

TH316-15 Theatre and National Identities

24/25

Department

SCAPVC - Theatre and Performance Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Nadine Holdsworth

Credit value

15

Module duration

9 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module looks at how English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish theatre institutions, playwrights, theatre-makers and performance artists have engaged with conceptions of the nation, nationalism and national identity during the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

This module's overarching question relates to how English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish theatre institutions, playwrights, theatre-makers and performance artists have engaged with conceptions of the nation, nationalism and national identity during the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. The module will explore how theatre has contributed to the construction and reappraisal of the nation and national identities through the sites it occupies, the stories it tells and the representations it offers. In particular, this module will explore the fact that ideas of the nation are constantly in flux, subject to the play of history and politics, and that the way theatre engages with the nation changes according to different geographical, political, economic, social and cultural circumstances. The module will begin by introducing key theories on the nation and national

identity before looking at plays and performances hailed as seminal 'state of the nation' works or celebrated as offering a distinct national identity by reclaiming histories, local dialects and indigenous cultural traditions. This will be followed by a focus on the idea and different manifestations of 'national theatres'. The module will consider a range of performance forms: plays, devised works, site-specific performance, community plays and performance installations.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week One: Nation, Nationalism and National Identity

This session will introduce the broad concerns of the module and begin to consider some theories, ideas and concepts central to an understanding of what we might mean when we talk about the nation, nationalism and national identity. In particular, we will look at these questions through the lens of Brexit and what the vote might tell us about competing notions of national identity and how the National Theatre in London responded with *My Country: a Work in Progress* (2016).

STATE-OF-THE-NATION PLAYS AND PERFORMANCES

Week Two: Reclaiming the Highlands: 7:84 Scotland's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*. This session will explore a seminal performance event widely credited with reinventing the form, subject matter, performance strategies and geography of Scottish theatre.

Week Three: Memory, Mourning and Survival: Brith Gof's *Gododdin* Drawing on the theoretical concept of 'deep maps', this session will consider how the Wales-based performance company Brith Gof created a multi-dimensional, site-specific cultural encounter to explore issues around notions of history, heritage, cultural legacies, political projects, cultural memory and national identification.

Week Four: Negotiating the Past through the Present: Tinderbox's *Convictions*

In 2000 Tinderbox Theatre Company staged a series of performances in Crumlin Road Courthouse in Belfast. This session will explore how the pieces negotiated the histories, memories and reverberations of the site in order to destabilise fixed narratives and understandings of Northern Ireland's past.

Week Five: *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*: Roy Williams's *Sing Yer Heart out for the Lads* (2002) In this session, we will look at how Roy Williams explores questions of migration, racial identity, racism and integration. We will think about what it means to be 'English' and question when does patriotism end, xenophobia begin and violent nationalism emerge.

Week Six: Reading Week

NATIONAL THEATRES AND BEYOND

Week Seven: Reimagining the National Theatre for the Twenty-First Century: The National Theatre of Scotland

In this session we will explore the long cultural fight to generate the National Theatre in Scotland. With specific reference to the NTS's inaugural piece *Home* and Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* we will consider the ways that NTS has reconceptualised what a national theatre can be and mean in the twenty-first century.

Week Eight: Reimagining the National Theatre for the Twenty-First Century: National Theatre Wales
Following on from the previous week, we will explore the establishment of NTW and in particular its approach to its inaugural year and the culmination in the large-scale staging of *The Passion*, which is documented in *The Gospel of Us*.

Week Nine: British Asian identities: community, comedy and post-apocalypse

This session will explore two contrasting examples of British Asian playwriting, and their complicated reflections on migrant identities and narratives. In particular, we will explore how each play's chosen style (family comedy and science fiction drama) enables both historical and contemporary reflections on the construction of identity in multicultural Britain.

Week 10: Introduction to 2nd assignment and feedback/tutorials on the 1st assignment

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- By the end of the module, students should be able to discuss the ways in which late twentieth century and twenty-first century performance artists, theatre practitioners and playwrights have explored ideas around nation and national identity in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- By the end of the module, students should be able to identify key themes and theatrical strategies that reoccur in plays and performances emanating from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern that are concerned to explore, negotiate and contest ideas of nationhood.
- By the end of the module, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of how key conceptual frameworks can inform the creation and analysis of contemporary theatre/performance.
- By the end of the module, students should be able to analyse a wide range of plays and performances in relation to their historical and cultural contexts.
- By the end of the module, students should be able to engage in research-based investigation of appropriate primary and secondary source material.
- By the end of the module, students should be able to communicate what they have learnt both orally and in writing.

Indicative reading list

Adams, David, *Stage Welsh: Nation, Nationalism and Theatre*, (Gomer, 1999)

Blandford, Steve, *Theatre & Performance in Small Nations* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013)

Brown, Ian, *Scottish Theatre: Diversity, Language, Continuity* (Rodopi, 2013)

Harvie, Jen, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005)

Holdsworth, Nadine, *Theatre & Nation* (Palgrave, 2010)

Holdsworth, ed. *Theatre and National Identity* (Routledge, 2014)

Jones, Anwen, *National Theatres in Context*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007)

McCrone, David, *The Sociology of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998)

McCrone, David and Frank Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Rebellato, Dan, *Theatre & Globalization* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2009)

Reid, Trish, *Theatre & Scotland* (Palgrave, 2013)

Stevenson, Randall and Gavin Wallace, eds., *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996)

Taylor, Anna-Marie, ed., *Staging Wales: Welsh Theatre 1979-1997* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997)

Wilmer, S. E. ed., *National Theatres in a Changing Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008)

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Research element

Both assessments require the students to engage in independent research into the theory and practice of performance in its historical, national and social context.

Interdisciplinary

Students will be looking at theories of nation, nationalism and national identity drawn from political theory and sociology.

Subject specific skills

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Discuss the ways in which twentieth century and twenty-first century performance artists, theatre practitioners and playwrights have explored ideas around nation and national identity in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Identify key themes and theatrical strategies in plays and performances emanating from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that are concerned to explore, negotiate and contest ideas of nationhood.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how key conceptual frameworks can inform the creation and analysis of contemporary theatre/performance.
- Analyse a wide range of plays and performances in relation to their historical and cultural contexts.
- Engage in research-based investigation of appropriate primary and secondary source material.
- Communicate what they have learnt both orally and in writing.

Transferable skills

research skills
analytical skills
communication skills
presentation skills
group work

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 2 hours (67%)
Tutorials	1 session of 1 hour (2%)
Private study	17 hours (31%)
Total	54 hours

Private study description

Private study 17 hours

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Essay	40%	38 hours	Yes (extension)

With reference to one performance event studied on the module, examine how it investigates the history and contemporary context of the nation it addresses (you should pay particular attention to the relationship between the national context, form and performance strategies in your response).

Portfolio	60%	58 hours	Yes (extension)
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produce research-based Programme notes and illustrations (which can be formatted and submitted as an actual programme) for a plays/performance chosen for its connection to the themes explored in the module.

Feedback on assessment

Oral and written feedback.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 4 of UENA-QW35 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies with Intercalated Year
- Year 3 of UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 3 of UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies
- Year 4 of UTHA-W422 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies