



## Small But Perfectly Formed: The Short Play

(Blog post about writing short plays)

Being a writer can be tough. (Sob). You come up with an idea for a full length play, sit on it, obsess over it for an age and wonder if everyone else will think it's stupid. (I choose a title and then write it on my hand every day and stare at it. I'm totally normal). Then comes the actual writing of it: arduous, sometimes enjoyable, sometimes impossible, but pretty all-consuming either way. Then it's finished. And the little bit of your soul that you gave away while writing it is replaced by a bunch of crisp typed pages. Neatly stacked in front of you, they grin at you and whisper eagerly "You Wrote Me". There isn't a feeling in the world like typing the word END. That moment is totally yours, no one can take it or change it. You might have a million rewrites to do, but first draft is done. Unadulterated achievement.

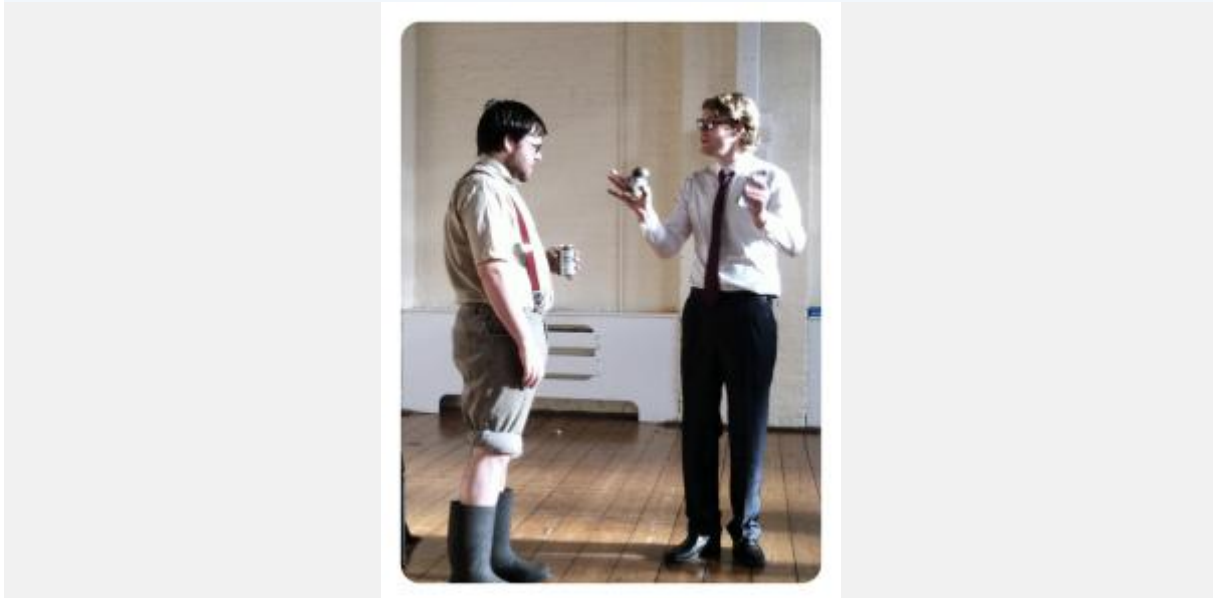
So, now what? Ultimately the writer wants to get their work ON. Easier said than done, no? There are plenty of new writing theatres which will read unsolicited submissions. (Meaning not through a lit agent. I always think "Unsolicited" is an unfortunate choice of word. Makes it sound like you're doing something a bit dodgy.) [The Royal Court](#), [Theatre 503](#) and [Soho Theatre](#) are all new writing theatres where you can send your work. With [The Bush Theatre](#) you can submit plays through the [Bushgreen](#) website. These theatres will often provide feedback, which is invaluable. However, this can take take months. It's just the way it is. I have more than one full lengther languishing on my hard drive, wondering whether it will ever get a real outing. Sitting at your desk surrounded by notebooks and coffee cups is only half the work. Hearing and seeing your work in rehearsal and up on stage is where you learn whether what's on the page comes alive or not. So how do we get our words heard?

