Education Resources
Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company presents the Abbey Theatre / Amharclann Na Mainistreach production
Terminus
By Mark O’Rowe

PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

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Education Resource written by Kerreen Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy

KEY

AIM of exercise or section + Extension Exercises
Drama Exercises + English Exercises
YouTube Download and watch
Play online

TERMINUS
Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2011
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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Mark O’Rowe
Set & Costume Designer – Jon Bausor
Lighting Designer – Philip Gladwell
Sound Designer – Philip Stewart

CAST

A - Olwen Fouéré
B - Catherine Walker
C - Declan Conlon

MAN C
I’ve heard tell that even the Devil remembered Heaven after he fell
Terminus

THEMES

Isolation
Urbanization
Irish Drama
SYNOPSIS

Woman A is a mother and an ex-teacher, who is volunteering in a phone counselling service. Concerned for a young distressed pregnant girl ‘Helen’ whose voice over the phone she recognizes, Woman A goes looking for her through the dark night streets of Dublin.

Woman B lives a mundane existence – the bus home from work, the telly and a micro-wave dinner is her daily routine. Invited out for a drink with a friend and her husband she meets ‘Andy’ who lures her up a crane. Rejecting his sexual advances, she steps back and falls. Wondering why she hasn’t hit the ground she opens her eyes to see she has been rescued by a flying Demon of worms. When she asks the Demon why he rescued her he admits he was desperate to touch a woman.

Man C has an overpowering fear of women. Having made a pact with the Devil trading his fear of women for the gift of singing he goes on a killing spree. After picking up an unsuspecting woman in a pub he kills her. He confronts three men who had teased him earlier in the evening and murders them.

The Dublin of the real is transformed into a strange and threatening landscape. When Woman A finds Helen she looks like Hades. No longer in a world of reality these three isolated people find themselves in the world of the supernatural and fantastical with flying demons and avenging angels.

As they journey between the real world and the fantastic the characters are literally on a collision course as their paths cross and their lives are revealed to be intimately intertwined. Having crashed his car Man C tired and hungry from having to search for more victims on foot steals a truck. Woman A is reunited with her lost daughter. Woman B recognizing Woman A, screams “Mother” as she lays dying after being hit by the truck Man C is driving. Fleeing the scene of the accident Man C finds himself face to face with the Devil again but this time on his final descent into Hell.
Consider

All stories begin with place.

In fantastic fiction the ordinary everyday world is invaded by events or creatures from the world of fantasy.

Terminus has been compared to John Milton’s Paradise Lost.

References: ‘Victorian Urban Gothic : The First Modern Fantastic Literature’
Kathleen Spencer in Intersections: Fantasy and Science Fiction
Eds G E Slusser, E S Rabkin 1987

‘After Beckett’, review of Terminus, Eamonn Kelly, in ‘Books Ireland’
Feb. 2008
HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

Mark O’Rowe is one of the new generation of Irish writers who emerged as part of a period of rapid social change in Ireland referred to as the ‘Celtic Tiger’ – an era of unprecedented financial growth that ended with a descent into recession. From the mid-1990s, Ireland became ‘the most globalized country in the world’ with its non-Irish-born population increasing from 6 to 12 percent by the end of 2008. These shifts had a profound effect on Irish theatre dissolving previously held geographic, economic and cultural boundaries.

The literary Celtic Tigers have been identified as Brian Friel, Sean O’Casey, Marie Jones, Martin McDonagh, Marina Carr, Conor McPherson, Dion Boucicault, Enda Walsh, Marie Jones and Elizabeth Kuti. Also the emblematic works of dance theatre company Fabulous Beast signify the intertextuality and engagement with other art forms such as film that have become a feature of this new generation of theatre artists.

The Celtic Tiger dramatists challenged Irish drama’s traditional concern with rural life by focusing on urban stories and re-workings of classical works and are often characterised by ‘high-octane language and a surreal and violent sensibility’. The social and cultural changes that accompanied Ireland’s rapid economic transformation in the 1990s and its most recent demise with the Global Financial Crisis continue to provide these writers with a rich reservoir of ideas and themes in their examination and critiquing of what it means not only to be Irish but to be human in a volatile global economy.

