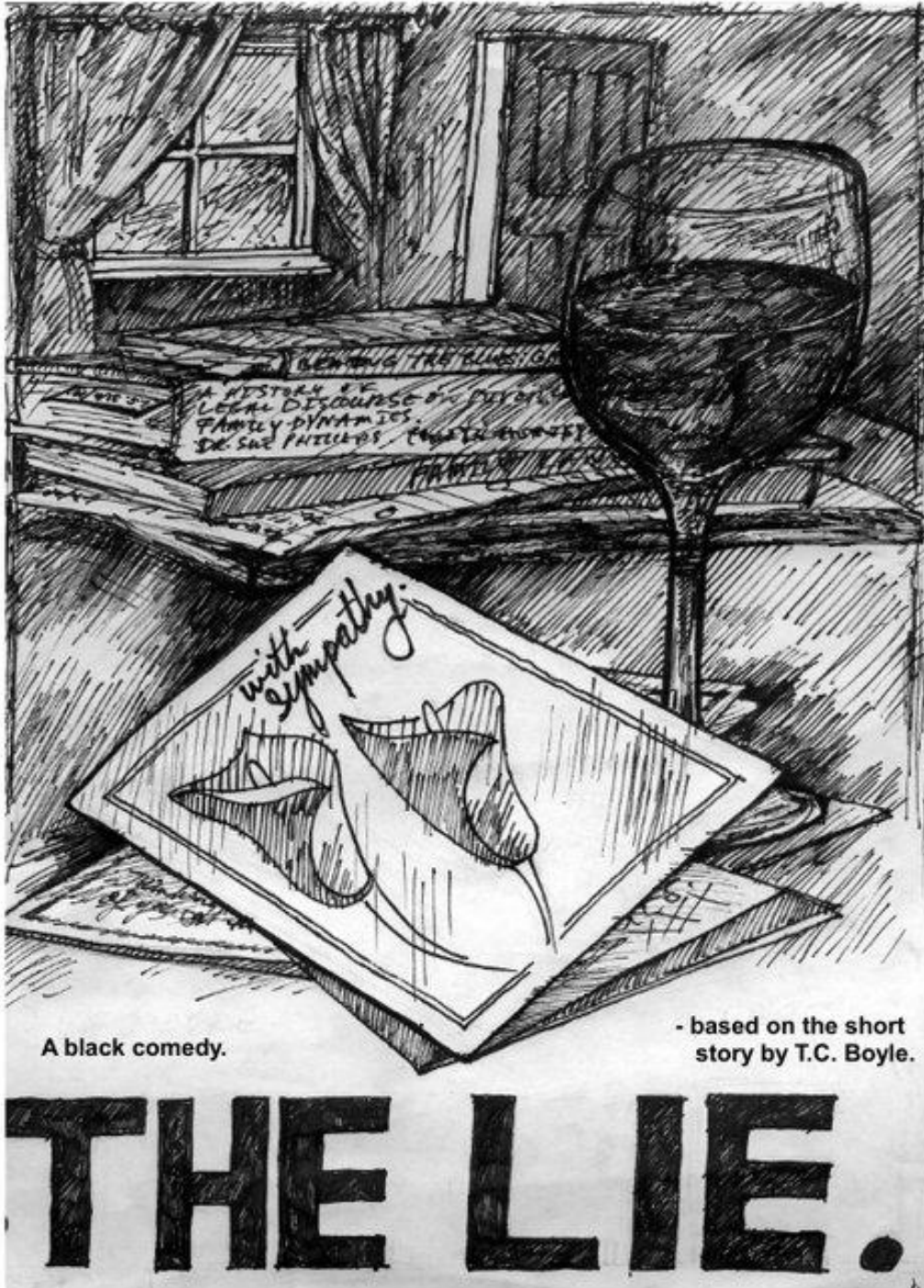


Clare Byrne

Project Report: IATL Student As Producer Fund
"The Lie"



A black comedy.

- based on the short story by T.C. Boyle.

THE LIE.

Capital Centre Studio. Mon. & Tues. Week 9 (29th & 30th Nov.) at 7:00p.m; Free Entry.

Why The Lie?

Upon reading the original short story "The Lie" by US writer T.C.Boyle in a 2008 issue of the New Yorker magazine, I felt it was a unique story that tackled, in a darkly comic way, how far you could push a person. The story, which follows the



unravelling events of a young man Lonnie who lies about the death of his young baby to avoid another day at his dead-end job, is written in the first person. Therefore it didn't immediately feel like a work that could transfer to stage. However once I heard a reading of the story by improviser and actor Stephen Colbert in front of an audience, I was utterly captivated and set about working "The Lie" into something that could be performed on stage.

"I'd used up all my sick days and the two personal days they allowed us, but when the alarm went off and the baby started squalling and my wife threw back the covers to totter off to the bathroom in a hobbled two-legged trot, I knew I wasn't going in to work..." The opening from T.C. Boyle's short story.

