



theatre in wales

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Theatre Publishing

The Play's the Thing

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The Play's the Thing

Jeni Williams on English-language publishing and the theatre in Wales

I love reading plays. But I am in a minority. Even those who love theatre do not necessarily read them, many agreeing with Mike Pearson's succinct rejection of the historic dominance of the text: 'The play's not the thing.' (*New Welsh Review* 27). So before I examine what is being published and by whom, or consider the value and function of these publications, I want to think about publishing playscripts *per se*. Publishing is about producing and marketing books; theatre is about producing and marketing performances – so why publish a script?

Publishing for the theatre: special issues

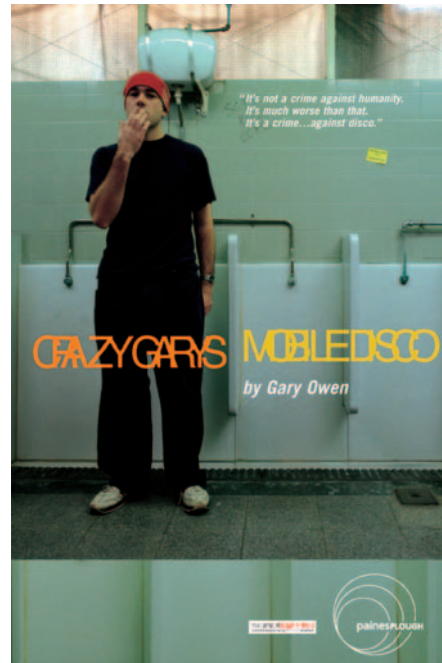
Playscripts seem to exist in the no-man's-land between performance and literary text: sometimes seen as only part of the play-as-performance, sometimes seen as so tied to performance that they are only uneasily assessed as literature. This is as evident in Wales as elsewhere. The 2001 special issue of *The Literary Review* entitled *Re-Imagining Wales* serves as an example. Guest-edited by Tony Curtis and Christopher Meredith, it contains a wide range of short stories, poems and extracts from novels – but, despite the fact that many Welsh dramatists seek to 're-imagine Wales', it features no plays. Rarely discussed in the colloquia of the Association of Welsh Writing in English, playscripts seem almost invisible within Welsh literary debate too.

Dramatic texts, like those produced for children (as discussed in *New Welsh Review* 65), appear peripheral to mainstream literature and consequently receive even less serious attention. The comparison is instructive. Both face the chronic problems common to any literature produced in Wales, where the bookshop chains are run from London, and Welsh texts assessed as 'local interest'. Yet there are major differences. In the light of the Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee's report on Welsh Writing in English, which presses for more 'books of popular appeal', children's literature clearly qualifies for increased support: it seeks and would attain popular status if marketing and distribution were improved. The case for playwriting is more difficult to argue. Although improved marketing could generate interest, as would increased critical debate, plays are not, and are never likely to be, popular literature. The publication of plays must be justified on other grounds: that without documentation there can be only repetition of past patterns, that without innovation gifted writers will leave the theatre. Two recent playtexts, both by the same writer, illustrate my point.

Gary Owen's first play, *Crazy Gary's Mobile Disco* (2001), was picked up by the English new writing company, Paines Plough, and developed with Sgript Cymru, the new writing company for Wales. A powerful, original play, it challenges its audience, tracing the relations between different kinds of addiction, violence and mental illness, loneliness and exploitation. The play consists of three unmediated monologues, the first by a sadistic psychotic, ironically called Gary, the others by two of his victims, both psychologically damaged at school by his bullying. What's relevant to the question of publishing is the outrage it generated in Wales – not in England, where it was well received. The unusual construction makes unusual demands of its audience but it is not difficult to understand, nor difficult to get hold of, since it was sold on the door for the price of a few pints of lager. Why then did it become a *cause célèbre* on the Theatre-in-Wales website, with contributors confusing the attitudes of the first speaker with those of Owen himself? Why did people who are interested in theatre (only those who are engaged in passionate debate on theatre websites) not understand this play? A play in which all three voices crave for love despite everything? The answer must lie in the unfamiliarity of the material.

Three years later Owen wrote *Ghost City* on a commission for Sgript Cymru. Again, formally innovative, more radically so than *Crazy Gary*, still dealing with loneliness and the need for love, but here much more daring in its scope and more probing in its critique of the abuse of power. I have not seen any reviews, either in or out of Wales, that do justice to its complexity. The tendency has been to see it as an unusual play about Cardiff. I focus on a few passages to demonstrate why it is far more interesting than that, both as dramatic construction and as text.