Terminus has been described as a ‘metaphysical odyssey’ an urban tale combining elements of the fantastic, gothic horror, cartoon violence, poetic verse and human pathos. A quest journey through the streets of Dublin - St.Declan’s Road, Dollymount, Ormonde Quay, and Heuston Station – the characters teeter from the top of a crane. The idea to write Terminus came from O’Rowe’s interest in a real life incident when a female cyclist was dragged under a truck and killed in Dublin and the common site of cranes dotting the city’s skyline.

Terminus is written in a poetic rap style and intersecting monologue structure. There is a strong
James Joycian form underlying the text – stream of consciousness laced with poetic puns and word play. Mark O’Rowe’s literary influences include James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, David Mamet and Harold Pinter. As a child O’Rowe was an avid consumer of action and horror films and he says these have had a greater impact on his work than any formal theatre writing training. These popular culture influences are borne in his propensity for high-powered language, the fantastical and bold juxtapositions between violence and comedy.

Mark O’Rowe is an accomplished screenwriter and consistent with his stage works is focused on representing the brutal side of urban life. Terminus is his directing début.

**Consider**
The Celtic Tiger dramatist’s represent Irish culture as a ‘collision culture’.

References:
“Celtic Tiger Cinema: Irish Dramatists and/as Filmmakers” Werner Huber in *Cinema’s Of Ireland* Eds Isabelle le Corf, Estelle Epinoux 2009

*Playboys, Demons, and the Last Kick of a Tiger: Irish Theater in 2007* Patricia Byrne
New Hibernia Review - Volume 12, Number 3, Fómhar/Autumn 2008, pp. 134-143

*Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* 2010 Patrick Lonergan

Lyn Gardener The Guardian Review 5 August 2008
[http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2008/aug/05/edinburgh.terminus](http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2008/aug/05/edinburgh.terminus)
Additional Resources

Abbay Theatre
http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/

Terminus trailer (embedded in Archives of Abbey Theatre website) has excerpts from the performance, interviews with the writer and cast.

Mark O’Rowe
Interview on Terminus http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYOVIJAVPqs

Interview Trinity News, Polly Graham

List of works, reviews, quotes
http://www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/o/ORowe_M/life.htm

Literary Influences
James Joyce Ulysses
Samuel Beckett Molloy series
David Mamet House of Games (film version 1987 directed by Mamet)
Works of Harold Pinter

Terminus Image Sources
‘Death Of A Cyclist’ media story

Dublin Cranes from a Crane Driver’s POV – photo montage accompanied by U2 sound track
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muBY3soG5Uw

Review of Terminus NY Production
‘For Him, the Devil Is in the Rhymes’ New York Times 2008 Jason Zinoman
**Film Screenplays**

*Intermission* 2003
Opening Scene clip – demonstrates O’Rowe’s urban concerns, violence and humour juxtapositions, rhythmic dialogue/monologue form

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8EGCC9NNvo

*Boy A* 2007

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VaSQNUt9H4

*Celtic Tigers*

*Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years 1990 to 2008: Gender, Bodies, Memory*
by Susan Cahill (to be published in June 2011)

Fabulous Beast Company – dance theatre Youtube excerpt from their re-working of classical ‘Giselle’

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wl8fPSD7T74
**AIM:** To develop skills in composing a monologue for solo performance utilizing a range of sources.

**Re-telling**

*Terminus* was inspired by two images: the death of a female cyclist pulled under a truck and killed in a busy Dublin intersection and the multiple cranes of Dublin’s skyline in the advent of the Irish building boom in the 1990’s.

**Select & Re-tell** a story that interests you – from a newspaper story, a fairy-story, an urban myth, a story someone told you.

**Ask yourself,** why have I chosen this story to use rather than another?

- What interests me most about the story – the events, the people, the setting?
- Is it something I don’t understand about the story that makes me want to re-tell it?
- Is it similar to something I’ve experienced myself?
- If it’s sad, what makes it sad?
- If it’s sad what do I need to do to make it funny?
- If it’s funny what would I do to make it tragic?

