

Educational Material for *Stones in His Pockets*

- a play by Marie Jones

How to use the educational material:

- If you are just going to *see* the play, you can work on part 1 and part 3.
- If you are going to *study* the play in detail, the assignments in part 2 will be relevant as well.
- If you have questions or comments, you are welcome to contact us.
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Introduction:

About the Play

The play “Stones in His Pockets” is written by playwright: Marie Jones and was first performed in Belfast June 1999.

Director: Ian Burns

With: Kevin Kiernan-Molloy and Jefferson Bond

Period: Oct 31 – Nov 28

Mon-Fri: 19.30 / Sats: 17.00 / Wed matinees: 13.00

Krudttønden, Serridslevvej 2, 2100 Kbh Ø

The play is a tragicomedy about a small rural town in Ireland where many of the townspeople are extras in the making of a Hollywood film. The story centres on Charlie Conlon and Jake Quinn, who, like much of the town, are employed as extras.

The script calls upon the cast of two to perform all 15 characters (men and women), often switching gender and voice swiftly and with minimal costume change – a hat here, a jacket there. Comedy also derives from the efforts of the production crew to create the proper "Irish feel" – a romanticised ideal that often conflicts with the reality of daily life.

The playwright, Marie Jones has the special gift of making us laugh and then making us feel guilty seconds later, for doing so.

Critics:

”Sad, hilarious and irresistible” – London Evening Standard

“Clearly magical” – The Guardian

“Marie Jones is very funny and her observations of the hectic compression of a film set are dead on” – Vanity Fair

Part 1: Opening the play

Meet the characters:

The play has two characters:

- Charlie Conclon
- Jake Quinn

Look at the poster below:

1) Describe the poster.



Make a short description of the two characters: make use of adjectives that you find appropriate:

rural, simple, ignorant, intellectual, academic, primitive, smart, funny, serious, humorous, dull, naive, powerful

Look at this trailer from a previous production:

[Stones in his Pockets 2024](#)

- What is your first impression of the characters? Share your thoughts with your partner.

Setting:

The setting is a scenic spot near a small, sleepy village in County Kerry, Ireland.

Look up the county Kerry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Kerry

Make a short description of the county.

Plot:

A Hollywood movie is being filmed in a small village in Ireland. Two locals, Charlie and Jake, have been cast as extras for the film. The play is a satiric portrait of filmmaking.

Contrasts:

Try to categorize the words listed below in two different sections 1) reality 2) film
Extras, peasants, crew, romantic, costumes, director, cast, script, stars, rural community, neglect, working class, locals

Reality	Film

Genre:

Read the following article from The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/dec/20/stones-in-his-pockets-review>

Stones in His Pockets – review

Tricycle, London

Michael Billington

Tue 20 Dec 2011

[Marie Jones](#) clearly feels that the political anger behind her hit play, first seen in Ireland in 1996, got somehow neglected when the show became a West End hit. So Indhu Rubasingham, director-designate of the Tricycle, has come up with a fine revival that puts the

emphasis back on the disintegration of a rural community. But, while I welcome this revisionist approach, I still feel it's the tragicomic mix and the platform it provides for two performers that makes this play special.

Jones's witty conceit is to view the making of a piece of Hollywood-Irish hokum from the perspective of two County Kerry extras: the quintessentially optimistic Charlie and the more jaundiced Jake, lately returned from New York. What Jones does is to skilfully oppose life and art. In the movie, the high-born heroine romantically weds a local lad: in reality, Jake rejects the advances of the gushing American star who pretends to seduce him in order to appropriate his accent. And, while the film offers a rose-tinted vision of Irish life, the truth is that the land is being split up and Jake's suicidal cousin is the latest victim of both rural decline and the national propensity to dream.

Even if [Shaw](#) made similar points a century ago in *John Bull's Other Island*, Jones's play sharply satirises American cultural imperialism: my only doubt concerns her play's tricksily contrived ending. But the great virtue of Rubasingham's production is that it clarifies the division between the two main characters. Jamie Beamish's cheerful Charlie is the born accommodator while Owen McDonnell's saturnine Jake seethes with mutinous discontent. Both actors are also brilliant at assuming, in a split second, other characters. Beamish's preening, thigh-stroking American movie star and bullying Scottish security guard are a delight, and McDonnell switches with equal dexterity between a briskly ambitious female assistant director and a bolshie septuagenarian. In this revival, you relish the acting without losing sight of Jones's lament for a lost Ireland.