Ghost City seems to start as a series of monologues in the vein of *Crazy Gary*, but instead of three extended pieces there are twenty-four short sections representing the hours of a day, each located in a different part of Cardiff and slowly hesitating into dialogue. The play thus firmly situates its voices in space and time, its very structure demonstrating the difficulty of achieving communication. Though concluding with a fragile connection, the various voices speak repeatedly of abandonment, bewilderment, bitterness and fantasies of revenge. An example is the voice from the Welsh media that, apparently sympathising with a Welsh-Asian actor returning from London, details what she'd like to do to the Londoners 'packed like vermin' on the underground:



if you're me you think –
 Chuck in a match and a gallon or two of paraffin
 Or better still some of that gas what
 The fuck is that – sarin?
 Let a coupla million of the fuckers choke.
 That'd take the spring out of their collective step.

It's vicious and jealous, rooted on the racist division of 'them' and 'us' transparent in her advice: 'a guy like you /With your especial pigmentation [could] go for /Lead roles, but then /You've got the whole ethnic market covered too.'

This concern with those excluded from lead roles – and their responses to that situation – permeates the text. Most chillingly, Owen draws on the racist paradigm by twice adapting the dignified request for aid sent to the UN by a group sheltering in a Rwandan church: 'We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with all our families.' No one heard them, and the following day they were hacked to death. Owen depicts a desperate mother logging onto a computer programme that responds randomly to its correspondents' words, trying to find a clue to her son's disappearance. She recognises his voice floating out of the ether: 'I wish to inform you that tomorrow you will be killed.' In the final scene, a desperate child suddenly shouts, 'I wish to inform you/ That tonight you will be killed / With your families.'

This complex play repays close attention. Its formal innovation allows it to say new things about major issues, linking Cardiff and Cardiff voices to the rest of the world, demonstrating the appalling price of ongoing failures to listen or care that lie at the roots of terrorism. The most frightening voices are the most traumatised rather than the most evil. When the little boy of the final scene is found by his distraught mother, he explains his plan with horrible lucidity:

I know what we should do.
 Do you know Mum? ...
 Let's get them.
 Let's kill then all.
 It's on the internet
 What gases you need.
 Where you get them from. ...
 We'll kill the bastards,
 For leaving me wet, and cold
 And on the street, and all alone,
 And not giving a shit
 Whether I fuckin lived or died ...
 They won't mind.
 Cause they would've all let me die.
 That means, they don't mind
 Whether persons
 Live or die.

Ghost City is an example of a play that deserves to be published and re-staged, not played once and then forgotten. Theatre does not emerge as neat, self-sufficient packages in a vacuum; it needs other texts as reference points and will get them from what's available. If those models are not playscripts than we will not get decent scripts. At the moment the existing models are overwhelmingly those of television and film, with the result that many playscripts are really screenplays. Those informed by theatre are frequently influenced by a theatre rooted elsewhere – in London, New York. A text like *Ghost City*, which presents a mass of differentiated localised voices, all marginalised and forgotten, is a wonderful text for development – for other places outside the metropolitan centres – as well as being an excellent play in its own right.

Writing and publishing playscripts: the Welsh experience

Sgript Cymru publish every script they nurture to production, arguing that if they seek to contribute to a reinvigorated writing for the theatre, that can't happen if (as in the past) scripts disappear as soon as they are produced. Their Artistic Director, Simon Harris, is positive about the growing impact of the internet on marketing drama in general, not least because it allows a mass of plays to be kept in print (including print-on-demand), but there is no bank of forgotten Welsh plays. This is why Sgript Cymru held a retrospective season of Welsh drama in Cardiff's Chapter Arts Centre in December of last year, which featured out-of-print playwrights from the early twentieth century, like J. O. Francis, and from the mid-century, such as James Hanley and Alan Owen. More recent voices were also included, like Alan Osborne, whose magnificent *Merthyr Trilogy* never had a second full production and is about to be reprinted by Parthian, or Peter Gill whose work has been widely produced – but not in Wales.

Concurring with the general belief that marketing and distribution are all-important, Sgript Cymru try to work in collaboration with publishers such as Methuen and Nick Hern. In exchange for a guarantee that they will buy 500-1,000 copies to be sold at the stage door, they get access to distribution throughout the UK and to promotion on websites associated with new writing. But there are drawbacks. Like the book chains, these publishers are based in London and the two key elements that ensure their interest are a run in London and an extensive tour. Methuen published *Crazy Gary's Mobile Disco* by an unknown Gary Owen because of an extensive national tour that included three weeks at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith and ended at Edinburgh's Traverse – and the partnership with Paines Plough helped. With *Ghost City* they were dealing with a known quantity, and an extensive tour including New York clinched things. Because it opened in London's Soho Theatre, Catherine Tregenna's *Art and Guff* was published fairly smoothly with Nick Hern. The prolific Dic Edwards already publishes with drama specialist Oberon, and his work is greatly admired by theatre *wunderkind* Torben Betts, so they were happy to publish *Franco's Bastard*, his 2002 play for Sgript Cymru, along with an earlier play, *Lola Brecht*, and a glowing Betts introduction.

