

The Nick Darke Award 2010

PLAYWRIGHT AS LOBSTER FISHERMAN

by NICK DARKE

On the face of it there's nothing to compare lobster fishing with play writing, but delve down and the similarities are there. Both are solitary activities, meticulously prepared then thrown to the whim of uncontrollable forces such as the Atlantic Ocean or theatre directors. One plunders humanity's detritus, the other baits with putrid meat. Both, when successful, are ludicrously over-paid and their practitioners wonder where the next one's coming from.

So how does lobster fishing *meld* with playwriting? Do they integrate on a day-to-day basis? Here's routine one: wake up at dawn. Spend five minutes watching sea through bedroom window. There's a swell fetching in and breaking onto the shore but it's not too big to launch. Switch on computer, go outside and check weather – wind force and direction are critical. Haul on 'skins (oil). Return to screen and click on current play. Sit at desk in fishing gear and read yesterday's work, taking care not to drop particles of sand and dried bait into keyboard. Absorb play whilst thinking of fish. (Zen moment.) Launch boat. Haul, clear, bait and shoot pots. Talk to self. Discuss catch so far. Study swell condition round Turtle Rock and debate safety margin for far pot. Push thoughts of play to back of mind and head for Turtle. Swell is big. Realisation: wind strength underestimated. Play forgotten. Reach pot. Engine neutral. Haul in slack rope. Gigantic swell. Engine falters. Fuck. Raise throttle one notch. Engine screams. Sea in turmoil round rock. Haul pot. Wind carries boat directly towards rock. Pot reaches gunwhale as boat nudges rock. *Massive lobster*. Wind drops, swells shrink, engine purrs. Offer short prayer to Poseidon. Clear pot, bait it, re-shoot. Steam home rehearsing Oscar acceptance speech, playwright and lobster fisherman in perfect harmony. Remove 'skins. Write play. Routine two: wake up, check sea. Too big. No fishing. Think of play. Sleep.

Seizure of moment is the key skill that a lobster fisherman shares with the playwright. Play writing involves accumulating diverse gobbets then judging the perfect time to feed them into the computer. Start to write too early with too few gobbets and you dry up, frustrated. If you leave it too late the material grows stale and the process becomes laboured. It's the same with lobsters. You shoot your pot you leave it lie. The prey smells the bait, expresses interest, wanders over and takes a look with those stalky eyes. It crawls around the pot and probes for the bait but

can't quite reach, so it swims in through the neck, dines and enters the parlour. Trapped. If you haul your pot too early you've lost your fish but if you leave it too late and the sea gets up, the pot shifts and in two days it's gone.

The playwright who is also a lobster fisherman works to a lobster fisherman's time frame. Life is governed by the moon. Writing becomes tidal, low water the deadline. In winter the boat is seldom launched due to adverse sea conditions. Fishing is reduced to a single pot attached to a ring bolt on an island, and the journey there includes a wade through bullock crushing cold water. On rare occasions it is possible to launch at Christmas when there's a high pressure sitting on us and the sea goes flat as a pea on a plate. The sun shines. The air is crisp. If the tide is neapish (not too high or too low) the playwright takes his boat and shoots a net across Trescore.

This is a magic, tranquil time. A moment stolen from the elements. He shouldn't be out there. Poseidon has blinked. The playwright hauls the net and alters his diet to bass, dover sole, turbot. He beaches the boat. There are no people about. No dogs. The second- home-owners are tucked away in House One, Surbiton. He lies back on the crust of frosted sand, closes his eyes and dreams. The playwright becomes not lobster fisherman, but lobster – the lobster occupies a hole in the rock and emerges at night. It is a solitary, cautious beast with few predators. Fiercely combative when threatened, it has survived millions of years without a brain. All actions are programmed, instinctive, patterned, like a play. Plays are blueprints for three dimensions. The playwright's tools are language, actors, action, his habitat the stage, the black hole...he's woken from his reverie by the sound of a shorebreak. He surveys the sea. Dolphins swim around Turtle rock amongst a growing thunderswell which ten minutes ago wasn't there. Gannets dive. Guillemots and razorbills bob and duck and disappear into the troughs between Atlantic rollers. The sea, once more, is an alien place. Back to computer. Write play.