My interest in American literature was particularly fuelled when living and working in New York for some time before beginning my studies at Warwick. It was there that I first became familiar with the work of TC Boyle, whose insight into the impact of socio-economic depression on the average man and woman is both rare and affecting, and can be seen particularly his 1995 novel "The Tortilla Curtain". The captivating denouement of "The Lie", the conflicting moral and social arguments communicated with such dark humour drew me into writing an adaptation for the stage, an hour in length to confine it to a therapy session which would serve as a narrative device. I felt particularly given the work I had done in my Politics degree on the societal impact of recessions that this work had a particular relevance to modern Britain, this change of setting also enabled me to put a more personal stamp on the project. It seemed a particularly apposite tale for the recession generation today, which is told, consistently to "keep calm and carry on".

LONNIE
She's sick.

(long pause looking at the healthy baby)

Very sick. With a fever and uh...all that... Well we don't know exactly what's wrong with her yet. The doctors are running all kinds of tests, they haven't been able to tell us anything firm yet. Yeah I'm at the hospital now. They're telling us just to, um, keep, you know, keep calm and, uh, carry on. Dig for victory and all that. Yes. In fact I've got to-

(he covers the phone for a second then picks it back up holding it at a distance)

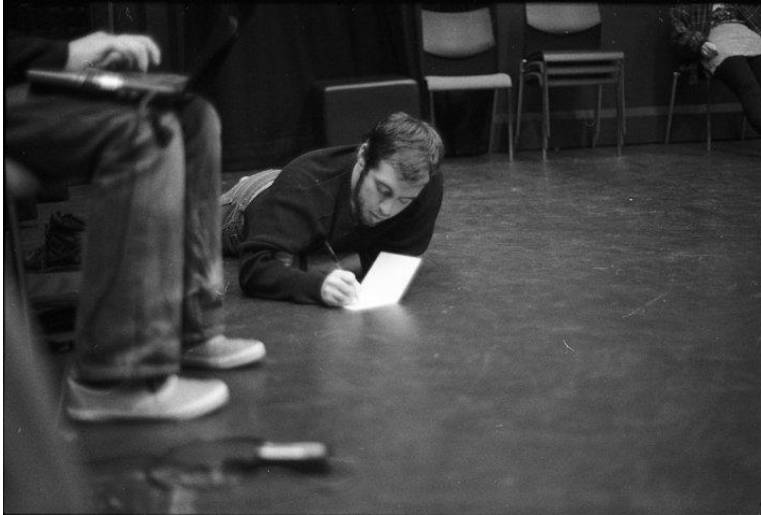
Oh so sorry I didn't realise...*(pulling phone closer)*.

Apparently you're not allowed to use phones in here Sir. Got to go.

He hangs up the phone. Looks down into the crib.

Sorry baby.

Adapting



There were many challenges to adapting an eight-page short story set in America into a timely piece for a British audience. After some invaluable advice from Tarrell McCraney and other participants in the Capital Playwriting workshop at the end of last year I spent the summer completing the adaptation. I was very keen to keep the element of a mind and situation unravelling and not lose the impact of the denouement that hits you sharply and abruptly in the short story.

Therefore the incorporation of a grief counsellor character was necessary to move the piece along in a clear timeline. The character framed each scene, being on stage throughout, with a brief link or introduction. The Grief Counsellor also provided the pressing motivation for Lonnie to reveal his true thoughts, which in turn enabled me to incorporate more of the original story's narrative into the dialogue.

GRIEF COUNSELOR
You're sick.

LONNIE
Yeah. I probably have depression or something right?

GRIEF COUNSELOR
No-

LONNIE
I was reading about seasonal anxiety disorder the other day-

GRIEF COUNSELOR-
I mean you're, a horrid person-

LONNIE
SAD as it's known. All this rain-

GRIEF COUNSELOR
You're a horrid person. Sick. "SAD". Who does something like this...wait rain?

LONNIE
It's been awful lately.

GRIEF COUNSELOR

The rain? The bloody rain? You're going to blame the rain?

LONNIE

I'm sorry. I'm just trying to be honest with you.

The story was told from the first person point of view and so finding a realistic voice for the character of Lonnie in dialogue was a huge challenge. However thanks to the rich source material, finding little clues and mentions in the text, characters for Lonnie to interact with were much easier to create, and an exciting opportunity for me to build four characters from scratch.

Staging / Rehearsal

With a short rehearsal period of 2 to 3 weeks actors were certainly pushed to their limits. Particularly for the actor playing Lonnie, who never leaves the stage, learning lines in such a short space of time was tricky. However as someone who champions improvisation as a theatrical skill, I endeavoured to use this to the projects' advantage, through encouraging improvised dialogue as a solution for blanking lines and doing improvisation exercises in warm ups. This freed the script up to changes that needed to be made. I have since redrafted with tweaks in place that I would only have known about through rehearsing in such an open, educative way as encouraged by IATL. For example the end scene of the piece, in which through a series of incidents Lonnie's wife Clover believing her baby to be dead forces her husband into a confession, was particularly difficult to write. Only through playing with the actors in balancing the comic Lonnie with the overwrought Clover again and again in rehearsal, right up until the day before performance, were we able to find that balance. The end result was not a particularly drastic deviation from the script but a question of delivery and tone, a pitch we would not have hit had we not listened to each other and the reactions we were all having to the denouement.