For those who don't fit into this scheme, however, there are problems. With their eye on the market, these publishers will not risk publishing material they deem 'too localised', too 'provincial'. Marketing an unknown writer like Tracy Harris proved difficult and then, without an extensive tour, Sgript Cymru could not secure a publishing partner for her strange and spiky *past away* (2002). Nor could they obtain one for respected Welsh-language playwright Meic Povey: his first English-language work, *Indian Country* (2003), was perceived as 'very Welsh', while a run at the Traverse Theatre didn't counter the absence of a London venue. Sgript Cymru chose to self-publish – at a loss – rather than see the scripts disappear. Simon Harris points out that although a provisional one-year publishing grant has transformed the situation for next year, the problem of distribution remains – which of course takes us back to a system dominated by London-centric book chains...

Simon Harris praises Parthian as the only Welsh publisher to achieve wide circulation in this system. Indeed, Parthian is the only publishing house with a current English-language drama list. An occasional play may be published by the others – Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, for example, published Tony Conran's dance-drama *Branwen* last year, while Mark Jenkins's brilliant monologue *Rosebud: The Lives of Orson Welles* (two major awards and a US tour on the back of last year's Edinburgh fringe – so far!) was published by infestedwaters, a tiny private press set up by Pembrokeshire businessman, David Hughes – but Seren closed their drama list in 2001 and Gomer have never had one.

Parthian, however, are steadily adding to their drama list. A comprehensive designated catalogue has recently appeared, containing their past publications, re-publications like *The Merthyr Trilogy*, a spring list of four new books, and the two books produced for last year's Edinburgh.

The first of these, *More Lives than One*, contains five plays by Mark Jenkins: two monologues, *Playing Burton* and *Mr Owen's Millennium* (about Robert Owen); the heartbreaking *Downtown Paradise* (race and civil rights; 2 characters, 1 bit part); the crafted drama of *Nora's Bloke* (gender, love and the war; 6 women, 2 small parts for men); and the corruscating *Birthmarks* (the human cost of Marx's commitment to writing the revolution; 8 characters, 6 actors). Varied, well researched and extremely readable, a fierce, committed intelligence lies behind each of them. A fascinating interview by Hazel Walford Davies concludes the book. Jenkins had international success with *Playing Burton*, last published as part of Parthian's collection of male monologues, *One Man, One Voice* (edited by David Adams, 2001). But Jenkins insists that, despite his success, he has received no support within Wales because 'theatrical gatekeepers in this neck of the woods have been laying down "agendas" for Welsh writers and ... outlining "collective" visions for Welsh theatre'. He has found that 'the small unassuming door, the one closest to the writer, is the hardest one to enter, whereas on the other side

of the planet the imposing portals of the Sydney Opera House are open'. He is finally achieving recognition at home, however. After success in Edinburgh, Jerusalem, Budapest and New York, tours across New Zealand and Australia, and translation into Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Icelandic for a three-year Scandinavian tour, *Playing Burton* was part of the inaugural season at the Wales Millennium Centre. The success of *Rosebud* means that Jenkins is the first Welsh playwright to have three plays in New York inside twelve months.

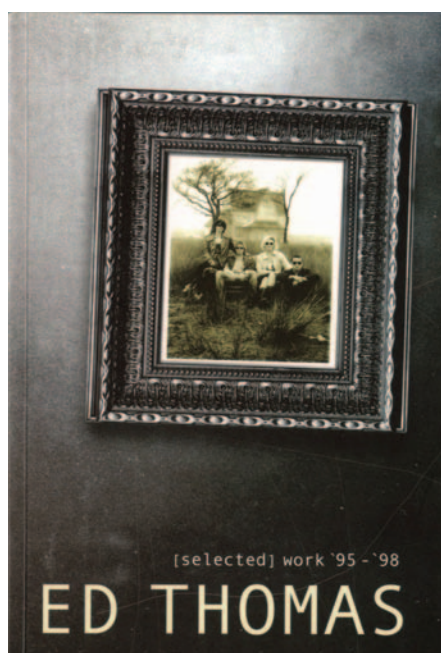


The second playtext was Lewis Davies's *Football*, a sharp play of ideas that draws on cult show *Art*. Its publication for Edinburgh was an experiment. In the past, Parthian have had problems with Sgript Cymru's policy of pre-performance publication, arguing that the audience receive a different script from the one they see because of changes introduced during rehearsals. Yet there is never, as Harris points out, a better time to sell a playtext than on the evening of the performance, and new writing is increasingly marketed in this way. So this year, despite his reservations, Parthian tried a first-night publication that incorporated rehearsal changes.