- What do we get to know about the genre and themes of the play?

Themes in the play:

- What are your associations to the following themes:

-The Have and Have-Nots

-Unfairness

-Hopelessness.

- Read this extract from a review *Giving New Meaning to the Term "Character Actors"* from the newspaper *The New York Times* and sum up the points made in the review regarding these themes.

Giving New Meaning to the Term ‘Character Actors’

(The New York Times, Feb. 8, 2013)

This is a comedy with a tragedy in the middle... “Stones in His Pockets” is about haves and have-nots, and the unfairness and hopelessness of it all, without painting the rich and powerful as complete villains or the poor and struggling as total victims in their own plights.



Our chief have-nots are Charlie Conlon (Euan Morton) and Jake Quinn (Fred Arsenault), youngish Irishmen down on their luck who have landed jobs (“40 quid a day” and free meals) as extras in a Hollywood movie that is being filmed in their little village in County Kerry. And it is not easy to be surrounded every day by so many of the more fortunate: powerful directors, arrogant up-and-coming assistants and real live spoiled movie stars. Mr. Morton and Mr. Arsenault play all the characters, from Caroline Giovanni, a famous American actress who has a habit of “going ethnic” (i.e., inviting at least one local man to her hotel room) wherever she is on location, to Tommy, who claims to be one of the last living extras from “The Quiet Man” (John Ford, John Wayne, Maureen O’Hara, 1952, filmed partly in Counties Galway and Mayo). Mr. Morton is particularly good as Caroline, conducting a thoroughly believable seduction and flinging herself onto the grass as if to make love to the land itself. Kind enough to send all the flowers from a wedding scene to a local funeral. Serious enough that when a young man tries to pass off a Seamus Heaney poem as his own work, she recognizes the lines and corrects his recitation. Clueless enough to have no grasp of the thoughtless way she may have contributed to a local man’s suicide.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/nyregion/a-review-of-stones-in-his-pockets-at-the-yale-repertory-theater.html>

Act it Out

1. You are at a catering truck.

You have to convince the caterer that you need a second serving for your friend who is not able to come to the catering truck in person.

Find as many excuses as possible.

2. Visit at the dialect coach:

In the play you meet an American actor, who needs to speak with an Irish accent. She gets help from a dialect coach.

Try to pronounce the following sentence with the following accents:

“I will speak to my father, you have suffered enough.”

- 1) American accent
- 2) Irish accent

3. In pairs read the advice given in the play by the dialect coach:

Caroline Giovanni: (American star)

John: accent coach

Caroline: “I will speak to my father, you have suffered enough.”

John: You’re doing great Caroline...remember always to soften the a; and elongate it...I will speak to my father, you have suffered enough.

Caroline: (she repeats badly). I will speak to ma father, no...I will speak to my fetherr...shit...

John: No Caroline put your tongue behind your teeth.

Caroline: Thaaather.

John: no...No, your bottom teeth.

Caroline: Father...fetthe... fatttther...shit...these people will think it sounds ridiculous.

John: Don’t worry...Caroline...Ireland is only one per cent of the market.

Caroline: I want to get it right John.

Discussion

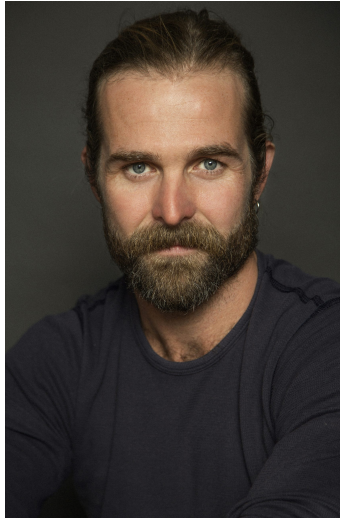
Discuss the following:

Is it a big deal to *not* cast Irish actors in a movie/play set in Ireland?

Debate:

Films such as “Irish Wish” have been criticised for being set in Ireland but without Irish actors. Is this a valid criticism? Why/why not?

The 2 actors performing in "Stones in His Pockets" are:



Kevin Kiernan-Molloy:



Jefferson Bond:

Do your own research on the two actors and their background. Are they Irish?

