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Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Dog

By Paula Bardell

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Emlyn Williams Theatre, Mold, North Wales: 20th February 2003

Clwyd Theatr Cymru commemorated the 50th anniversary of the death of the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas (1914–1953) with a superb run of performances by a small but accomplished cast of actors.

Described in the programme as "A theatrical journey through the prose writing of Dylan Thomas", the production was created by Tim Baker, an Associate of the Royal National Theatre, who won the Manchester Evening News Best Visiting Production award in 1992 for the highly acclaimed To Kill a Mockingbird.

Although Thomas is best known for his 'play for voices', Under Milk Wood, his evocative poems such as Fern Hill and Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night are rarely overlooked when anthologies celebrating 20th century poetry are put together. Indeed, this mesmerizing interpretation of Thomas's short stories could well be described as a rich fusion of prose and poetry. For example, in a scene crossing a river he speaks of, "slipping stepping stones" and early on in the piece he describes his "love" of words thus:

"And these words were, to me, as the notes of bells, the sounds of musical instruments, the noises of wind, sea and rain, the rattle of milk carts, the clopping of hooves on cobbles, the fingering of branches on a window pane, might be to someone deaf from birth, who has miraculously found his hearing."

The company of five use only stools and orange boxes to set the scenes for Thomas's vivid recollections of his boyhood in Swansea. The young Dylan is played brilliantly by Russell Gomer, who struts and capers across the hazily lit stage, reliving the poet's every memory as if it was his own. His fellow actors play a myriad of characters. The slightly built but enormously gifted Zoë Davies is adept at playing both male and female roles, from oppressed aunts to inebriated old men. And Morgan Walters, a ginger-haired giant of a man, is memorable for his portrayal of the young poet's bear-like

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uncle, as well as Les, Thomas's friend who invents names for passing strangers, and as a relation who steals livestock to pay for drinking binges. Whilst the cherubic-faced David Rees Talbot puts in a particularly memorable performance as Ray, a young man whose tragic past is briefly forgotten but inevitably revisited when he and Thomas ramble to the seaside to paddle in the surf.

The enigmatic and engaging Thomas lived a short and self-destructive, if literary fruitful life. His father, an English teacher at the local grammar school, began to read Shakespeare to him at the age of four and he started to write poetry in his eighth year. His childhood and adolescence were central to his later work - although he left school without formal qualifications and did not learn the Welsh language. He moved from Swansea to London in 1934, famously remarking, "The land of my fathers My fathers can keep it."

Thomas's first two books, *18 Poems* and *Twenty-five Poems*, were published respectively in 1934 and 1936. He married Caitlin Macnamara in 1937 (they had three children during their tempestuous years

together) and he made his first radio broadcast with *Life and the Modern Poet* on the BBC Welsh Services the following year. After the Second World War, his popularity as a poet grew in direct proportion to his reputation as a heavy drinker. However, his positive, rhetorical style won an enthusiastic following and poems such as *A Refusal to Mourn the Death by Fire of a Child in London* led to lecture tours of the United States. He died in St. Vincent's Hospital, New York, on 9th November 1953.

This stage adaptation of *Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Dog* - so bristling with humour and pathos - will undoubtedly delight parents and teachers endeavouring to introduce young people to Thomas's work. Adult audiences will also be entranced by its wry, witty narrative and flamboyant presentation. There is little doubt that, in the future, new theatrical companies will revive the production and it will become a fitting tribute to one of the world's great 20th century poets.

Paula has contributed features to numerous guidebooks, magazines and journals on the subjects of literature, travel, culture and history. She is currently the editor of two online guides: *All Info About Poetry*

and *All Info-About English Culture*

Portrait Gifts For Special Occasions

By Grace Palce

I've always wanted someone to give me a portrait as a gift but somehow, there's still no one who has the foresight to give me that. Portraits are not impersonal gifts that you can just purchase from the mall but rather portraits are very special gifts that can impress recipients with your thoughtfulness and level of care.

Choosing the right subject and the right occasion to give portraits as a gift is the first obstacle in your

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path. To help you choose when's the best time to give someone a portrait as a gift, here are several suggestions that you could bear in mind.

For Better or For Worse, Till Death Do Us Part What else am I talking about except for marriages? For most people, especially the Catholics, you can only walk down the aisle once in your life so for them, marriages that last long as Britney's Vegas ceremony are an absolute no-no.

Hence, if you've got friends who believe that only death can ruin their marriages, you can certainly believe that they haven't arrived on their decisions lightly. Most probably, they've married because they found true and everlasting love and could there be a better way than capturing the essence of their feelings for each other through a beautiful portrait gift?

I'll Remember You People who are bereft of their loved ones and in mourning usually feel that an integral part of their lives are lacking. Even though they've "moved on" with their lives, there are still times that they probably can't help but miss their loved ones. To give them something concrete to hold on to, you could try giving them a portrait gift of that special someone who passed away.

Animals - Friends For Life Never underestimate the bond between man and animal. That's why they say that the dog's a man's best friend. A dog, for a lot of people, serves as a daily companion who stays with their masters throughout the good and the bad times.

Sadly, dogs and other animals have a comparatively shorter life span so it would be inevitable when the time comes that they'd leave their masters to go to the after life. Hence, for pet lovers, portraits done of their pets could just be that perfect gift.

Memories For some people, a remembrance of their old hometown or a favorite childhood spot is the best gift they could ever receive because it reminds them of their origins and how far they've come.

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