This meant that two days before they were due to leave for Edinburgh with the printed texts, he was phoning last-minute revisions through to the printers. The problem returns us to considerations of the way that the play is caught between stage and page: if a literary text is complete when the writer is happy with it, a dramatic one only achieves that status when the production works.

Parthian attempts to ensure variety: four very different books appear this year: five of Frank Vickery's plays in a *Selected Work* (edited by Phil Clarke, foreword by Michael Bogdanov); a range of *Shorter Plays from Wales*, including Helen Griffin's excellent *Caitlin* and an early play by Ian Rowlands (also edited by Clarke); a two-play volume containing Lewis Davies's *Sex and Power on the Beau Rivage* and Lesley Ross's *Inside Out*, about writer Rhys Davies and performer Ivor Novello respectively (edited by Chris Morgan), and *Now You're Talking*, a series of conversations between Hazel Walford Davies and Welsh playwrights Dic Edwards, Sian Evans, Lucy Gough, Ian Rowlands, Ed Thomas and Roger Williams (edited by Hazel Walford Davies).

This mix of drama is carefully chosen not only for the quality of the writing but also because of its appeal to different audiences. Vickery's work is extremely popular at Cardiff's Sherman Theatre and short plays are a valuable resource, easily adaptable for performance; by dramatising the struggles of gay Welshmen in early twentieth-century London, the plays of Lewis and Ross appeal to an interest in gender and society, while the 'conversations with playwrights', of course, attract a range of readers. But it is impossible to compete with the big publishers with their advances, blanket distribution and large marketing budgets. Ed Thomas started by publishing the stage play of *House of America* with Seren, and contributed a monologue, 'Envy', to Parthian's *One Man, One Voice*. Parthian also published his *Selected Work* (the screenplay of *House of America*, the finalised texts of *Song from a Forgotten City* and *Gas Station Angel*). But his new play, *Stone City Blue*, was published in Methuen's Contemporary Drama Series in October to accompany its first production in Cardiff.



Contexts and debates

A playtext is part of an ongoing process: it can be thought about, re-visited, re-interpreted, expanded on, quarrelled with; it can document and order unfixed memories, can spawn other writings. Forms of theatre that are not documented risk being lost – and video is no better than a book. Several years ago I spent hours painfully transcribing the muffled dialogue of a company video of Volcano's *L.O.V.E.* for a Spanish company. In March this year Michael

Topping and Marc Rees produced and co-ordinated *The House Project*. The walls, floors and ceilings of a Canton house were variously inscribed with texts, each room 'interpreted' by a different performer. Chapter have partially documented the project in a small, pleasing booklet of photographs. But no images can evoke the dramatic experience: if it is to be remembered it must be turned into stories.

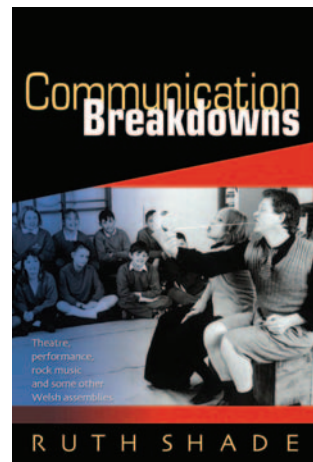
Public storytelling is the other side of publishing for the theatre. It forms the essential context that stimulates interest and debate at all levels, whether in the reviews and commentaries on Keith Morris's excellent Theatre-in-Wales website, or the coverage in the media. These resources are unfortunately thin. Academic books about theatre disseminate more substantial stories. The most detailed publication about Welsh playwrights is *State of Play* (edited by Hazel Walford Davies, Gomer, 1998) which collects a range of superb essays on four of them: Greg Cullen, Dic Edwards, Ed Thomas and Charles Way. But next to nothing has been written on other established writers such as Lucy Gough or Alan Osborne, or on newer writers, like Gary Owen, while little is written generally on the theatre scene in Wales. A more balanced, nuanced and

theorised discussion of the theatre scene could be expected from an academic publisher but the two recent offerings from the University of Wales Press are disappointing in this respect.