- Kevin Kiernan-Molloy: [Kevin Kiernan-Molloy](#)
- Jefferson Bond: [Jefferson Bond](#)

For inspiration: Look at the trailer for "Irish Wish"

[Irish Wish Trailer](#) The character James Thomas (played by Ed Speelers).

Meet the playwright: Marie Jones:

Watch this interview from 2021 with Marie Jones: [Interview with Marie Jones](#) (2:32 minutes)

About the interview: *We sat down with Olivier Award-winning playwright and OBE, Marie Jones, to find out about the history of her comedy Stones In His Pockets and how she feels about her son Matthew taking the helm of the 25th Anniversary production!*

Consider Marie Jones' answer to these two questions.

- 1) Where did the idea come from for Stones in his Pockets?
- 2) Why do you think the Irish setting is so important?

Part 2: Analysing the play

To prepare for your analysis, please investigate the following terms and write a short definition:

Satire:

Tragedy:

Comedy:

Metafiction:

Furthermore, in pairs or small groups, discuss the following:

- What do you associate with Hollywood and the typical Hollywood film (including the happy ending)?
- What associations do you get from the title: Stones in his Pockets?
- How might this serve as a foreshadowing?

Act 1

Act one begins in medias res. What associations do you get from the establishment of the setting at a catering truck?

Comment on Jake and Charlie's first meeting (pp.16 - 20) . What do we learn about the two characters, Charlie in particular, at first glance?

On pages 19 and 27, we are told that Mickey has apparently starred in an old Hollywood film set in Ireland called The Quiet Man. Find information about the film and consider why this example is applied in the play? (Think, for instance, in terms of metafiction)

We are introduced to four other characters in pages 22 - 24, Simon, Aisling, Caroline and John. Who are they? What might their significance for the play be?

When talking about learning to speak with an Irish accent, John warns Caroline: "but be careful Caroline, you can't be too exact, you won't get away with it in Hollywood, they won't understand" (p.24). What is meant here?

As you read the play, see if you can find other places in the play where the relationship between reality and imitation is put into question.

What does Caroline say about Hollywood versus rural Ireland on page 24? What does this say about her? Is she portrayed as an authentically decent person, or is there something else at stake?

Look at the turf digging scene on page 25 and again on p. 45. What is turf, and what is it traditionally used for in Ireland?

What is ironic about the fact that the extras are instructed on how to act when digging turf?

On page 28, we are told about a lady who runs a guest house. How is she described and what does this say about the corrupting influence of Hollywood? In what sense might this be considered emblematic of the themes of the play and the image of Hollywood and the filmmaking industry in general?

Comment on the dialogue between Jake, Sean and Charlie pp. 29 - 33. What signs are we given of what is going to happen? What do we learn about Sean's general condition and why might he not be able to star in the film as an extra?

When Sean staggers away (p.33), Charlie seems a bit anxious. In what sense might this be an example of foreshadowing? Look at your answer again once you have finished reading act 1.

We learn on pages 33 - 34 that Jake has been in America and that he broke up with his American girlfriend. What reasons does he give, and what does this say about his situation and his world view?

Describe the meeting between Caroline and Jake (p. 36 - 38). Why does she show an interest in him? What does she want to achieve?

Describe Caroline Giovanni in as much detail as possible, both based on what we are directly told in the play and any other associations that might spring to mind. Is she a Hollywood stereotype? Does she develop in the play?

On pages 39: What is the joke/double meaning in terms of the line "fancy a line"?

On pages 40 - 42: describe the further conversation between Ms Giovanni and Jake. Why does he pretend to be a poet and what is surprising about her reaction? Both of them seem to try and exploit the other. Describe what each of the characters want to get out of the meeting and who has the upper hand in the situation?

On pages 46 - 49: Why does Jake turn down the request to spend another 10 minutes with Ms Giovanni?

On page 49, we are told that she has a habit of "going ethnic". What does that mean, and what is ironic about it? What does Jake realise in this context?

On pages 50 - 53: It turns out that Jake goes along with spending the time with Ms Giovanni after all. What does Jake say that questions her approach, and what does this show about her knowledge of class and customs in rural Ireland?

How does the dialogue proceed and why does she act so strongly at the top of p. 53?

What do we learn at the end of act 1 (p.56)?

How does this turn events around?

In what sense might the main characters Jake and Charlie feel a sense of guilt at this stage?

Sum up: What has happened in Act 1? Relate to the title of the play.

Act 2

Consider how the opening of the act on page 57 sets the scene.