CLO
VER

Lonnie, what's going on here? Where's the baby? Lonnie
what the hell is going on here? Where's the baby?
(pause) Lonnie where's the baby Lonnie? Where is she?

LONNIE

Listen. Darling, you weren't supposed to find out this
way-

CLOVER

Oh my...Oh my..She's

LONNIE

Clover now calm-

CLOVER

(begins to hyperventilate) She's....she's

LONNIE

Clover wait-

CLOVER

She's...she can't be-

LONNIE

Listen Clover wait what happened was-

CLOVER

She's...my baby, my little girl-

LONNIE

Just wait. Listen, I didn't want to-

CLOVER

How did? How did it happen? How-

LONNIE

Well I did something-

CLOVER

What?

LONNIE

Stupid.

CLOVER

She's? Oh my god-

LONNIE

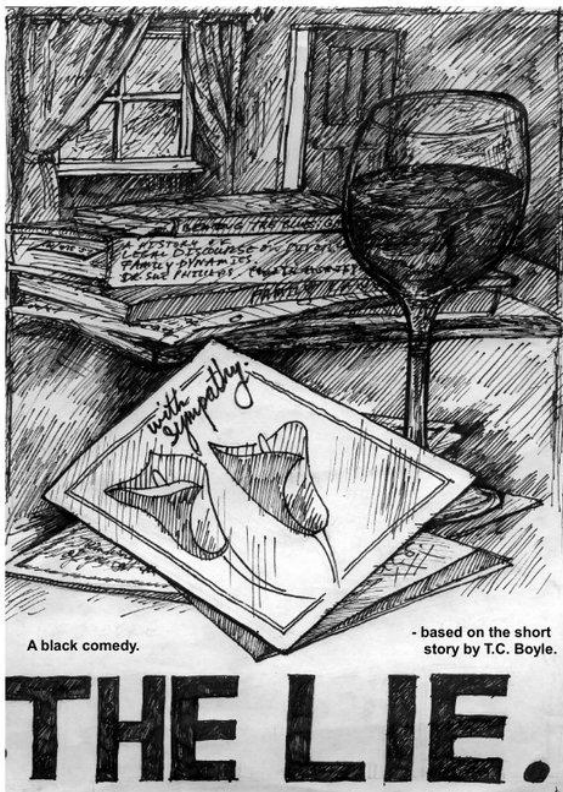
(noticing the sympathy cards in her hand)

Oh. Oh.You...Oh. No.Wait.Oh No. She's not um...(lets out a laugh).
Oh no she's not dead. She's fine. She's upstairs.

Putting the project into the IATL Studio was remarkably straightforward thanks to the help from the IATL staff and the scrambling of household items from the houses of the cast. A naturalistic but versatile set was created, giving a claustrophobic circular environment mirroring the life of the lead Lonnie, going round in circles and gradually getting more cluttered with inanimate objects.



Publicity – Using our actors on hand to their full extent we had cast member and third year English Literature student Lauren Stone design our poster. She also took the photographs of the production used in this report and in marketing.



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IATL presents THE LIE.

The Lie a stage adaptation of TC Boyle's short story of the same name was performed in the IATL Studio on the 29th and 30th Nov 2010.

I'd used up all my sick days and the two personal days they allowed us, but when the alarm went off and the baby started squalling and my wife threw back the covers to totter off to the bathroom in a hobbled two-legged trot, I knew I wasn't going in to work...

Entry is FREE to this IATL sponsored black comedy from the most macabre minds Warwick has to offer.

*Joshua Elliott
Emily Elvin-Poole
Daniel Hutton
Lucy Katz
Lauren Stone
Alon Witztum*

*Adapted and directed by Clare Byrne.
The Opportunity*



Being a politics student IATL's Student As Producer Fund provided a brilliant opportunity for me to put my course and extra curricular endeavours together in a practical learning project. Firstly it gave me the all too hard to come by opportunity to stage a personal project in a great space and to gain further insight into the role of writer and director. The audience that IATL is able to attract is also particularly useful as the 30 or so audience members each night were an opinionated and interesting bunch who had heard about the project through their courses or the advertising we did in Milburn House. Therefore they could provide very constructive feedback. Operating outside of the Warwick University Society drama scene I was able to use a diverse range of actors who are not solely Theatre Studies students. For example my producer on the project is a History student, cast members Alon Witztum a third year Physics student and Emily Elvin Poole a Law student. This brought different ideas, attitudes and working methods to the table. Hearing feedback from actors during the process and the audience on the night about what worked and what didn't is always and was invaluable. More than this though, the nature of the IATL structure, the freedom from the constraints of a box office profit and the intimate educational nature of this fund, offered me the opportunity to be truly collaborative with the actors. The very fact that this was an educational endeavour meant that listening to each other was paramount. Being open to trying and testing methods, from playing with the script to rehearsal practices, worked because the stakes IATL provided were neither too high nor too low, but simply a great structure in which to learn from and teach ourselves as students.