The first, Peter Stead's *Acting Wales: Stars of Stage and Screen* disappoints as a glossy and uncritical overview of individual actors: the word 'stars' tells it all. It's an undemanding, easy read, filled with masses of information loosely thrown together and leavened with frequent, sentimental appeals to 'Welshness', to 'our history', to 'Welsh style' – whatever these various abstractions may mean. It also needs decent copy-editing. I'm harsher on it than I would be if it were not a University of Wales publication, however. The Assembly's Welsh Writing in English report may recommend more money specifically for 'books of popular appeal', and insist that 'the new schemes are not restricted to supporting works of "literary merit" alone and sales figures will be a key indicator of performance'. But a university press too closely associated with such populism risks losing academic respectability. If the press needs the money then it should set up a popular imprint that cordons off such books from its academic programme. There is a role for this kind of book, but I'm not convinced that it will do much for theatre – or film.



Ruth Shade's academic study of the history of theatre in the South Wales Valleys, *Communication Breakdown*, is a different matter. It is a polemic against the Arts Council as an ideological state apparatus, passionately arguing that it functions only nominally at arm's length from the government and, by importing class-determined criteria of excellence masquerading as objective truths, has alienated the Valleys' working classes from their own cultural product. The result: the collapse of a vibrant Valleys culture, the loss of a wider participation in the theatre, and the emergence of rock music within those communities as a more viable cultural expression than the (now) emasculated theatre. I would agree with much of this analysis, and yet I feel it flawed in a number of ways. For example, I feel that the mode of statistical analysis that Shade uses is no longer adequate for the changed communities she considers, while anyone who knows the Valleys rock scene knows that it, like the popular music scene generally, is deeply sexist and hardly a comprehensive expression of the community. Despite these problems, there is much to admire: it reveals a forgotten past and draws attention to the way that Arts Council mismanagement has played a role in undermining a vibrant heritage. I have two more fundamental concerns about the book however.



The first is that I don't agree that the chief role of the arts is to provide social capital, and the second is that I am concerned that this book may give those opposed to the Arts Council ammunition to justify its demise – and I wonder whether the Assembly would be any more likely to support historically undervalued communities. As the recently published Boyden report argues, 'art involves risk.

It is not all about consumption by an audience, it is also about creation and expression by individuals, so must be allowed to be unpopular. Consensus in the arts is not about compromise, it is about allowing and facilitating choice.'

Critical writing about the theatre should no more be about consensus than creative work and, although Ruth Shade's thesis may be unpopular, her book raises significant questions about the meaning and function of art. The real reason for my disappointment is frustration that it stands alone. What we need is more books to stimulate further debate. One hopeful sign for the future is Alyce von Rothkirch's gender-inflected critique "'There's a change come over the valley": The Crisis of Masculinism in Early Twentieth-Century Welsh Drama in English', just published in *Beyond the Difference: Welsh Literature in Comparative Contexts* (edited by von Rothkirch and Daniel Williams, UWP, 2004).

The past affects the present, and one inheritance that continues to reverberate into the present is the debilitating mantra that 'Wales is not a theatrical nation'. So far in this article I have drawn attention to three dissenting views – each very different: Sgript Cymru's retrospective season aims to prove that there is a tradition, Ruth Shade's sociological analysis focuses on the forgotten glories of a community-based drama, while Peter Stead seeks to infiltrate and change public perception through repeated assertions about 'Welsh theatricality' and a flamboyant 'Welsh style'.

That is the past. What of the future? Two publications mark out new, interdisciplinary ground. The first is last year's one-off publication on contemporary performance practice in Wales, *Platform un/1*, which focuses on a variety of key innovators: Eddie Ladd, Marc Rees, Eve Dent, Volcano, Pearson/Brookes/Thomas and Meic Povey. It is an attractive package but feels what it is: a promotion published by Wales Arts International. Because of this there can be no development: this year's publication promotes poets and novelists.

The second publication is *Cyfrwng*, a media journal that discusses performance alongside television, new media, film, radio and journalism. It remains to see how successful a journal with such a wide remit may be, but the individual articles are on the whole substantial, well-researched pieces, alternating between the Welsh and English languages, with an excellent review section at the end (there is, for example, a very positive review of *Communication Breakdown* by Heike Roms).

New writing for and about the theatre is appearing in Wales. Routledge may be commissioning a book from Richard Gough of Aberystwyth's Centre for Performance Research, and the University of Wales Press is in the process of commissioning further theatre texts. If we value a future for theatre in Wales, more debate is essential, as are more policy changes that mean that more texts are printed and more plays are performed. This small but expanding body of work needs to be read and discussed at every level, so that people, especially the young, will come into contact with it, and be inspired.

