

**Transcription**
**Open Submissions Workshop #15: Interviews with Breakfast Plays Playwrights**

**Video (with closed captions):** <https://youtu.be/fzy2ybhVpuw>

[AUDIO BEGINS]

**Q1: What’s your name and what’s the names of your play?**

UMA NADA-RAJAH:

My name is Uma Nada-Rajah and my play is called 'The Water Cooler’.

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN:

My name is Conor O'Loughlin and my breakfast play is called ‘Doomsdays'.

AMY RHIANNE MILTON:

My name is Amy Rhianne and my breakfast play is called ‘Matterhorn'.

REBECCA MARTIN:

Hi, my name is Rebecca Martin and my breakfast play is called 'Rabbit Catcher’.

JAMIE COWAN: My name is Jamie Cowan and my breakfast play is 'Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat)’.

**Q2: What’s your play about and what inspired you to write it?**

JAMIE COWAN:

‘Contemporary Political Ethics' is a play that takes place during the final hour of the general election at the country's quietest polling station. It's really about three very different people from very different walks of life who have gathered here for the final hour and are just trying to make it to the end hopefully without killing each other.

What inspired me to write it is this sort of idea that at the moment people are treating politics a bit like sports teams in that you kind of pick your team and once you're a part of that you don't care about anyone else you only care about winning at any cost. And that to me I think is a really strange and sort of disturbing idea especially in regards to politics, which affects everyone's way of life and that was something I wanted to explore a little bit further and kind of see just how dark and how aggressive it can really become in this day and age.

UMA NADA-RAJAH:

I started this play in lockdown, um, it was it was the time like where it was just before the killing of George Floyd and it was that kind of sense of impending tension where you felt like America was just about to implode. Watching it all happen kind of through social media which felt so claustrophobic and yeah-. It's a play about love and friendship and communicating or failing to communicate across the chasm of race and be that black or brown or white and yeah I guess it's also a play about institutions and the inability of institutions to change.

AMY RHIANNE MILTON:

It's set in Durham Cathedral, I'm from Durham and it has always been a very inspiring place for me it's so beautiful. I like a lot of sci-fi, I love like a lot of time strangeness and I really wanted to combine the two because that seemed like a good combination! Inside of the cathedral is the last community left alive or what they assume is and three women, sometimes who are there sometimes who are not, I'm not sure how to describe it without kind of giving it away but basically inside the cathedral is the last place in the world where time still works, as in it goes in the forward linear motion that as we all experience it, and then outside of cathedral is where time is what they describe as being undone and where they describe as no cause and effect and it kind of messes with their reality.

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN:

Doomsdays is centered around a meeting slash confrontation between former members of the 2012 doomsday cult, taking place many years later. So on the one side there's the ex-leader who has since been able to move on and move past it and then two former followers who've not found that to be true for themselves. And then we also get some flashbacks to give us an insight into what their life was like back in 2012 especially that pivotal moment when the apocalypse didn't happen.

I suppose it began with me asking quite a glib question to myself which is, would those who suspected that the world was going to end in 2012 feel in some way vindicated by everything that's happened since? As I developed that thought it ultimately suggested the characters which later suggested a setting which then suggests kind of the bones of a narrative. I think it's always a case of landing on enough of those maybe happy coincidences that ultimately become the overall story or the design.

REBECCA MARTIN:

It is a contemporary mythology, It takes place in the Scottish highlands looking out to Inverness in the Black Isle on a hill called Old Hill. 'Rabbit Catcher' is half in our world and half an otherworldly one where legends are formed, Devil's rule and deities are birthed and the dead talk. It explores violence, mythology, poetic language and aims to de-glamorise the highlands. It’s the grand tale of Ren who lost her life in Old Hill and her realisation of how she was murdered and who she has destined to become after death. There's also symbolisms throughout the piece about rape culture.

One of the main inspirations for 'Rabbit Catcher' is the Highland landscape itself, its partnership in beauty and brutality. I want to tell a story that contextualises this into words and imagery through poetic language and to use that language in the de-glamorisation of the land. But I also want to offer audiences a different perspective about the Highlands that isn't for the narration of the Highland [inaudible] and the Battle of Culloden. I believe it's important to showcase a different representation and a contemporary voice from the Highlands about the Highlands.

**Q3: Can you tell me a little bit about the process of writing your Breakfast Play? How did it change during the process?**

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN:

The process was fantastic in that it was the same as if the play was being produced in any format and also the same that someone would have gone through even if they had plenty credits to their name. Because ultimately it's about drafting and re-drafting and getting the the play down to a form that that can fly once it's in front of actors.

REBECCA MARTIN:

So I think very visually. So part of my process of writing is visualising myself in that world that I’ve created, so for example how the sunlight may shine on a character or the sound of a pine cone falling from the tree and how it's landing on the ground. I need to see my head experience it as if it were a film, but it wasn't until breakfast plays that I realised one of my processes in writing is actually drawing illustrating scenes or a character or a particular feeling or symbolism. Rabbit Catcher's world became extremely important and vital throughout my journey. [SHOWING DRAWING] So this one here, so you can see here a rabbit on top of the dead skull and a quote from my play, 'I am the favourite one'. So basically I would search on Pinterest if I find something inspiring that related towards my script I would have the need to draw it in my version. You can see here there's a girl with a crown on even though there's not a crown - a girl with a crown in my play, but it was vital in my process and just whenever I had a writer's block or whenever I wanted to create a certain emotion it was really handy to draw out first.

JAMIE COWAN:

The process of writing it was quite interesting because I kind of started with this idea, but I didn't really know exactly what the shape of it was going to be just yet I knew that I wanted three people who were radically different from each other it's going to be locked in one room together. I didn't really know where it was going to go from that, so a big part of the play for me was just trying to figure out how these personalities clashed with each other and how that would kind of naturally bring about this conflict that arises over a really minor and simple issue that could be resolved quite easily. It was also really a case of trying to make sure that the comedy came through it as well that was something I think in some of the earlier drafts it was a bit tricky to kind of weave that comedy in with the actual story and the politics and the characters. So over the course of the writing process it was really a case of trying to find this really fine balance between the development of the characters and the plot while also making sure it’s entertaining to listen to for the audience.

**Q4: What was it like creating a play for an audio/podcast format? How did it differ from creating a play for the stage?**

UMA NADA-RAJAH:

Yeah, so never done that before and I remember I used to listen to like audio like cassette tapes when I was a kid and I like absolutely loved them and I've never really listened to like radio drama before but I had the love of it there.

AMY RHIANNE MILTON:

'Cause I know i'm a very visual thinker a lot of my first draft had like big combat scenes and fights and explosions. I was like okay what does this feel like now that it's an audio kind of experience and then suddenly we've got all of these like voices coming through and these whispers and basically just finding other forms for all the physical things that I put in there to like have a different life as something more audio. That was that was fun it was a challenge and yeah I enjoyed doing that.

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN:

In radio in particular and I think it's maybe important in every play but because audio does need an extra level of maybe immediacy or clarity, make sure that every character has a clear intention and a clear obstacle to that intention, and a clear tactic to overcome it. Then there's some of the I suppose other maybe more expensive things that you can do in audio so making use of sound effects, maybe making use of the distance between characters to tell an interesting story or give an interesting kind of subtext. And then I would say the ending is much bigger than would otherwise have been the case, it definitely goes places that it would just from a purely practical point of view it wouldn't have been possible to do so. And in some ways I think it changed it changed in very specific ways as well so I'm kind of introducing a concept with two characters confront someone from their past I feel like if it had been a staged version of that, they would have been much more polished about what they were trying to do because you could make use of that kind of, you

know, Pinter-esqe silences and menace but instead I went through to making them much more talkative so they're less polished. And then maybe that adds a whole new dimension to the story they can accidentally provide some of the tools that you can use to get out of that situation. So I do think I changed in lots of ways big and small.

