

WRITER'S BLOCK

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Matt Thompson

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WRITER'S BLOCK **By Matt Thompson**

SYNOPSIS: It's the afterlife and some of the world's greatest playwrights are guests on *Inside the Writer's Studio*! Our hosts, George Bernard Shaw and Edgar Allen Poe, are having a hearty discussion on the life and times of our famous authors, until George Lucas stops by and tells them that he is going to digitally reformat their lives. It's a quick humorous laugh at literature!

CAST OF CHARACTERS (5-6 EITHER)

Though these are male parts, since this is rather tongue-in-cheek, these roles may easily be played by either male or female.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (m/f)..... Upbeat host of *Inside the Writer's Studio*. Speaks with an English accent.

EDGAR ALLEN POE (m/f)..... Co-host of the *Inside the Writer's Studio*. Very serious. Think Emo. Speaks with an English accent. May double with George Lucas.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (m/f)..... A guest on *Inside the Writer's Studio*. A bit of an airhead. Speaks with an English accent.

AESCHELUS (m/f) Famous Greek playwright. As a guest on *Inside the Writer's Studio*, he becomes a little annoyed.

MOLIÈRE (m/f).....The famous French comic playwright. He thinks that everything is a joke. Also, a guest on *Inside the Writer's Studio*.

GEORGE LUCAS (m/f)The unexpected guest. May double with Edgar Allen Poe.

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AT RISE:

As the lights rise, we see a table with five adjacent chairs. Behind the table sits our host of the Writer's Studio, GEORGE BERNARD SHAW. His mannerisms may be a bit like James Lipton from "Inside the Actor's Studio." In the chair closest to the desk sits his co-host, EDGAR ALLAN POE, dressed all in black.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *(Addressing the audience.)* Hello everybody, and welcome to another edition of *Inside the Writer's Studio*. I'm George Bernard Shaw, here with my co-host, Edgar Allan Poe. On our program, some of history's greatest magnets of literature discuss their contributions to history and their reflections of the written word. Edgar, how are you feeling today?

EDGAR ALLAN POE: Like death.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Right. So, let's begin. Our first guest is considered to be one of the finest writers of the English language. He has written some of the most admired plays in the Western Hemisphere, he also transformed the English theatre by expanding expectations about what could be accomplished through characterization, plot, action, language, and genre. He never traveled the world but wrote all about it. Ladies and gentlemen, the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon, William Shakespeare.

Applause SFX. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE enters and shakes hands with GEORGE BERNARD SHAW and takes a seat closest to EDGAR ALLAN POE.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Our next guest is one of France's most beloved *commedia dell'arte* performers. A true comic genius in the vein of such greats as Charles Chaplain, Harold Lloyd, and Pauly Shore. An all around man of theatre, please welcome Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, better known as Molière.

Applause SFX. MOLIÈRE enters with a funny wig, a rubber nose, while honking a horn. HE does a pratfall, pulls himself up and goes to shake GEORGE BERNARD SHAW's hand, but pulls his own hand away at the last moment. HE finally takes a seat.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Our final guest... Edgar, would you like to introduce our next guest?

EDGAR ALLAN POE: *(Quickly.)* No.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Very well, our next guest considers himself one of Greece's most esteemed playwrights. Winner of the Dionysia Festival of 458 B.C. and the inventor of tragedy, and he just signed a four year endorsement deal with Kalamata Olives. Please welcome Aeschylus.

Applause SFX. AESCHYLUS enters in a toga and sandals and takes a seat.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Thank you all for joining us here today. Let's start with you, Bill. There has been a lot of controversy surrounding your writing, and there is one looming, burning question that has been sitting in the minds of scholars for centuries: who wrote the plays of William Shakespeare?

SHAKESPEARE: I did. Me.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Good enough for me. Your *Hamlet* leads the canon as the English speaking language's greatest piece of literature put down into words. It speaks of the poetry of the mind, of the body and of the soul. In your masterpiece, the central character, Hamlet, in act three scene two speaks to Ophelia, the object of his love, and he says, "Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?" In which she replies, "Tis brief, my lord." And what does Hamlet retort?

SHAKESPEARE: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation."

Beat.

AESCHYLUS: That's Robert Frost.

SHAKESPEARE looks away, a bit guilty.

AESCHYLUS: You just plagiarized the poet Robert Frost.

SHAKESPEARE: Oh.

MOLIÈRE: Nice goin' Shakespeare.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Let us move on. (*Stressing the short "e."*) Now, Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS: That's (*Stressing the long "e."*) Aeschylus.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Right. Let us discuss *Agamemnon*, the first play of three brilliant works discussing the curse on the House of Atreus.

AESCHYLUS: Yes.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: In that first play, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, attempts to persuade him to step on a purple carpet. Some scholars say the tapestry is cyan or even magenta. The hue of this carpet is exceptionally important to the main character, since stepping on this tapestry indicates hubris on Agamemnon's part. (Very intense and serious.) Aeschylus, what...is your favorite cartoon?