Llanybydder Mart

Gary Owen

Gary Owen's *The Shadow of a Boy* (winner of the 2002 George Devine Award and the 2003 Meyer Whitworth Award) opened at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff on 12 February, and will run until 12 March. *Llanybydder Mart*, a short monologue performed at the Sherman on the night of the premiere of *The Shadow of a Boy*, is a new piece which is published here for the first time. Among other commissions, he is currently working on *The Long Revolution*, a new play for the National Theatre.

Liz, in her late forties, early fifties.

I hated being a kid.

Any moment, any day, the ground could disappear underneath you.

You'd be carrying on quite happily and suddenly – you were in trouble.

You had no idea why.

And no idea what you could do, to get out of trouble.

I remember one time me and Moira.

We had these great big bikes, three-wheeled bikes, we'd seen something or found something and we were riding back to the house to tell mum and dad.

We got to the house ran in going mum, dad.

Dad was there in the kitchen.

Did you just ride across that field, he goes.

What've I told you, he goes.

How many times've I told you?

You ride along the side of the field.

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You ride by the hedge.

I've told you. I've told you both.

And what did I just see you both do?

And that was it for us.

Bed with no supper.

And I can't even remember now, what it was me and Moira were so excited about.

I just remember all that excitement going cold in my throat.

And marching upstairs to bed.

And getting undressed.

And making a point of not crying, not even a bit.

Once dad'd gone out, Ninnie crept up the stairs with a few slices of bread and butter, and milky tea for the two of us.

Then the tears came, of course.

Pause.

Back then I used to get thirty pounds for breaking in a pony.

Dad would let me keep every penny.

Which was amazing because everything with Dad was about money.

That sounds horrible. But it was sort of true.

It sort of, became true.

The house where we lived, wasn't ours. We rented it.

We'd rented it for years, and the landlady was a nice enough old woman but my dad.

It was like he couldn't settle.

He'd always be on that she could have us out anytime she wanted.

Then all the work he'd done on the house and the land would go to nothing.

In the end he decided was gonna have the house off her.

For that he was gonna need money.

More money than he had, and more money than he could make off our land.

So he started scrimping and saving.

Some bloke down the road from us went bankrupt, Dad had enough to pick up his couple of fields that bordered onto ours.

With the extra land, we were bringing in extra money.

Dad kept on saving, and before too long he bought a few more acres.

And then a few more.

And then a few more again.

And he carried on like that. Working every hour he could, saving every penny he could, buying every scrap of land he could till we had a decent sized farm, making decent enough money.

Bit of an achievement.

He didn't take much pleasure in it.

Because the heart of the farm, the house we lived in, was not ours.

It could be snatched from under us at any time. It could all just disappear.

Any moment. Any day.

But whatever Dad offered the landlady to sell up, she always thought he could offer a little bit more.

And he would offer more, six months later. And she would still say no.

And so it went on.

The horses I think he felt guilty about.

It was like they were – a distraction.

Cause though they were there to make money, he loved them.

Not like the farm work: he was good at the farm work, but he did it cause it paid.

With the horses, he properly loved them.

It started cause Teddy Bishop down the Mason's Arms had bought his daughter a pony, and needed a field to put it in.

And we had this field out the front of the house that was boggy most of the year, and good for nothing.

So we took in this pony, Trigger, and Dad built it a little lean-to.

Then Teddy Bishop's daughter loses interest in Trigger. Stops coming up to feed him and muck him out.

So I start looking after Trigger. Dad starts charging Teddy an extra few bob a week for my efforts.

And like everything Dad did, it just sort of took off.

All we really had was this field, this lean-to, and this grumpy dapple grey mountain pony. But down the pub, the legend grew, and word got round the district we had this thriving business, stabling and breaking in ponies.

So people started coming to us, wanting us to stable their horses and break in their ponies.

Thing was Dad didn't have time to be breaking in ponies.

I was gonna have to do it.

I wasn't sure, but Dad said I'd be fine. He told me I had good hands, I could feel what a horse was up to, when it was thinking about having

a bolt.

He said he'd tell me the secret of breaking in ponies, if I'd let him whisper in my ear.

He was smiling, and it made me nervous, cause he was such a crotchety old sod usually if he smiled you'd look up, to see what was about to hit you.

But I said oh all right then and he came up close and put his mouth to my ear, and he whispered – the secret is, when you take a pony out to ride her for the very first time, make sure you do it just after heavy rain, when the ground's all nice and muddy.

I said why's that Dad, does it calm the pony down, or what?

And he said no not a bit of it, but at least you'll get a soft landing when she chucks you.

He laughed like anything.

And that was something you'd hardly ever see.

Like I say, he properly loved the horses.

But he was always a bit on guard about them.

As if they might lead him astray.

Pause.

We had some beautiful horses stabled with us in the end.

I'd be riding point-to-pointers in the off season, galloping them round the Ross and Lisserfran.