**Extension:**

- **Select** two images from real life: one of a place and one of a person.
- **Write** a story based on both images.

**Point of View & Narrative Voice**

The characters in *Terminus* tell individual stories in monologue form.

**Write & Present** a monologue from one person’s point of view based on your re-told story.

**Reflection:**

How did the choice of narrative point of view affect the story?
When watching the STC performance

Who are the characters speaking to?
Why do the characters not interact physically?
What kind of world do the characters live in?

Reference: The Writing Book  Kate Grenville

“WOMAN B
Don’t fret, my dear, or fear.
It’s a piece of cake from here.

Terminus”
AIM: To analyse and synthesize O’Rowe’s use of rhyme and rhythm in Terminus.

Rhyme and rhythm are key stylistic features of O’Rowe’s dramatic writing. His crafting of rhyme at times mirrors the sardonic tones of urban rap–style music lyrics.

He describes writing the first draft of Terminus: “I wrote a couple lines one day, and there was some rhyming going on. So I thought, ‘O.K., lets keep it up.’”

‘He reaches, I slip his grip, step back and, blind to behind, I trip and topple and, lacking any space to sprawl, I bounce off the edge of the arm and fall and twist and turn and spurn the earth’s unstoppable rise by closing my eyes.’

Woman B

Discuss O’Rowe’s approach to writing with reference to the sample text.
What do you notice about the language?
What devices is the writer using to create rhythm?

Word Games
Write a paragraph without using the letter ‘e’.
Write a paragraph in which every word starts with ‘b’.
Write a paragraph in which every consecutive word begins with a new letter of the alphabet from ‘a’ to ‘z’.
Write a dialogue between two characters in rhyming couplets.
Choose ten interesting words from the dictionary. Write a paragraph in any style or form of writing using all the words – a poem, song, story, dialogue, report, editorial.

Extension:
Re-Write your character monologue from the Re-telling writing task with your character speaking in poetic language.
Consider
     Rhyme
     Puns
Assonance – a vowel rhyme, as in ‘turn and spurn’
Repetition & Lists
Alliteration - repetition of the beginning sounds of
words, as in ‘step back and, blind to behind’

*Word Association*

Form a circle, start a continuous clapping rhythm ending with a finger click on each hand.
Go around the circle, one by one and say a word on the right hand click and another on the left hand click.
Next person say the previous person’s word on their right had click and adds a new word on their left click – without breaking the rhythm.

Extensions:
Begin your word with the last letter of the previous word.
Start every word with ‘b’
Rhyme every new word with the previous word.
Have a conversation in pairs speaking in rhyming couplets.

When watching the STC performance
How is the world created by the way the characters speak?

Reference: *The Writing Book*  Kate Grenville

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WOMAN A
Looking like Hades heated,
defeated, stressed, her body
best described as slight

Terminus
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AIM: To understand and examine O’Rowe’s use of the fantastical.

The Fantastic

Research the Fantastic.
Collect examples – from literature, films, art works.
List common features of the genre.

‘The truly fantastic occurs when the ground rules of a narrative are forced to make a 180 degree reversal, when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted’

The Fantastic In Literature
Eric S Rabkin

Discuss this statement with reference to your understanding of the Fantastic as a storytelling genre.

From High Places

Imagine climbing to the top of Mt Everest, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, or the world’s tallest skyscraper.
Describe your feelings when you get to the top.
Describe the view from above.
Imagine falling.
Imagine the unexpected.
Step into the world of the fantastic.
What will happen next?

Write a story in which the character falls from a high place but as they fall something unexpected happens, something that moves the story from the real world into the fantastical.
Consider
What is the incident that triggers the fall?

When viewing the STC performance
What images of the fantastical emerge as the drama progresses?
AIM: To understand and explore the acting skills and techniques required in spoken word performance.

‘The script is only about thirty percent of the performance’
Mark O’Rowe

What demands are being made on the actors in *Terminus* with the play’s focus on spoken word, interior monologue and off stage action?

**List 5 key skills demonstrated by the actors in the performance.**

**Consider**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gesture</th>
<th>Movement &amp; Stillness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Diction &amp; Rhythm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How did the production’s dramatic elements contribute to the actor’s performance choices?

