

Press Release: 29-01-09

An Exciting New Play - Where Art Meets Science Meets Ethics

The Irish Council for Bioethics (ICB), in conjunction with Fishamble: The New Play Company, is hosting a staged reading of a thought-provoking new play ***Begotten not Made*** in **Farmleigh** on **29th January** from 6.30pm. The invited audience will consist of people working in the spheres of science, philosophy and the arts.

Begotten not Made, a play-in-development, is the culmination of a National bioethics playwriting competition, during which an esteemed panel of judges awarded talented playwright **Paul Meade** a commission to the value of €11,000. This unique initiative presents an intersection between science and the arts and allows for the possibility of exploring challenging philosophical and medical themes in a theatrical form.

In recent years major medical and technological advances, such as genetic modification and stem cell research, have been made which have given rise to numerous ethical questions. Given Ireland's literary tradition the ICB decided to commission a play, which would raise public consciousness and stimulate discussion on these complex but ever more pertinent topics.

At a time when Ireland hopes to advance itself as a "knowledge economy" by developing new scientific and medical technologies we must, as a nation, ask ourselves how these new technologies will impact on society. The ICB believes that ***Begotten Not Made*** provides an innovative and exciting response to this key challenge.

Begotten Not Made deals with three bioethical issues in their most human form, in three interwoven strands:

- ❖ The first strand tells the story of Gavin and Louisa who are struggling to conceive a child via IVF. Having exhausted all legal options, the couple must decide how far they are willing to go to have a baby.
- ❖ In the second, we meet Brian and Dorothy who are travelling to Switzerland for an assisted suicide. During this story, their faith in God, their decision to opt for assisted suicide and their love for each other are all tested.
- ❖ The third narrative relates to brother and sister John and Susan. John was born as a "saviour sibling" for Susan and his cells were used to save his sister's life. We watch as the pair sift through their past and attempt to resolve their differences.

Dr Siobhán O'Sullivan, Managing Scientific Director of the ICB said that: "while the term "bioethics" may, to many, seem like a vague scientific term, it is a topic, which is ever present in all of our lives and deals with such human interests as organ donation, IVF and end-of-life care". She continued: "bioethics is an open-ended and interesting topic and because of its ability to pose questions that

confront humanity daily, is one that is extremely well suited to the realm of drama”.

Jim Culleton, Artistic Director of Fishamble added: “theatre has the potential to provoke, challenge and encourage us to see the world from different perspectives, so it is an excellent medium through which to explore ethical issues. I am delighted to be associated with this marvellous initiative of the Irish Council for Bioethics and Paul Meade’s fascinating, thought-provoking play”.

Ends:

Notes to Editor:

What is Bioethics?

Bioethics is a discipline dealing with the ethical implications of research and practice in the biological sciences and medicine. It facilitates a deeper understanding of a range of moral choices, which can inform decision-making in areas of public policy and with respect to the direction and control of science. Bioethics is also a forward looking discipline, working to anticipate future questions of concern, encourage awareness about them and stimulate progressive debate amongst the public.

Who is the Irish Council for Bioethics?

The Irish Council for Bioethics is an independent, national body set up by the Government in 2002 to consider the ethical questions raised by biological research and biomedicine, such as stem cell research, IVF, genetic modification and euthanasia. An important objective of the Council is to promote public understanding, informed discussion and education with respect to bioethical issues. For more information see www.bioethics.ie

Who is Fishamble: The New Play Company?

Fishamble is an award-winning, internationally acclaimed company, dedicated to the discovery, development and production of new work for the Irish stage. Over the past 20 years, the Company has produced numerous award-winning and highly-acclaimed plays by first-time and established playwrights. Through partnerships, tours and collaborations, Fishamble has brought this work to audiences throughout Ireland as well as in England, Scotland, USA, Canada, Romania, France, Germany and the Czech Republic.

As part of its commitment to developing new work for the theatre, Fishamble regularly presents workshops, discussions and seminars, as well as in-house and public readings of new work. Fishamble also runs a number of playwriting courses and workshops, which are open to the public. For more information see www.fishamble.com

Who is Paul Meade?

Paul Meade is a writer, director, actor and co-artistic director of Gúna Nua theatre. From Limerick, Paul trained at the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College, and later received an M.A. in modern drama from U.C.D.

Work as a writer includes *Trousers* and *Scenes from a Water Cooler* with David Parnell (Winner Best Production 2001 Dublin Fringe Festival), *Skin Deep*, for which he received the Stewart Parker Award and *Thesis* with Gerry Dukes and David Parnell. He recently completed English language versions of the Romanian Plays, *Stop the Tempo* by Giannina Carbinariu and *Our Father Who Art in the Supermarket* by Petra Barbu, which are published in the anthology *East of Eden*

(new Romanian plays). As a director Paul has directed *Trousers* (in Dublin and off-Broadway), *The Real Thing*, *Taste* and co-directed the award-winning *Scenes from a Water Cooler* for Gúna Nua. He has also directed *Translations* for Hands-Turn Theatre, *Medea* for Threshold, *Death and the Maiden* for Mirage and *The Second Shepard's Play* for Limerick Youth Theatre.

As an actor Paul has worked in film, television and theatre touring to the UK, USA and Australia.

About the Competition:

In 2006/2007 the ICB ran a National playwriting competition. Entrants were asked to submit a synopsis of a script and a written statement outlining the specific manner in which the play would relate to the field of bioethics and how the author envisaged the development of the script. The winner was selected from a shortlist following interview. The ICB received over 120 entries to the competition. Entries were submitted by both professional and amateur writers and by expatriates from as far a field as China and Brazil.

Who were the Judges?

Liam Cunningham (Actor), Aideen Howard (Literary Director, Abbey Theatre), Richard Hull (Member, ICB), Gavin Kostick (Literary Officer, Fishamble), Orlaith McBride (Director, National Association for Youth Drama), Helena Nolan, (Office of Science & Technology, Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment), Siobhán O'Sullivan (Managing Scientific Director, ICB), Alan Stanford (Actor, Director at the Gate and Artistic Director, Second Age Theatre Company) and Jim Culleton (Artistic Fishamble).