But my favourite was always our first little pony, Trigger.

We had him for years and Teddy Bishop's daughter came up to ride him maybe half a dozen times.

I couldn't blame her, though. Nobody could ride Trigger. Not my dad, not Moira.

Nobody but me.

Anyone but me got on him, he'd be a little bugger, rearing and bolting, all his tricks to get you off.

But for me he'd behave. Mostly.

I don't know why he'd behave for me, he just –

She stops.

I got to thinking of him as being my pony.

At first just my pony in that if we took people out for a hack, then of course Trigger would have to be my pony cause no-one else could ride him.

But after a while, he was just – mine.

For years, he was mine.

Then Dad told me Teddy Bishop'd decided to sell Trigger, and I'd have to get him ready to take to Llanybydder mart.

I remember the feeling, of the ground being gone.

I didn't argue, of course.

You didn't so much argue with your parents, in those days.

But I tried to think, what could I do, how could I stop it.

At first I asked Dad if we could buy Trigger.

Dad said, what for? He's no use to anyone. No-one can ride him.

I can ride him, I said.

Dad said what, you'd rather trot round on some grumpy little pony, when there's proper horses you could be riding?

If I'd've said yes, I would rather be trotting on my grumpy little pony that would've been answering back. And you didn't, in those days.

On the way to the mart, me and Dad talked about – birds we saw out the window, cows we saw in the fields, cars we saw on the roads. We talked about what tractors were value for money, what tractors were expensive foreign rubbish. We talked about anything we could.

And then we got to Llanybydder.

And I said I would just stay in the Landrover.

And Dad said, who d'you think's gonna show Trigger? I can't show him, he'll play up with me and no-one'll touch him.

I said Dad, you're gonna make me show my own horse to be sold?

And he said, no love. I'm gonna make you show Teddy Bishop's horse to be sold.

And you're gonna show Trigger as best you can.

And we'll get the best price we can.

And then we'll go home.

So we get Trigger out of the box.

We walk him to the ring.

We get our number.

We wait for our turn.

And our turn comes.

Dad says to me, right.

You show them what they'll be getting.

And he turns, and hops up into the stalls.

And the auctioneer is calling my number.

I head into the ring. I take Trigger round for a first lap.

And I catch my Dad's eye.

He is, very gently, smiling at me.

And so I, very gently, give Trigger a squeeze.

He bolts across the ring. He rears up and whinnies.

I make a show of getting him back under control.

And then I give him another little squeeze and, away he goes again.

And I catch Dad's eye. He is smiling still.

I hear the auctioneer asking for bids.

Not a peep.

The auctioneer lowers his opening price.

Still no takers.

I'm doing one final circuit of the ring.

The auctioneer is saying that if there are no bids at all, he'll move on to the next lot.

I'm turning to take Trigger out of the ring.

And someone waves. Someone makes a bid.

I look to my dad.

The bid is nothing, a couple of quid.

I look to my dad and.

He's just about to raise his arm.

He's just about to raise his arm and make a bid of his own. A bid for me.

I see his fingers stretch and his arm start to lift.

And he turns away.

Walks off.

And Trigger gets sold. For a couple of quid.

In the Landrover on the way back Dad turns on the radio, puts it onto the news.

He makes conversation about wars and people starving in foreign countries and how lucky we are.

I stay quiet.

That night he comes and sits on the edge of the bed, makes sure I've said my prayers.

Tells me things'll be different once he's bought the house.

Once we own our own home there'll be firm ground to stand on.

A bit of money to spare.

But not till then.

Till then we all have to put up with things we don't like.

My dad dies in that house, ten or twelve years later.

And he still doesn't own it, even then.

He dies carrying bales of hay out to some horses, one freezing January.

Fifty-two. Heart attack.

He falls in the field, and dies there.

I think he loved those horses. Properly.



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Sgript Cymru Published Plays

SC1 Diwedd y Byd / Yr Hen Blant Meic Povey
 SC2 Art and Guff Catherine Tregenna
 SC3 Crazy Gary's Mobile Disco Gary Owen
 SC4 Ysbryd Beca Geraint Lewis
 SC5 Franco's Bastard Dic Edwards
 SC6 Dosbarth Geraint Lewis
 SC7 past away Tracy Harris
 SC8 Indian Country Meic Povey
 SC9 Diwrnod Dwyntwen Fflur Dafydd, Angharad
 Devonald, Angharad Elen, Meleri Wyn James,
 Dafydd Llewelyn, Nia Wyn Roberts
 SC10 Ghost City Gary Owen
 SC11 AMDANI! Bethan Gwanas
 SC12 Community Writer 2001-2004 Robert Evans,
 Michael Waters a chyfraniadau gan eraill oedd yn
 ymwneud â'r prosiect
 SC13 Drws Arall i'r Coed Gwyneth Glyn, Eurgain Haf,
 Dyfrig Jones, Caryl Lewis, Manon Wyn
 SC14 Crossings Clare Duffy

crossings
by Clare Duffy

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Out on the Margins

Lewis Davies

Parthian's Publishing Director, Lewis Davies, reflects on the role of theatre publishing in contemporary Wales.