**Consider**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lighting</th>
<th>Sound &amp; Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set Design</td>
<td>Staging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costume Design</td>
<td>Direction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Melody**

Letters, syllables, words – these are the musical notes of speech, out of which we fashion measures, arias, whole symphonies.

*Building A Character*
Constantin Stanislavski

**Examine** the selected speech.
But, fast as we hasten, they’re closing the gap, he’s becoming handicapped by his freight, my weight. We keep going, straight across the city centre, then the suburbs, subsequently the country, our mile head start curtailed to half a mile, soon after a quarter. And now, a little further, we falter, fall toward a wood and filter through the trees, and when we should hit ground, we don’t at all, it’s through we fall, into a small place, a crack in the earth, a crawlspace, and crawl is what the demon does, propelling us, face frowning, ever down.

Read it aloud.

Listen to the rhythm and patterns of sounds.

Recite it in monotone. Feel the restrictions of the monotone and the desire to change the tone. Notice where you most feel the desire to break out of the monotone.

Sing it. Forget the sounds have any verbal meaning. Sing in the melody that stresses the sounds you feel are most important.

Perform the speech in your normal voice. Let your voice respond to the sounds that arise naturally as you speak the words.

Imagery

Select key image words/phrases from the speech.

Close your eyes.

Allow your self to see the images in your mind’s eye.

Speak the selected words/phrases in a whisper to yourself.

What do you see when you speak the words?

How do the words/phrases make you feel?

Speak the speech in your natural voice.

Allow your voice to respond to the images and sounds freely and spontaneously, without too much thinking!

Reference: The Actor At Work, Robert Benedetti
**Modes of Address**

‘The monologue is somewhere in the middle of theatre, stand-up and the novel’

Mark O’Rowe

**Rehearse & Present** Character B’s speech.

In preparation address these questions:
- To whom are you speaking?
- Do you see the images?
- Do we (the audience) see them with you?

**Speak** the speech in different modes of address:
- Confessional
- Police statement
- Stand-up routine
- Conversational

How does the mode of address effect the emotional tone of the speech?

**Performance Reflection**

Describe the different vocal tones of the characters in *Terminus*.

How similar and or how different were the characters from each other?
AIM: To understand and be able to apply the writing techniques utilized by Mark O’Rowe.

The Writer’s Craft
The world of Terminus is created through the spoken word. Everything is articulated in words and nothing is actually acted out on stage.

How does Mark O’Rowe write dramatic action through words? O’Rowe describes his writing process as partly ‘stream of consciousness’ and ‘accidental’. Stream of consciousness or ‘interior monologue’ refers to the writing technique that depicts multiple thoughts and feelings that pass through the mind.

Typical features of this style of writing are:
- long passages with minimal or no punctuation
- word play
- focus on a character’s inner thought
- single point of view
- sudden shifts in time and place
- disregard for logical plot and linear narrative structure

Irish writer, James Joyce was an exponent of stream of consciousness writing.

Compare & Contrast these texts by Joyce and O’Rowe.

MOLLY BLOOM, Ulysses by James Joyce
Yes. Thought so. Sloping into the Empire. Gone. Plain soda would do him good. Where Pat Kinsella had his Harp theatre before Whitbread ran the Queen’s. Broth of a boy. Dion Boucicault business with his harvestmoon face in a poky bonnet. Three Purty Maids from School. How time flies, eh? Showing long red pantaloons under his skirts. Drinkers, drinking, laughed spluttering, their drink against their breath. More power, Pat. Coarse red: fun for
drunkards: guffaw and smoke. Take off that white hat. His parboiled eyes. Where is he now? Beggar somewhere. The harp that once did starve us all.

**A, Terminus**

Did I mention she was a student of mine? And this is the thing. Academically fine, she was prone to going around alone all the time. No need of friends or forsaking them or just no talent for making them, she’d drift from class to class, eyes cast down – they were brown, as I recall – and as she passed down halls, head bowed, through crowds of loud, ignoring teens, my heart would break, because she seemed like a ghost of some kind; sort of there, sort of not.

