

Four various playwrights.

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Applied Drama: Education, Wellbeing, Community.

1,607 Words.

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Tribute To Talent

'Titanic hits iceberg and sinks. Massive loss of life.' That could well have been the dramatic headline splashed across the front page of the Swansea Evening Post back in 1912. And so, for my future project, a Tribute To Talent, I will insist that they print the comparable headline – 'Corona Virus hits Britain. Massive loss of life.'

The sole purpose of my project will be to raise money for the unfortunate families who have been devastated by this horrendous pandemic. I propose to hire the Arts Wing, at the Grand Theatre in Swansea for Tuesdays and Thursday evenings for four weeks. There I intend to give a talk on the lives and achievements of four extremely talented individuals. Followed by a 'script in hand' reading of some of their work by a group of my friends who have volunteered to take time off from their other commitments to make my 'Tribute To Talent' a success.

I decided to start with a playwright from the emerald isle of Ireland, who in my opinion was head and shoulders above his compatriots. The playwright in question is of course, the one and only, George Bernard Shaw. Now, whether it was the mischievous whisperings of the Leprechauns that lulled him into thinking that the streets of London were paved with gold, we will never know. But, suffice it to say that Shaw, at the tender age of twenty, decided to leave his homeland and venture to the fair city of London to seek his fortune. And in next to no time, he found himself working as a music and drama critic for several prestigious newspapers. (Gifford, 2002)

In all, Shaw succeeded in writing fifty plays. The first of which was called, 'Widower's Houses' and was performed in London in 1892, when Shaw was a more mature, thirty-six years of age. It is interesting to note that as well as being a prolific playwright, Shaw also wrote books. The best known of these was the one which he wrote in 1928 entitled, 'The intelligent woman's guide to Socialism and Capitalism.' I do wonder to myself, what the modern intelligent woman of today, would make of that book? But that's another story.

To sum up, although Shaw's plays are best known for their wit and social and moral concerns, I feel that a certain anecdote of the time gives us an even better insight into the great man himself. Now apparently, Shaw and the late Winston Churchill really detested each other, but enjoyed exchanging insults. And on one occasion, Shaw sent Churchill two tickets for the first night of his new play with a note saying – 'Bring a friend

– if you have one.’ Churchill returned the tickets, asking instead, for tickets for the second night – ‘if there is one’. (McWhirter, 1995)

For this performance I decided to use the text from Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. But for the script in hand reading, I am going to include a part for a narrator, who will read all of Shaw’s many stage directions as they appear, as I feel that these instructions are as entertaining as the spoken word.

After using an outstanding Irish playwright for the first week of my ‘Tribute To Talent’ expose, I decided to follow it in the second week with some home grown talent. Namely, an outstanding Welsh playwright.

Oh! Woe is me! Now Wales may be regarded as the ‘Land Of Song’, and the land of all sorts of other things that people attribute to what they refer to as ‘God’s own country’. But, when it comes to writers, it’s a case of poets, poets everywhere and not a playwright in sight. It was just like searching for an oasis in the middle of the Sahara Desert. In next to no time, I began to feel as frustrated as Henry Stanley must have felt, when he was searching for David Livingstone.

So? What was I to do? The whole idea of my ‘Tribute To Talent’ enterprise was to present the work of four icons from the British Isles. Namely, one Irish, one Welsh, one Scottish and one English. With such a production as the one that I had in mind, cheating, or trying to hoodwink the audience was a nonstarter. Therefore, some sort of a miracle was needed. But, on reflection, I thought that the chances of a miracle coming my way to save the day, would be on a par with me meeting a polar bear, while searching the Sahara Desert for an Oasis.

No! The brutal truth was, that some sort of a compromise was the only port in this diabolical storm. But then, right out of the blue, it hit me! It was a eureka moment of extraordinary proportions! The solution had been there all the time, right under my nose, in fact, so to speak. And my saviour was a native of Swansea, of all places! It was that Welsh, folk – hero, par excellence, Dylan Morlais Thomas.