REBECCA MARTIN:

It definitely was a little bit tricky at times and as for myself I really needed to write the stage version before I was able to write the audio podcast version of the piece. I did have to remind myself later on that is for audio and to cater towards that format, and I listened to a podcast called Soundstage which is created by the Playwrights Horizon based in the U.S which helped me thinking about different ways in telling the 'Rabbit Capture' story through this medium.

**Q5: What was it like rehearsing the play remotely?**

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN:

Rehearsing the play to me was as beneficial as any other kind of rehearsal I feel I'm very much still learning how to be a writer in a rehearsal room and how to be an asset in that situation. And even though everything was being done remotely it still felt as close as possible to that experience. It was directed by Debbie Hannan who did a phenomenal job and I think made sure that we hit the ground running and never really stopped. And likewise the actors they very quickly got not just the characters but then all of the extra technological elements that um that the recording called for.

JAMIE COWAN:

It is something that kind of gives you a very interesting new perspective on the

rehearsal process and kind of starting off it's maybe a little bit tricky and a little bit unusual at first but as you kind of get into and get to see the actors really get into the pace of it and get into the swing of it starts to become something really quite exciting to watch happen even though it’s happening remotely. Again I'd say it was definitely fun definitely challenging but I think it's something that I'll remember forever in terms of the sheer uniqueness of having done it this way.

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN: I would say theatre, it's ultimately about establishing a connection, so firstly, there's the connection amongst the creative team and then later the connection with the audience

and I think it really speaks to the power of that connection that it still comes through even when everyone is at a distance and then i'm sure the same will come through of that connection once it's out, um, in the world.

UMA NADA-RAJAH:

I was a bit nervous about like eight hours on Zoom but it was an absolute dream um the team were really great, the actors are actors that I tremendously admire and yeah working with Debbie and [Eleanor White] was just wonderful so it was it was just a delight really.

**Q6: How does it feel to have your play premiere as part of the Traverse’s first Digital Festival?**

JAMIE COWAN:

It's really exciting to be honest, it’s really amazing how this process has been adapted around everything that’s happened over the last few months, so getting to be a part of something this kind of bold and exciting and new is really it's really quite a big honour. I think it's definitely something that i'm really proud to be a part of.

AMY RHIANNE MILTON:

I couldn't believe that I got a Breakfast Play in the first place, I remember seeing them last year and seeing people in them and just loving them so much. And yeah we don't get like the breakfast roll and cup of tea this time but we can make those in our own homes but the fact that it's even still

happening, the fact that like Traverse is still making something happen even in this strange world that we now have to all have online I think that's pretty amazing and I feel very kind of privileged to be a part of it really. Because lots of other things just stopped so it feels pretty special.

**Q7: How are you planning on celebrating the premiere of your Breakfast Play? Are you going to host a virtual listening party?**

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN:

I'm sure everyone is saying this but a breakfast roll is a must.

REBECCA MARTIN:

Definitely a bottle of bubbles will be on the table, I do plan to have a wee hosting party at some point but I think I want to listen to 'Rabbit Catcher’ by myself and enjoy the experience rather than be concerned by other people's facial expressions, their opinions. I just want to really emerge myself in that experience.

CONOR O'LOUGHLIN:

The last few years some of my happiest festival memories would involve being in the Trav Bar after a show and kind of dissecting it with everyone so it'll be interesting to find a way to keep doing that even from separate locations.

UMA NADA-RAJAH:

Right I guess the one great thing about writing is that it becomes like as soon as you get to a stage where you’re you're happy with what you created you pass it along and it becomes something completely different and someone else’s. So yeah, I’m really looking forward to listening to it.

AMY RHIANNE MILTON:

I will be with my family and they, not many of them have had an opportunity to see my work and especially since I moved to Edinburgh. It will be really quite special to be able to like just put it on

and have it on in a room where like my grandparents are there, and like friends are there who've never-. Yeah the fact that people are going to be able to hear it from anywhere that's really special.

[AUDIO ENDS]