**Consider**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Punctuation</th>
<th>Rhythm &amp; Rhyme</th>
<th>Simile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Voice</td>
<td>Alliteration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Of View</td>
<td>Assonance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Debate** is O’Rowe contemporary theatres new James Joyce?

**References:** *Dictionary Of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J.A Cuddon
Interview with Mark O’Rowe, ‘Grisly scenes in the mind’s eye’
February 4, 2011 Lara Collins-Hughes

‘*Free Association*’ *Writing Improvisations*

Stream of consciousness techniques are often employed by writers to capture the spontaneity, freedom and randomness of a character’s inner thoughts and feelings. By allowing yourself to freely associate, new and surprising ideas and images can emerge in your writing.

**Write** for 60 seconds without stopping. Write exactly what comes into your head, even if it’s only ‘I can’t think of anything to write this is a stupid thing to do’.

**Don’t** write in correct sentences or proper punctuation unless it comes out that way.

**Write** the words ‘I remember’ at the top of a piece of paper. Begin writing.

**Write** the words ‘Yesterday’ at the top of a piece of paper. Begin writing.
Extension

‘Today’
‘Tomorrow’

_Dreamscapes & The Fantastic_

**Write** about a dream you had recently (or a recurring dream), even if you only remember bits of it.

**Look** at the bits.
Do any of them make you think of something else?
Is there anything in waking life that they make you think of?
What is the mood of this dream?
**Use** these bits as a starting point for a creative writing improvisation.

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Extension

Refer to your pre-production research notes on the Fantastic.

**Re-write** your ‘High Places’ scene or ‘Re-telling’ story in the style of O’Rowe (and or James Joyce).
OR

Adapt your scene or story text into the visual style of a graphic novel.

Reference: _The Writing Book_, Kate Grenville
AIM: To understand and examine approach to character and narrative structure.

In the *Terminus* play script the characters are referred to as:

A  *female, forties*
B  *female, twenties*
C  *male, thirties*

Why does the writer choose not to give the characters personal names?

*A, B & C Characters Rules*

A is the main character – they are the story.
B supports character A’s story. But they are not the story.
C is a character that the A and B characters would naturally encounter in their world.

The key to good character writing is that every character should have the potential to be the A character in their own story.

Describe how the A, B, C characters of *Terminus* follow (or not) these drama conventions.


*Creating Character A*

Without trying to think of a story, describe a character: male or female, their age, cultural background, occupation, physical appearance and mood at this moment.

Where is the character: city, country; inside, outside; rich, poor surroundings; cold or hot environment; alone or with others?

*TERMINUS*
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However, limited photocopying for classroom use only is permitted by educational institutions.
* If you have trouble thinking of characters, start by improvising a place, a setting and then add characters later. The city of Dublin was an inspiration for *Terminus*.

**Creating Character B**

Now describe the same things about another character. The second character needn’t have anything to do with the first.

Connect the two characters. Do they already know each other? If they don’t, is there a way in which they meet each other? If they already know each other, are they related by love, hate, accident or physical proximity? Is there a significant place or object, which is important to the characters? Does one of the five senses dominate – sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell? What is the overall mood: menacing, domestic, medative, etc?

**Write** a page in which these two characters interact.

**Creating Character C**

Describe another character. The third character must have something to do with the first character.

**Write** a page in which the first character ‘A’ and third, ‘C’ interact.

**Point of view**

First person - ‘I’

Third person - ‘he, she’, ‘they’

Second person - ‘you’

**Re-write** the A, B, C character texts in the form of three single monologues in first person.

**Inter-cut** the monologues allowing the characters to interact briefly.

For example, in *Terminus* the characters have a number of brief encounters:


Light up on A.

A
You’ll have to be strong from here.

B
...my language having eroded so. Then a kiss and, slowly, she withdraws and because all words are gone, I try to scream in vain, as she leaves me behind for ever ... 

Lights up on C.

C
End of the line...

B
...the one that endures beyond any other ...

C
...I’m almost out of time, man...

B
...Mother!

Lights down on A and B.

References: The Writing Book, Kate Grenville
A, B, C Characters, Caro Clarke