Discuss the idea of escapism in relation to Hollywood and the American dream as expressed in the dialogue on pages 58 - 60.

How does Clem prove to be particularly inappropriate in his demands on the extras on pages 61 - 64. Consider the double meaning of the word “ecstasy” in this context. How does the situation affect Jake in particular?

Explain the dialogue between Jake and Father Gerard, as well as the one between Sean and the father on pages 65 - 67. What is the effect of using flashbacks?

We know that there are only two actors on the stage. How do you imagine the flashback and role shift might be acted out?

What do you make of Sean’s childhood essay about cows?

On pages 68 -70, Jake and Charles discuss Charles’ manuscript. In what sense is this his dream? Compare it to Sean’s dream. What is at stake for Charles and what might he be afraid of?

On page 72, we are heading to Sean’s wake. Look up the term wake (Funeral). What is significant about this tradition in Ireland? How is this shown between the lines on pages 73 - 75? How is Simon’s remark at the bottom of page 78/top of page 79 problematic in this context?

On page 74, Fin tells about Sean’s last evening where he was at the pub. What happened and how did it affect Sean according to Fin?

On pages 77 - 78, there is a dialogue between Caroline and Jake. Explain the content of their conversation and what Jake thinks of Caroline. Do you think Caroline is partially to be blamed for the incident? Explain why/why not.

On pages 86 - 93, Jake and Charlie discuss an idea for a play. We are given various pieces of information about the play. Explain its content. Explain its correlation with the play you have read. Why might it disturb us that the play and action somehow matches what you have already read?

Now look up the term “metafiction” and read the following speculation about its effect on the reader:

“Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the Quixote, and Hamlet a spectator of Hamlet? This inversion suggests that if the characters of a fiction can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious.”

Jorge Luis Borges, “Partial Magic in the Quixote” (*“Magias parciales del Quijote”*, 1949).

Explain how the ending of the play might be considered a metafictional twist. How might this influence us as an audience of the play? How are the scales turned?

Part 3 Additional material

Overall analytical questions after reading the play

1. Dialogue and Language

How is dialogue used to reveal social differences between the Hollywood crew and the Irish locals? Find examples

In what ways does the dialogue shift between humour and tragedy? What effect does this create?

How do accents, dialect, and colloquial expressions contribute to the authenticity of the characters?

How is this contrasted to the inauthenticity of the Hollywood actors?

What role does silence or pauses play in key emotional moments (e.g. following Sean's death)?

2. Characterisation

Do Jake and Charlie develop over the course of the play? If so, what drives their personal growth?

In what ways do Jake and Charlie represent different attitudes toward storytelling and ambition?

How are minor characters (e.g. Caroline Giovanni, Mickey, Sean) used to highlight the play's central concerns?

What is the significance of Sean's character, despite his limited stage presence?

a) Representation and Stereotypes

How does the play critique the way Hollywood portrays Ireland and Irish people?

What stereotypes are presented in the film-within-the-play, and how are they challenged?

How does Jake's script idea contrast with the romanticised version of Ireland shown by the film crew?

b) Dreams and Disillusionment

How are dreams (e.g. acting success, storytelling, escape) presented in the play?

In what ways does Sean's story highlight the darker side of failed dreams?

Do Jake and Charlie achieve their dreams by the end of the play? Why or why not?

c) Identity and Voice

Who gets to tell stories in the play, and whose voices are ignored?

How do Jake and Charlie struggle to assert their own identities against the dominant Hollywood narrative?

What does the play suggest about the importance of authentic storytelling?

d) Power and Exploitation

How is power distributed between the locals and the film crew?

In what ways are the Irish villagers used or exploited by the Hollywood production?

How does the play explore economic inequality and cultural dominance?

3. Dramatic Techniques

What is the effect of having only two actors play multiple roles?

How does this staging choice contribute to themes of illusion, performance, and storytelling?

Is the play metatheatrical? If so, how does it draw attention to the nature of performance?

How does the shifting between characters and scenes affect the pace and tone of the play?

How does humour function as a dramatic technique to address serious issues?

4. Big-Picture / Evaluative Questions

Does the play ultimately offer a hopeful or pessimistic view of storytelling and cultural identity?

How successful is the play in balancing comedy and tragedy?

What message does *Stones in His Pockets* convey about who has the right to tell a story?

To what extent is the play relevant to modern media and global film industries today?