Well, the answer might just be The Short Play. Never has the British playwright had so many opportunities to get their work performed, in the form of short play festivals and competitions. It's something to invite people to, friends and family but also agents, directors, literary managers. OK, so often they can't make it, but if you have something on its a reason to write to them; to make a connection and hopefully start a relationship. Because festivals have loads of actors, directors and writers involved it means the theatres are generally filled to the rafters, so it won't be just you, your

nan and your mate from work. You might be just starting out as a writer, so just finishing a play, no matter how long means you can get some of that achievement sugar I spoke of earlier.

In terms of writing a short play, keeping it simple usually works for me; limiting to two or three actors and making sure each has an integral role. I've never written a short play that doesn't occur in real time, or has moved locations or has more than one scene. I keep props, scenery and sound and lighting cues to a minimum. Of course you must write the play you want to write, and if that's a school trip to Mount Vesuvius while it erupts then so be it. But it's worth remembering you want this play to be performed – and successfully. That usually means in a small fringe theatre with limited space, equipment and, most importantly, time. Like any good play, it is important that the characters go on a journey; they end in a place that is different than where they started, through event(s) that happen throughout. And a good short play should engage the audience instantly (I like to call it “Grabbing them by the balls”). You need to establish in the very first couple of minutes who your characters are, where they are, what is their relationship and what is the situation. Take us straight into the action of the play. Important in any piece, but essential in the short play.

So, where to send your little gem? The [Off Cut Festival](#) springs to mind immediately.



Matthew Bloxham & Benjamin Francis in *Bed of Foxgloves*, part of *Fragments*

I took part in the first Off Cut Festival with my play [Closer To God](#) back in 2009 (which we have revived for [Fragments](#)) and was lucky enough to win. It

was genuinely the most significant event of my career so far. Off the back of that I got signed by a lit agent and was approached by [Little Brother Productions](#), and am now putting the finishing touches on my first TV drama series treatment which I have developed with them. Not bad going, for a mere 2771 words. Last year Off Cut brought 28 playwrights, 28 directors and up to 112 actors together to The Riverside Studios for the festival, which was won by the rather talented [Tanja Mariadoss](#).

I also hear great things about [Little Pieces of Gold](#) at the Etcetera Theatre. I have been on the panel for [Artists Anonymous Page to Stage](#) event, where you can send in a short play or ten pages of a longer work which is performed. You then you get feedback and discussion from the industry panel and the audience. I was also on the panel for [The Lost Theatre 5 Minute Festival](#) this year which is a great platform. [The Love Bites Plays](#) are currently looking for fifteen minute submissions on the theme of “Anti-valentines”. (I might enter. I could write a *belter* on that theme).

[Playlist](#) is a great concept, where you write a play inspired by a song, the only rule being that the play is no longer than the song which inspired it (a challenge indeed, for witterers like me). My piece for Playlist was based on Adele’s [Someone Like You](#), (see pic at top) which meant I was an emotional ruin as I listened to it on repeat for two weeks. I also wrote a piece based on the brilliant Foals song [Blue Blood](#). Both pieces feature in [Fragments](#) at Riverside. At Theatre 503 they run a fabulous writers event called [Rapid Write Response](#). Writers get a £5 ticket on a specified date to see a 503 show, and then have a week to write a short play in response to it. The successful pieces are performed at 503, and the event almost always sells out. I’ve been involved in many of these. You get to meet the Lit team there. Plus it is great for getting you going and not questioning yourself too much about whether what you are writing is “good”. There isn’t time!

Outside London Town I’ve been told about the [Ten Minute Play Competition](#) from New Venture Theatre in Sussex and [The Pint Sized Play Festival](#) in Tenby . Across the pond [The NYC Playwrights Festival](#) Calls for plays of 15 mins.

Of course, if you haven’t already, sign up to [WAP Writers Network](#). We will keep you updated with these projects as they come along. I hope this blog has been helpful.

And I hope to see you on the 1st Feb at Riverside, for some little plays and a big glass of Free Wine! Keep WAP updated, and let us know if you about any successes with a small your perfectly formed plays.

Anna Jordan ☺