The play's the thing. Absolutely. Plays are meant to be interpreted and performed. The publication of a play is therefore only an addition to any stage production. Playtexts are like critics, somewhere out on the margins of the theatre world, part of the dressing.

However, we are part of a culture where more dramatic work is getting published. It is relatively easy now to produce extended programmes and call them books. The writer and the actors love them; everyone from the stage manager to the cook gets a mention on the opening night, and they are passed around with the wine and cheese. There is in the end something about a book, its potential longevity promising life beyond the four weeks of rehearsals and the ten-day run in a small theatre. The blaze of publicity with stories in papers everyone has read before. A run everyone will forget in a month as actors and directors and writers move

off into their own lives again. Plays are often forgotten, usually for good reason. But the playtext captures a certain time. It offers for the writer at least the potential of a new run and new life. Charlie Way, for example, was invited to the Sundance Film Festival as the result of someone reading his play *Dead Man's Hat* in a collection published by Seren. *Dead Man's Hat* is a Western, set in Wyoming. Mark Jenkins has also found it useful to have his epic monologue *Playing Burton* published in a collection called *One Man, One Voice*. *Playing Burton* was already well into a successful ten-year world tour by the time it was published, but the authority of the printed text accompanied by a critical introduction has helped Mark Jenkins in his role as producer and playwright. Sharon Morgan has recently played *Magic Threads* (which was published in *One Woman, One Voice*) to audiences in New York. The publisher can never be sure if a book has been instrumental in securing extra productions



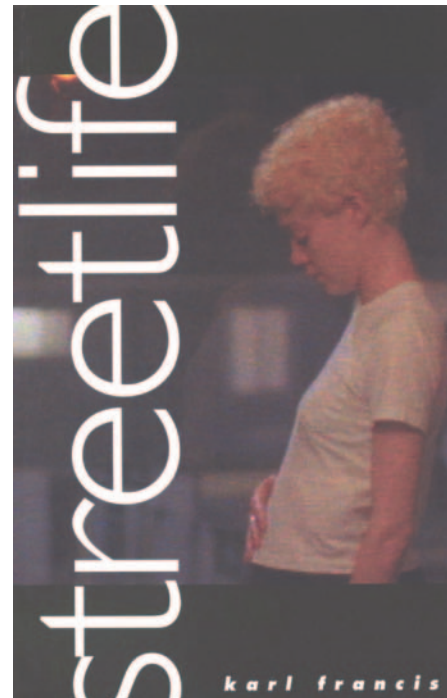


for these plays, but they don't do any harm. Again there is something substantial about a book, the investment of time and money beyond what the play is meant to be.

I've been involved in publishing plays since the publication of Alan Osborne's *Merthyr Trilogy*. Two of the plays in the trilogy, *Bull, Rock and Nut* and *Sunshine and Shadow* had achieved a certain mythical status in the world of Welsh theatre. The

great Welsh actors of the time had played in them: Dorien Thomas as Nut, Sharon Morgan as Vee, and Bob Blythe appearing in both. Alan Osborne's run of plays opened up an important period of Welsh theatrical invention. However, they were not published until 1998, some fifteen years after the first production of *Bull, Rock and Nut*. And yet there was something in the plays that kept them in the memory for over a decade. I had never seen a performance, but had met plenty of people who had. In the publication we tried to do something more than just publish the plays; we tried to set them in the context of their times with retrospective essays by Gilly Adams, cast photographs and set design sketches. This is expensive, but we wanted to make the book into something more than just a play. We have also attempted to follow this model with published work on significant playwrights such as Ian Rowlands. Seven years on, the first print run of *The Merthyr Trilogy* has sold out and the book has spurred a number of rehearsed readings, but there still hasn't been another full production of any of the plays. It is a lot easier to just publish the play with a cast list. We've tried this as well. On balance I'd prefer to wait, edit and select.

Plays don't sell in any numbers likely to interest a publisher who wants to make money. They are read largely by people involved in the industry, – actors, directors, writers, producers. In wider terms they are adopted for courses of study and they are a record of their time. However they are part of the dramatic culture of the theatre. Like critics, they are not necessary, but sometimes useful.



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