AESCHYLUS: (*Beat.*) Cartoon?

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Yes.

AESCHYLUS: What does my favorite cartoon have to do with anything?

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: It can say a lot about a person.

AESCHYLUS: We didn't have cartoons in my time.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: A shame. So, let us get back to your plays. You wrote seven in your lifetime.

AESCHYLUS: No, I wrote 76, but the others are lost.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: So you say.

AESCHYLUS: I have the original tablet manuscripts in stone.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: And you brought them with you?

AESCHYLUS: Of course not, that's thousands of pounds of granite.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: And so they remain lost, I suppose.

AESCHYLUS: No, I can go home and get them, I mean...

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: No, that's not necessary.

AESCHYLUS: But I...

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Aeschylus, if Zeus exists, what would you say to him as you entered heaven?

AESCHYLUS: (*Very serious.*) An artist has arrived.

MOLIÈRE honks his horn.

AESCHYLUS: Do you mind, Molière?

MOLIÈRE honks his horn twice.

AESCHYLUS: Please.

MOLIÈRE honks his horn once.

AESCHYLUS: (*Upset.*) Everything is a joke to you isn't it, Molière?

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Jean-Baptiste, would you mind sharing your thoughts on Aeschylus' small canon of work? Specifically the character of Oedipus?

MOLIÈRE: He needs to have his face slapped by a sausage. More sausage slapping! You cannot go wrong! (*Honks his horn three times and does a little jig.*)

AESCHYLUS: Excuse me, but I didn't write Oedipus Rex.

MOLIÈRE: Well, maybe you should have. (*Honks his horn.*)

AESCHYLUS: You're always out for the laughs aren't you, Jean? You know what? Your literature is a joke.

MOLIÈRE: And what is wrong with a joke? I have read your plays. And I say to you, high and mighty writer, where is the Inamorato, the Harlequin, the play on life? I do not think I agree with your very serious plays, sir, as they are not suited for the French theatre or for any theatre, for that matter!

AESCHYLUS: Molière, drop dead!

MOLIÈRE: I already did, on stage.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Gentlemen, please. And now my co-host Edgar Allan Poe has a special poem that he has written on the comedy of life. Edgar?

EDGAR ALLAN POE stands and recites a portion of "Spirits of the Dead" very intensely.

EDGAR ALLAN POE: Thy soul shall find itself alone
'Mid dark thoughts of the grey tomb-stone;
Not one, of all the crowd, to pry
Into thine hour of secrecy.

Be silent in that solitude,
Which is not loneliness - for then
The spirits of the dead, who stood
In life before thee, are again
In death around thee, and their will
Shall overshadow thee; be still.

Beat.

AESCHYLUS: Well, that will have them rolling in the aisles.

MOLIÈRE: For once I have to agree with Mr. Greek here. Not funny at all.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Edgar? Do you have a rebuttal?

EDGAR ALLAN POE: I'm going to kill myself.

AESCHYLUS: Oh, not again.

EDGAR ALLAN POE: You don't understand me! None of you understand me! I hate you! I hate me! I hate everything! *(Runs off stage.)*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: "The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity." A tragedy of the mind. Now, moving on.

AESCHYLUS laughs.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: What, sir, may I ask, do you find so funny?

AESCHYLUS: You!

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Me?

AESCHYLUS: Yes, you are quoting yourself!

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: "I often quote myself. It adds spice to my conversation."

AESCHYLUS: That's another one of your quotes. You're quoting yourself inside of your own quote! You are too much.

MOLIÈRE: Jealousy is a great green monster, you know. *(Honks his horn.)*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *(To AESCHYLUS.)* Sir, what are you implying?

AESCHYLUS: *(Laughing.)* I am implying that you, sir, in all equivocal senses are a master of monotony! Your plays go on and on about social issues that draw themselves in contemptuous dialogue.

SHAKESPEARE: A mouth that speaks in tunes is all but deaf.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *(A bit frazzled by his guest.)* Well, you, sir, are a first class hack!

AESCHYLUS: Hack?! Hack?! You call 76 plays in the canon a hack!

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: You only wrote seven of them!

AESCHYLUS: That's because the rest are lost!

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: As they should be!

SHAKESPEARE: *(Speaking with the tempo of iambic pentameter.)*
The cake of mirth has destroyed this host, O!

MOLIÈRE honks his horn three times.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AND AESCHYLUS: Shut up!

SHAKESPEARE: My kinship tastes a mortal piece of pie!

AESCHYLUS: Bill, will you stop speaking in iambic pentameter! We are arguing in prose!

SHAKESPEARE: The raging storm is strutting through your veins.

AESCHYLUS: Bill, I'm gonna punch you.

SHAKESPEARE: Hold up thy head vile man across the pond!

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: William, silence yourself, you sound like a robot!

AESCHYLUS: What's a robot?

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: After your time.

SHAKESPEARE: Come, saucy good folk, leave the patter still!

