



Under Milk Wood

by Dylan Thomas

Alton Fringe Theatre

Alton Maltings Centre
29 & 30 March 2006

Principal parts

First Narrator	Richard Fowler
Second Narrator	Christine McDerment
Third Narrator	Penny Cushing
Captain Cat	Fred Sharples
Mrs Cherry Owen/Voice of Guidebook/ Rosie Probert,	Alison De Ledesma
Polly Garter/Mrs Willy Nilly	Allyson Hall
Mrs Ogmores-Pritchard/Mary Ann Sailors	Ann Scott
Reverend Eli Jenkins/Organ Morgan	Brian Jones
Mae Rose-Cottage/Mrs Utah Watkins	Catherine Gerlach
Mrs Dai Bread 2/Mrs Pugh	Chris Chappell
Miss Myfanwy Price/Lily Smalls/ Gossamer Beynon	Claire Matthews
Mog Edwards/Mr Pugh	Gavin Meikle
Mrs Dai Bread 1/Mrs Organ Morgan/ Bessie Bighead	Lesley Willis
Willy Nilly/Cherry Owen/Mr Pritchard	Mike Biddiss
Lord Cut-Glass/Attila Rees/Mr Ogmores	Morris Hopkins
Nogood Boyo/Butcher Beynon/Mr Waldo	Tim Guilding

The voices of a further 42 inhabitants of Llareggub are also played by the cast.

Production

Lighting/sound	Haydn Chappell
Backdrop	Ruth and Mike Biddiss
Publicity	Gavin Meikle
Bar/Front of House	Morris Hopkins
Assistant director	Mike Biddiss
Director	James Willis

Recorded music by the Morryston Orpheus Choir and the Duvant Male Choir.

The play is set in an imaginary Welsh village in the 1950s.

The production runs for approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes.

There is no interval but the wine bar will be open afterwards.

'A greenleaved sermon on the innocence of men...'

Dylan Thomas said that he loved small towns by the sea, and small towns by the sea in Wales best of all. In *Under Milk Wood*, his 'play for voices', he traces with deep affection the activities of the inhabitants of such a town. From night-time dreams to morning, through afternoon to night; the final sentence pops like magic out of a sea of words, *'the suddenly wind-shaken wood springs awake for the second dark time this one Spring day'*.

Under Milk Wood was completed in 1953 – the year in which Thomas died, aged 39. It was his only play and is now his best known work. As in his greatest volume of poetry, *Deaths and Entrances*, death is an abiding theme, but here it is more than balanced by the richness of life. Above all, the purpose of what has been called the 'innocent voyeurism' of *Under Milk Wood* is simply to make us laugh.

Thomas conceived the play as early as 1943 under the title 'The Town That Was Mad'. In it Llareggub is certified insane by an Inspector sent down from London; the inhabitants decide it is the world that is mad. This farcical plot was abandoned as Thomas realised his talent was not for plots but for something more like a tone poem.

The first performance was in New York on 14 May 1953, with Thomas as narrator and the remaining seventy-three roles shared between four American actors. Nobody, not even Thomas, sounded very Welsh. In October of that year he delivered the New York script to the BBC for typing, but on getting it back he immediately lost it. The commissioning producer, Douglas Cleverdon, subsequently found it in a Soho pub. The first radio version was transmitted on 25 Jan 1954, shortly after Thomas's death. Our Fringe production is based on the text of the 1963 broadcast, which starred Richard Burton, also directed by Cleverdon, which included several passages previously omitted. This script is available in Penguin Classics, edited by Walford Davies and is the one we have used. The most significant change we have made is to divide the narration between three voices.

The only direction Thomas gave to the actors in the original New York production was this:

'Love the words'



Alton Fringe, which first came together for the 1988 May Arts Week production of *Murder in the Cathedral* (in which tonight's Captain Cat – Fred Sharples – played Thomas Becket), has acquired a reputation and a loyal following because of the variety and quality of its performances. The group's home is Amery Hill Drama Studio, but over the years it has also performed in churches, village halls, and even in a marquee in St Lawrence churchyard. It is a great pleasure to be the first to perform in the Centennial Hall of the New Maltings Centre.

If you are interested in joining the Fringe to act, direct or help backstage, please talk to any of the members. Or if you would like to be on the mailing list, please leave your name and address with one of the front of house team or phone Lesley Willis on 01429 83416.

Acknowledgements

Andrew Knowles and his staff at the Maltings Centre www.altonmaltingscentre.com

Amery Hill School – Rehearsal facilities

Corkscrew Wine Services – Bar

Friends of the Fringe – Front of House

Little Green Dragon Bookshop - Box office www.littlegreendragon.co.uk

Richard Tuff – Permission to use a monochrome detail of his painting *Blue Harbour, Coverack*. www.beside-the-wave.co.uk/posters/editionslrt.html

The Dylan Thomas Centre – General support www.dylanthomasboathouse.com/

You can read the full text and hear the BBC 1963 'Richard Burton' recording online at: www.undermilkwood.net/