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Introduction

The Nick Darke award was conceived in 2006 by Jane Darke and Cornwall County Council with the aim of celebrating and supporting a writer. It aims to achieve this by awarding the writer a sum of money which will allow time to work, and offer some support through the development process.

Nick Darke wrote in many forms but earned his living in the world of theatre, screen and radio. As this award is intended to contribute financially to the life of a writer, we have decided to make the award in one of these disciplines.

We are asking writers to submit work that pursues an environmental theme – to reflect Nick Darke’s lifelong commitment to this issue, and within one of the following four disciplines:

- Stage play
- Screenplay
- Radio play
- Documentary film

The Nick Darke Award has been developed by Nick Darke’s wife, the artist and film maker Jane Darke, with the support of Nick Darke’s family. It is funded by University College Falmouth’s School of Media and The Works (Dance & Theatre Cornwall Ltd.), and supported by KEAP (Kernow Education Arts Partnership). It is being administered by University College Falmouth.

Eligibility

1. The applicant must be a UK resident.
2. The competition is open to all writers aged 16 and over.
3. The writer must be the sole original author. The competition is not open to collaborations.
4. It must be a new and original piece of work which has not been previously performed or published.
5. Please tell us if you have any communication requirements and what these are (for example a preference for material in large print or a need for everything on audio CD).

Criteria

6. The theme is **the environment**; entrants may interpret the theme widely.
7. The work must be within one of the following **four** categories:
 - Stage play
 - Screenplay
 - Radio play
 - Documentary film
8. The length of the piece must be compatible with standard industry practice and must not be shorter than the following:
 - Stage play – 1 hour
 - Screenplay – 30 minutes
 - Radio play – 45 minutes
 - Documentary film – 30 minutes

Submission procedure

9. Please submit an **outline** of 2,500 words maximum. The outline should contain a clear description of the theme, narrative structure, characters and setting. In the case of documentary projects, the idea and how you will realise it.
10. Enclose a **CV** with your submission (this will help the judges to find out more about you), and include your contact details. If you fail to do so your application will not be considered.

11. Please submit **20 sample script pages** of your idea.
12. Do not include any supporting material such as DVDs, photos, CDs, etc.
13. Should you wish to have confirmation that your application has been received please enclose an SAE.
14. Submission copies will not be returned. Please retain a copy of your work for your records.
15. Please send your application to:
**Kerry Taylor, University College Falmouth, Tremough Campus,
Penryn, Cornwall TR10 9EZ.**
16. Please send one copy of your submission material by post to arrive by **Friday 12 March, 2010**. Late applications will not be considered. Emailed or faxed applications will not be considered.
17. Incomplete applications will not be considered.
18. The deadline for submissions is **Friday 12 March, 2010**.

Judging procedure

19. A panel of judges will be made up of practitioners in stage, radio, documentary and dramatic film.
20. Your work will be considered by a selection of readers who will compile a final shortlist of 10 for the judges.
21. Shortlisted applicants will be notified by **Friday 14 May, 2010**.
22. Unsuccessful applicants will not be notified, please assume your work has not been shortlisted if you haven't heard from us by **Friday 14 May, 2010**. The Nick Darke Award cannot enter into any correspondence regarding a submission nor can it offer any editorial notes or guidance. The shortlist and winner of the Award will be published on **www.nickdarke.net**.
23. The judges will select one winner from the 10 shortlisted writers.
24. The winner will be announced on **Friday 25 June, 2010**.