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: (*To AESCHYLUS.*) I'll have you know that *Man and Superman* has been treated as a modern classic.

AESCHYLUS: The play has forty-five acts.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: It does not.

AESCHYLUS: It's longer than the *Kentucky Cycle*.

MOLIÈRE: Where's Kentucky?

SHAKESPEARE: By New York.

AESCHYLUS: I also thought *Pygmalion* was rapacious!

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Rapacious?

SHAKESPEARE: What's rapacious mean?

AESCHYLUS: What's the matter, Bill? Marlow not around to write your plays for you?!

SHAKESPEARE: It was not Marlow! I wrote those plays myself!

MOLIÈRE: Now, that is a good joke! (*Honks his horn.*)

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Oh, lay off the kid, Molière. At least someone thought highly enough of his plagiarism to bind his work.

SHAKESPEARE: It is not plagiarized!

AESCHYLUS: Bill, kid... you stole every story from the *Holinshed's Chronicles* that you could get your grubby little hands on. We all know it.

SHAKESPEARE: Well...I was under pressure from the Queen of England. What would you do?

GEORGE LUCAS enters. Dressed in jeans, a plaid shirt and a beard. HE may be played by the same actor who played EDGAR ALLAN POE.

GEORGE LUCAS: Hi.

EVERYBODY stops.

SHAKESPEARE: Who are you?

GEORGE LUCAS: George Lucas.

AESCHYLUS: You look familiar.

GEORGE LUCAS: George Bernard Shaw, William Shakespeare, Molière, and Aeschylus.

MOLIÈRE: Oh yes, you're that cinema maker. You made that blockbuster picture with those flying machines.

GEORGE LUCAS: Yep.

AESCHYLUS: How's that going?

GEORGE LUCAS: Oh, I finished that eons ago, but I'm just going back and digitally enhancing some stuff.

AESCHYLUS: Enhancing?

SHAKESPEARE: I saw that film.

GEORGE LUCAS: Yeah, you see in episode V, during the Dagobah training scene, Luke's hair just isn't blond enough. I want it to be the same color as my daughter's. So I'm going back and making it perfect.

MOLIÈRE: Nothing is perfect.

GEORGE LUCAS: That's what you think. It's an obsession of mine.

SHAKESPEARE: Why don't you work on some of your other movies and leave that *Star Wars* thing alone, for Pete's sake?

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: I heartily agree. Maybe you should take a peak at that *Howard the Duck* monstrosity you created.

GEORGE LUCAS: But with all my new technology, I can make it look realistic!

AESCHYLUS: You want to talk about technology? Have you ever tried scaring the wits out of an audience using a 20 foot crane and a guy with a white sheet over his head? Talk about your *deus ex machina*. That's as realistic as we got in my day.

SHAKESPEARE: Or how about men dressing as women? I couldn't even use women to act in any of my plays. I had to use either a 13-year-old boy or a eunuch.

GEORGE LUCAS: (*To AESCHYLUS.*) Read your *Oresteia*. Good stuff.

AESCHYLUS: I call it...a trilogy.

GEORGE LUCAS: I knew we had something in common. You know, we could make it a movie.

AESCHYLUS: The whole thing would require an enormous set.

GEORGE LUCAS: We'll just use a computer to create that.

AESCHYLUS: We'll need a cast of a thousand.

GEORGE LUCAS: We'll use a computer for that, too.

AESCHYLUS: And we'll need some very sharp actors.

GEORGE LUCAS: We'll use a computer to create everything!

AESCHYLUS: No, no, no! This whole thing has to be done LIVE!

GEORGE LUCAS: (*Aghast.*) LIVE?!!

AESCHYLUS: Live.

GEORGE LUCAS: (*Very nervous.*) Oh, I don't know. That would mean I would have to leave my house and go on location, build a real set, use *real* actors. I don't know. I'm getting the willies just thinking about it.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: That's all fine and good, but may I ask what you are doing here? This is a group for serious literary works, and I highly doubt that your *movies* count as literature.

GEORGE LUCAS: Well, that's not why I stopped by.

SHAKESPEARE: So what are you doing here?

GEORGE LUCAS: Didn't you get the memo? I've bought the rights to all of your likenesses and I'm going to replace you all with computerized digital images.

SHAKESPEARE: But we're dead.

GEORGE LUCAS: Not anymore. I'm gonna use C.G.I.

AESCHYLUS: Sounds like a restaurant.

MOLIÈRE: You're joking.

GEORGE LUCAS: Nope. Well, I gotta go. If I stay outside of my house for too long I get agoraphobia. Anyhow, I've got money to burn. I'll see you all on the big screen.

GEORGE LUCAS exits. NOBODY says anything for a moment.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: "Everything happens to everybody sooner or later if there is time enough."

SHAKESPEARE: "Angels and ministers of grace defend us."

AESCHYLUS grabs the bicycle horn from a shocked MOLIÈRE and honks it three times. Lights to black.

THE END