

WR 120 First Major Paper: *The Plough and the Stars*

Assignment: Write a paper of 1500-1750 words with a central claim focused on some aspect of O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*. Your paper must engage with the play text, the production we watch, and at least one additional textual source.

Potential Approaches

1. An argument that compares the play text to the production

This option involves writing a paper that combines close analysis of textual elements with close analysis of specific details of the production. Text and performance would occupy relatively equal places in your body paragraphs. This isn't an exact science since some points could apply to both, but it means that you have a claim that treats both as central objects of your analysis.

2. An argument that uses the production as a lens through which to analyze the play text

This option entails using details from the production as a means through which to close read specific aspects of the text.

3. An argument that uses the play text as a lens to analyze the production

This option involves using details from the play text as a means through which to closely analyze specific elements of the production.

4. An argument focused on the production itself with supporting use of the play text

This option makes aspects of performance or technical, theatrical elements the major focus of your argument and uses the play text to aid in your close analysis of these elements.

5. An argument that primarily analyzes the play text, but uses elements from the production as a pertinent hook in the introduction and a central focus in a deeply developed conclusion

This option involves using the current production as a meaningful occasion or context for an analysis that primarily focuses on the play text. Although the performance will not be a primary focus of your analysis in body paragraphs, it will need to play a pivotal role in your introduction and then return as a central factor in a substantial conclusion that considers potential further questions about the play that the performance brings into focus. The challenge of this approach is that you do need to make sure that the involvement of the production is still significant and not just a disconnected afterthought.

Defining Your Focus

It may be that you have a clear idea which approach works for you and stick with that approach from brainstorming to final version, or you may start out thinking you want option five and then find that your paper morphs into option two. That's fine. What's important is that your writing process enables you to end up with a paper that ultimately has a clear, consistent approach. As with any claim-driven paper, you want to avoid situations where your claim does not match

your argument. For example, you don't want to imply through your claim that you will be analyzing both the play text and performance in detail and then write a paper in which you use one specific aspect of the production as a lens for your close readings of the play text.

1. Comparing the play text to the production

Note: Comparisons must always have a specific purpose behind them and do not tend to be persuasive arguments if they are just a list of similarities and differences. One strategy that can help you find the significance behind your comparison is to consider whether you want to focus on a surprising difference against a background of similarity, or a surprising similarity against a background of difference. Shifting three times can also be possible – obvious similarity, semi-obvious difference, deeper similarity OR obvious difference, semi-obvious similarity, deeper difference, but any more than three controlled shifts usually leads to confusion.

- Compare the portrayal of a particular character or the relationship between two characters as represented in the play text vs. this particular production.
- Compare the presentation of a particular historical element in the play vs. this production.
- Compare a pivotal scene or set of 2-3 interconnected scenes in the play text vs. this production.

2. Using the production as a lens through which to analyze the play text

Note: The distinction between a lens paper and a comparative paper is that the source you use as a lens is usually referred to briefly in each body paragraph but most of the evidence and analysis in the body paragraphs will be focused on the other text. The difference between a lens paper and the fifth option below is that the source that functions as lens does need to be interwoven into not just the introduction and conclusion, but the body paragraphs as well.

- Use a particularly striking choice the director of this production made in shaping the set to analyze the portrayal of the setting in the play text.
- Use a particularly striking choice the director made in the portrayal of a single character or relationship between two characters to analyze the portrayal in the play text.
- Use a particularly striking choice the director made in relation to representing a particular issue (poverty, nationalism, socialism, gender roles, etc.) to analyze this issue in the original play text.

3. Using the play text as a lens to analyze the production

- Use a description or two of the set from the original play text as a lens through which to analyze those sets in the production.
- Use the descriptions of a particular character in the play text or a deeply connected pair of characters to analyze how those characters are represented in the production.

4. Focusing on the production itself with supporting use of the play text

- Analyze the use of lighting in several pivotal scenes in the production using the play text to refresh your memory about particular details from the scenes you analyze.
- Analyze the blocking in several pivotal scenes in the production using the play text to refresh your memory about the characters present and particular lines in the scenes.
- Analyze the use of specific props or scenery in several pivotal scenes in the production using the play text to refresh your memory.
- Analyze a particular actor's portrayal of a specific character or the portrayals of two actors whose characters share important interactions.

5. Analyzing the play text, but using the production in the introduction and conclusion

- Focus in the introduction and conclusion on the temporal context – the centenary year of the Rising – in relation to some of the other anniversaries. What are the effects of this play being performed specifically in 2016?
- Open your introduction by describing a striking choice that the director of this production made, focus on analyzing the play text in the body paragraphs, and then return in the conclusion to analyzing the director's choice in more detail in relation to your readings of the play text.

The options above are not meant to be exhaustive but are intended to give you a sense of how you might write about some potential issues in the context of these different approaches. If you have other ideas that fascinate you, please do pursue them. You will all be meeting with me, but I am also around in person and through email for additional questions or consultation.