The Winner

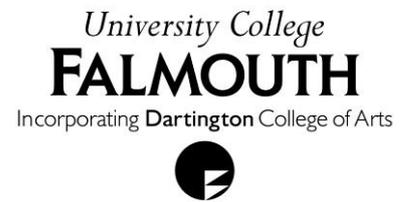
25. The winning entrant will receive **£3,000** to allow them to complete their script to industry standards. The payment will be made in two instalments of £1,500. The first instalment will be paid shortly after **25 June, 2010** and the second payment will be made on **25 September, 2010**, on receipt of the completed script. The winner will also receive mentoring to help them develop their script and to prepare the project for production.
26. The winner must submit a complete script by **25 September, 2010**.

The small print

27. Should the writer fail to submit a complete script by 25 September, 2010 they may be obliged to return the money in full.
28. The copyright for the piece remains solely with the author. However the Nick Darke Award must be credited on all subsequent publicity material.
29. The winning writer must make themselves and their winning piece available for all publicity purposes within reason.

Contact information:

Kerry Taylor, PA to Paul Inman, Director, School of Media,
University College Falmouth, Tremough Campus, Penryn, Cornwall TR10 9EZ
Email: kerry.taylor@falmouth.ac.uk. Tel: 01326 253751. Fax: 01326 255998.



University College Falmouth

University College Falmouth is the only independent higher education institution in Cornwall with the powers to award degrees in its own name. It has two campuses in Cornwall – at Woodlane in Falmouth and Tremough in Penryn (which it owns, and jointly manages with the University of Exeter) – and a third campus at Totnes in Devon, following its merger with Dartington College of Arts in 2008.

This merger created a new institution focusing on the expansion of Falmouth's expertise in Art, Design and Media and Dartington's expertise in Choreography, Music, Theatre, Art and Writing. The Devon-based courses will relocate to a new, high-specification Performance Centre at Tremough in 2010, paving the way for a new specialist Arts University in Cornwall by 2012/2013 that will be unique to the South West.

The University College is a founding partner in the Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC), a unique initiative to promote regional economic regeneration through Higher Education, funded mainly by the European Union (Objective One and Convergence), the South West Regional Development Agency, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England, with support from Cornwall Council.

Study **Media** at University College Falmouth and you'll join a long line of success. Recognised as one of the UK leaders in the delivery of high-quality, practice-orientated media education and training, in 2007, competing with over 100 other universities and colleges, the University College was awarded Skillset Academy status, which brings with it an incredible range of opportunities for students.
www.falmouth.ac.uk

KEAP

KEAP (Kernow Education Arts Partnership) is an arts education partnership with a mission to engage the whole community in creative learning through the Arts. We know the benefits of creative learning and we're passionate about making it happen. We work with anyone and everyone from teachers and youth workers, to Early Years' settings and Cornwall Council, to make sure that the arts and creativity are at the heart of work with children and young people.

We've got a great reputation and track record, and we know just the right people across the education and arts sectors. We'll work with you to create projects or programmes that meet your aims, we can find you the right artist for your idea, or if you're an artist we can advise you on your work with schools or link you up with other organisations. **www.keap.org.uk**



The Works

The Works (Dance & Theatre Cornwall Ltd.) is the county's dance and theatre development agency. Our mission is to support and develop a thriving performing arts ecology in Cornwall.

We provide support, advice, services and information to a wide range of people and organisations, including:

- Individual dance and theatre practitioners
- Emerging and developing companies
- Established companies
- Venues and programmers
- Youth dance and youth theatre companies and practitioners
- Young people who want to get involved in youth dance and theatre
- Other agencies and organisations working in the creative and cultural sector, both locally, regionally and nationally.

We work with a range of partners, to develop opportunities that will strengthen the sector, including supporting quality and diversity in programming, and advocating for the sector to strategic policy makers.

The ambitions and needs of the sector vary enormously, but whatever they are, The Works is here to help support these, and to ensure that whether you are a creator or a consumer, you have access to a wide range of high quality dance and theatre opportunities across the county.

www.dancesouthwest.org.uk/network/the-works-cornwall