

New Playwriting, Ancient Greek Tragedy

The first symposium arranged by Concepts (the Consortium for the Co-ordination of European Performance and Theatre Studies) concerned 'New Playwriting in Europe', and was held in Valencia, Spain, in March 1993, in collaboration with the Shakespeare Foundation (Valencia). It took place over two days, and was generously supported by the City of Valencia and the British Council. Delegates attended from Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Finland, keynote speeches being given by David Gale (UK), Lilian Atlan (France), and Fermin Cabal (Spain).

These were followed by a series of workshops, each led by a professional writer or translator, on: 1, The place of the writer in the theatre today (Deborah Levy, UK); 2, The place of pedagogy (Nirav Christoph (Netherlands)); 3, Networking new playwriting (Susan Croft, UK); and 4, Translation (Manuel Conejero, Spain). There were also

a number of play-readings, and a performance of a new British play, *Stand*, by David Bown.

The symposium resulted in the establishment of a European Network of New Playwriting, the aims of which are: to encourage the exchange, translation, and production of scripts internationally within Europe; and to establish a base in each country, as far as possible working through existing institutions, from which new scripts and translations could be made available.

A second two-day 'practical symposium', on 'Greek Tragedy in the Modern World', took place at the National Academy in Sofia in October 1993. Participating groups represented institutions from Bulgaria, Turkey, Serbia, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. Each group had been asked to prepare a response to Sophocles' *Antigone*, and these were given and discussed during the first day. A practical workshop led by Cicely Berry, Voice Director of the RSC, effectively created international groupings which were developed for further work on *Antigone*.

In addition to the events of the symposium, the National Academy offered performances of work from authors as varied as Shakespeare, Ayckbourn, Thornton Wilder, and Caryl Churchill, and a lecture was given by Professor Nikolai Kaufmann on 'The Roots of Greek Tragedy in Lamentation Rituals'.

NESTA JONES

Obituary

Tom Vaughan

By a curious irony, the death of Tom Vaughan, at the age of 82, was announced in the week when the BBC serial of *Middlemarch* reached its conclusion, with George Eliot lauding Dorothea as one of those people whose fame will never be sung but who, by their very existence, touched and changed the lives of so many around them. If ever anyone deserved such an epitaph, it is Tom Vaughan.

When I first met him, forty years ago, he was lecturing at the Borough Polytechnic and running a drama group there. From that group came the actors Richard Briers, Brian Murphy, and Stephen Moore, and among others the fight arranger Ian McKay. The designer was a young art student, now among the leading British painters, Patrick Caulfield. We sat at nights in the old British Airways Terminal, where the National Theatre now stands, talking about theatre in discussions generally presided over by Tom, unassertive and non-dogmatic but influential through his ability to cut through to the crux of the matter.

Later, when Unity Theatre was going through one of its many ideological and managerial crises and was being riven and crippled by internecine quarrels, Tom quietly got on with getting shows on to the stage and keeping left-wing theatre afloat. For one production of mine, he single-handedly built the set and did all the in-house administration. While others argued the ideological toss, Tom put dialectics on the stage.

When he retired and became drama critic of the *Morning Star*, he used the pages of that paper to continue to raise questions of principle and to carry on the crusade for a truly popular theatre. His presence was encouraging in any audience. He never lost his passion for theatre, his interest in what was new and worthy of encouragement, and his ability to cut through cant and pretension.

You could steer a course by Tom Vaughan: to use a metaphor he would appreciate, he was the Touchstone of our times. The last time I saw him was at Brian Murphy's sixtieth birthday, last October. In the aftermath of a bad car accident he seemed frail and shrunken, which is not how I would like to remember him. Tom Vaughan was a big man, with a pervasive presence, and there will be many to regret his passing while giving thanks for the benefits which came from knowing him.

CLIVE BARKER