True, he has never been regarded as a playwright for the stage as we know it, but there was his outstanding radio play, ‘Under Milk Wood’ which I would be able to use. As a play, it may be rather disjointed and unruly and at times quite confusing, but the end result is not only enthralling and entertaining but extremely uplifting and poignantly thought – provoking. Mind you, I do always marvel at the way Dylan named the Welsh village in the play as ‘Llareggub’, by writing ‘bugger all’ backwards. I’m sure that this flash of inspiration must have struck him as he neared the bottom of his beer glass on one enchanted evening with Caitlin. Anyway, being a staunch believer in the old adage, ‘Brevity is the soul of wit’. I thought that Dylan wouldn’t mind if I edited slightly the section out of *Under Milk Wood*, for the script in hand reading, as follows.

Narrator: Mr Pugh, In the School house opposite, takes up the morning tea to Mrs Pugh

and whispers to himself on the stairs.

Mr Pugh: (*Sinister voice*) Here's your arsenic, dear. And your weed killer biscuits. I've throttled your parakeet. I've spat in the vases. I've put cheese in the mouseholes. And there's ground glass in your omelette. (*Evil Chuckle*) He, he he! Here's your

Mrs Pugh: (*Cries out*) Oh?

Mr Pugh: (*Kindly*) Nice tea dear.

Mrs Pugh: (*Tetchily*) Too much sugar.

Mr Pugh: You haven't tasted it yet dear.

Mrs Pugh: Too much milk then.

(And then on as far as)

Mrs Pugh: (*Nastily*) What's that book by your trough, Mr Pugh?

Mr Pugh: It's a theological work my dear, Lives of the Great Saints. (Thomas, 1954)

For my next talented playwright for the third week of my 'Tribute To Talent', I decided to pay a visit to 'bonny Scotland', Oh? But, alack and alas? Can you imagine my chagrin when to my horror, I discovered that just like Wales, Scotland had an abundance of writers and poets but none of which had produced any material for any thespians eager to 'tread the boards'.

Desperately disheartened, I eventually discovered that it was going to have to be, a case of what was sauce for the goose, had in turn to be, sauce for the gander. As the goose in this case was the celebrated Dylan Thomas, then the gander would just have to be the eminent, Arthur Conan Doyle. Yes, indeed, that Arthur Conan Doyle. The creator of that brilliant, private detective, Sherlock Holmes. And the reason that my choice was Doyle was, that although he was world famous for his short stories concerning the adventures of his fiendishly, clever sleuth. At least he had on two occasions, ventured into the world of theatre and had adopted the persona of a playwright.

One of his plays, which he titled 'Sherlock Holmes', was written with the collaboration of an American actor-manager named, William Gillette. While his other play was one that he had written himself by transposing for the stage his own short story, 'The Speckled Band'. So there it was! A clear case of 'Hobson's choice' lay before me. It had to be either

'The Speckled Band' by Arthur Conan Doyle or 'The Speckled Band' by Arthur Conan Doyle. (Doyle, 1892)

And so, on to the fourth week. The final week. The climatic week. A week that was going to be devoted entirely to the work of an English playwright. I was so relieved, because for a change, I was going to be spoilt for choice. Deep down, I knew that there would be a plethora of English playwrights 'waiting in the wings', so to speak, awaiting for my judgement.

But, before I could even start to contemplate the names for my shortlist, large bubbles filled with 'sheer class' and 'unique craftsmanship', began to surge to the surface of my mind. What on Earth was I thinking about? There was absolutely nothing to deliberate about. In the words of the vernacular, "There just ain't no contest, mate". And there wasn't! There was only one grand master of the world of theatre and that was, of course, William Shakespeare. So, my dilemma was not which playwright do I choose to use, but which play of the 'Bard of Avon's' do I decide to use for the fourth week.

It took me no more than a few seconds to decide. I would use what was my own favourite section out of, 'The Merchant Of Venice', where the resourceful Portia, disguised as a male attorney, 'locks horns' with the avaricious Jew, Shylock over his demand for a pound of Antonio's flesh. (Shakespeare, 1597)

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