effects, use of images or sound, and overall relationship of the language to the audience.

Due: 2/17

Essay 2: Production Analysis (5-7 pp.)

This assignment requires you to go see a live production of a play (i.e. *Treefall* here at Rhodes), or, with my prior approval, a select range of recordings of performances on DVD (available in Barrett library and through Netflix).

Citing specific examples, analyze at least three of the following aspects of a production: acting, directing (blocking, pace, tone), design (lighting, set, costume), performance contingencies, and overall coherence.

*I am willing to consider alternative deadlines if you plan to attend and analyze one of the shows after the deadline, but you must meet with me and give me a clear account of your plans beforehand. I would *highly* recommend turning it in as early as possible.

Due: 4/4

Paper 3 Interpretive Essay (5-10 pp.)

Construct a persuasive argument using appropriate examples from the text AND performances (either from historical productions or a clearly described hypothetical production) for an important reading of the play. Make your argument as specific as you can. For example, "*Hamlet* uses imagery of corruption" would be too general. Better: "An effective production of *Hamlet* would use dingy costumes to draw attention to the emphasis on corruption in the language of the play."

Due: 4/30

SCHEDULE

The schedule is, as schedules tend to be, subject to change. I will announce any changes in class. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find a classmate and check if there have been any changes. If you lose your copy of the syllabus, or the schedule ends up wildly different from how it is now, I'll gladly send you another copy, but I can't promise it immediately on demand.

Plays can be a different sort of animal to read, but once you have the knack, they go pretty quickly. Therefore, with the exception of our first play, I expect that you will have read the

ENTIRE play on the first day it is assigned. We may only discuss Act 1 or 2 on the first day, but in many cases our discussion will depend on your knowing later plot points, etcetera. Also, don't expect to leach off of the exuberance of other classmates who are doing the reading: I do notice when arguments and discussion, however brilliantly improvised, don't end up drawing on any substantial reading of the plays. On the flip side, I also notice when the occasional comment, however quiet or brief, expresses a serious engagement with the text and its performance possibilities.

Day	Date	Assignments
Wednesday	January 11	Introduction: Reading Plays and Playing with Readings
Friday	13	Shaw, John Bull's Other Island
Monday	16 (MLK)	No class
Wednesday	18	Shaw, John Bull's Other Island
Friday	20	Shaw, John Bull's Other Island
Monday	23	Synge, The Playboy of the Western World
Wednesday	25	Synge, The Playboy of the Western World
Friday	27	Synge, The Playboy of the Western World
Monday	30	McDonagh, The Cripple of Inishmaan
Wednesday	February 1	McDonagh, The Cripple of Inishmaan
Friday	3	McDonagh, The Cripple of Inishmaan
Monday	6	Pearse, An Rí; "Proclamation" (online)
Wednesday	8	O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars
Friday	10	O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars
Monday	13	O'Casey, The Plough and the Stars
Wednesday	15	Craig, "The Art of the Theatre" (online)
Friday	17	Yeats, Purgatory (online) [ESSAY 1 DUE]
Monday	20	Eliot, The Murder in the Cathedral
Wednesday	22	Eliot, The Murder in the Cathedral
Friday	24	Eliot, The Murder in the Cathedral
Monday	27	MIDTERM EXAM
Wednesday	29	Beckett, Waiting for Godot
Friday	March 2	Beckett, Waiting for Godot
Monday	5	Beckett, Waiting for Godot
Wednesday	7	Beckett, Waiting for Godot
Friday	9	Beckett, Waiting for Godot
Monday	12	Spring Break
Wednesday	14	Spring Break
Friday	16	Spring Break
Monday	19	Soyinka, Death and the King's Horseman
Wednesday	21	Soyinka, Death and the King's Horseman
Friday	23	Soyinka, Death and the King's Horseman
Monday	26	Soyinka, Death and the King's Horseman
Wednesday	28	Churchill, Cloud Nine
Friday	30	Churchill, Cloud Nine
Monday	April 2	Churchill, Cloud Nine
Wednesday	4	Churchill, Cloud Nine [ESSAY 2 DUE]
Friday	6	Easter Recess
Monday	9	Stoppard, Arcadia

Wednesday	11	Stoppard, Arcadia
Friday	13	Stoppard, Arcadia
Monday	16	Friel, Translations
Wednesday	18	Friel, Translations
Friday	20	Friel, Translations
Monday	23	McPherson, The Weir
Wednesday	25	McPherson, The Weir
Friday	27	McPherson, The Weir; Evaluations
Monday	30	[ESSAY 3 DUE]