

**Reviewer:** The play *The Short Goodbye*, by Richard Holder, is virtually unknown today, and is hardly ever produced, so it may be hard to understand the impact it had when it was first produced in 1957, but it represents an important landmark in the development of theatre in the UK. So, why was this play so remarkable at the time? Well, to begin with, it took place in an industrial city, which was almost unheard-of as the setting for a play in those days. [7] At the time, plays were often set in small towns and suburbs or country homes, and they tended to focus on the higher end of society. *The Short Goodbye*, on the other hand, dealt with the lives of factory workers. The main characters, a husband and wife named Colin and Sadie Thomas, were low-paid workers with little education, working in a factory that made car engines. [8]

Another feature of the play that broke new ground at the time was that the characters all spoke with a regional accent – before this, what was then regarded as standard English in terms of accent was the norm. [9] Even when characters were from a specific part of the country, authentic regional speech was rarely heard on the stage.

So the play set out to depict working-class people at that time, and it caused quite a sensation because these characters were not what working-class people were assumed to be like. It was assumed that the men talked only about football and the women discussed only household matters. However, despite their lack of education, the characters in this play spent a lot of time discussing social attitudes. [10] As the plot developed, the audience discovered that the main character, Colin, was planning to enrol at a college and that his aim was to become a lawyer. [11] His wife Sadie also had aspirations, and didn't want to spend her life doing boring work and household chores. She felt that her talents lay in art and she was keen to do that professionally. [12] So both characters were people who had dreams and a desire to fulfil them. This portrayal of working-class people caused a sensation at the time.

Now, let me just tell you about the stage set for the play when it was first produced in 1957. It showed a modest working-class home of the time, but in keeping with the themes of the play, it was a little different. For example, very prominent on the stage – towards the front of it so that audiences couldn't miss it – was a piano. [13] It wasn't played at all, but the director and set designer both felt that it would be a striking feature. And at the back of the stage, again very visible to the audience, was a group of bookshelves, indicating that the inhabitants were interested in reading. [14] So, the set surprised and fascinated the audience. When the curtain opened, they wanted to know what kind of people lived there.