

Editorial

This Scottish issue of *Theatre Research International* is the latest in a series of geographically-based special issues of the journal. These issues are important as they bring to the attention of theatre scholars research which is currently being pursued in areas which are often overlooked either because of their proximity to a dominant culture, or because of a general perception that the area is not worth studying. Recent issues have focused on the Caribbean and on South America and the next special issue will focus on Canada, in particular on francophone Canada.

The geographical special issues will soon be joined by special issues which concentrate on one field of theatre research. The first of these will be on anthropology and the theatre and this will be followed by issues on reception theory, new possibilities for performance analysis, theatrical adaptations of novels, theatre and therapy, new methods for understanding theatre history in its cultural context and post-colonial theatre. These special issues will complement the main body of work published in *TRI* and we urge those working in new fields of theatre research to contact us and to offer papers and suggestions for these issues. *TRI* has a truly international distribution and a unique function in the dissemination and discussion of the work of theatre scholars from all over the world.

Theatre in Scotland

Theatre in Scotland has suffered from being so closely linked with theatre in England and Ireland and much work has been done to identify what can or cannot be defined as Scottish theatre and which plays should be accepted into the canon of Scottish drama. Because of this perceived need to draw boundaries, much research has, until recently, adopted a tone which was by turns chauvinistic and defensive. Part of the problem for researchers has been the sad fact that, although Scotland had a fairly clearly defined theatre industry until the middle of the

nineteenth century, this was then subsumed into the touring circuits which had swamped British theatre outside London by the beginning of this century. Although Alfred Wareing's Glasgow Repertory Theatre tried to re-establish a theatrical profession in Scotland in the years before the First World War, the long slow haul towards a fully-fledged profession only really began in 1941 when, for the first time, Government money for the theatre was made available through the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. Even so, the consolidation of this process over the last forty years has only been made possible by the establishment of Scottish television and film industries.

A measure of the confidence felt in theatre in Scotland is the now substantial lobby for the idea of a national theatre. Arguments along the lines of 'if Iceland can support a theatre why can't we?' are frequently heard. The opponents of the idea point to the near impossibility of defining such a theatre satisfactorily, to the damage it might inflict on Scotland's delicate theatrical infrastructure and to the example of the National Theatre in London as reasons not to have a similar institution in Edinburgh or Glasgow or even Stirling—half way between the two. The National Theatre of Scotland would also have to confront the language question. This is not as acute as that in Québec for example, but a significant factor nonetheless. Much of the best of the early twentieth-century Scottish drama was written in Scots, or 'Lallans', in an attempt to make clear that it was a different drama, not just a play written in English with a quaint accent. Plays written in Scots, or at least played in a Glasgow accent, regularly attract far greater audiences and a national theatre would have to decide whether to Scotticize classics and how far the whole acting training in the country would have to be geared to knowledge of and proficiency in Scots.

The first two papers in this issue concentrate on what has been called Scotland's 'first national theatre', the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh

in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century. They scrutinize both the process of assigning of the Patent for the theatre and the repertoire which it nurtured. The key figure in both papers is Sir Walter Scott whose vision of Scotland, its history and its customs, was not always faithfully carried on to the stage, but whose novels were more widely known to audiences in theatres all over the English-speaking world than to readers. Christopher Worth restores Scott to his rightful position as godfather of the Scottish stage. Scott's European reputation as the colossus of letters helped to establish the theatre as a part of Scottish culture, when for much of the eighteenth century it was viewed as a Trojan horse, an English import, disseminating English manners, customs and speech to the upper classes of Scotland's capital.

Scott's mixture of realism and unionist politics also left its mark on the theatre's repertoire and Barbara Bell offers insights into what was considered to be the Scottish national repertoire. This work is based on a computer analysis of over 30,000 playbills from every decade of the nineteenth century which she recently undertook. The results of this analysis are an exciting example of the new historiography, though there is no space in a short paper to present them fully.

It is one of the ironies of Scottish theatre history that the national drama which started life as a diversion for the upper classes at the beginning of the nineteenth century began this century as the staple fare of Scotland's 'geggies', wood and canvas touring theatre which played working-class areas and country villages. There they kept alive a tradition of performance in Scots and of plays which dealt with Scottish life and history. These sprawling dramas owed no allegiance to any rules of dramatic construction but cheerfully mixed comedy and tragedy underpinned by extensive use of music. This tradition continued to influence Scottish drama far into the twentieth century, especially in plays written outwith the mainstream of the 'West End' tradition.

It is a sobering move to the next two papers grounded in the first thirty years of this century. During this time the idea of a Scottish theatre was kept alive by amateur theatre companies and by broadcasting and film. Karen Marshalsay

gives an account of the Scottish National Players whose work in the 1920s shaped mainstream ideas of a Scottish Theatre for the next forty years. The Players' vision of Scotland was one of bens and glens wrapped in a Celtic mist with a people forever keening over lost causes such as the Jacobite rebellion. It was however a very persuasive and pervasive myth with which many Scots concurred. The Players also perpetuated the idea of the Scottish theatre as obsessed with the past, in particular with the history of the Highlands. This paper is complemented by Adrienne Scullion's structuralist analysis of the early years of broadcasting in Scotland and its symbiotic relationship with Scottish Drama. This paper breaks new ground in its examination of the interdependence of Scottish cultural agencies and offers a much needed overview of a crucial period in the development of Scottish theatre.

The Players' vision of Scotland and Scottish theatre was later challenged by groups like Glasgow Unity Theatre who provided a series of tough working-class plays to balance the sentiment of the soft-focus Highlandry. Unity also took up the challenge to present life as experienced in the towns and cities of the industrial Lowlands. After this company ceased to exist in 1950, political drama in Scotland largely died away until the early 1970's and in particular the work of 7:84. Tom Maguire examines and evaluates the new direction which this company took after the Scottish Arts Council imposed a restructuring of the company in 1988 and whether the changes demanded in any way weakened the radical nature of the company's work. He also touches on some of the funding problems which are besetting Scotland's buoyant theatrical scene and make prospects in 1991 so gloomy, compared with the funding bonanza which heralded 1990 and Glasgow's year as European City of Culture.

This year-long celebration of the arts showed the work of Scottish companies like *Comunicado* and the *Citizens* beside some of the best work available in world theatre and revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the indigenous product. One company which benefited from this was the *Tron Theatre* company, who gained an increasing reputation for their work, both in association with theatres in the former Soviet

Union and for presenting the plays of Michel Tremblay in Scots. Bill Findlay's paper on Michel Tremblay underlines the delight of Scottish audiences, used to rather lifeless translations of Tremblay's work into standard English, to the Glaswegianization of the *Les Belles-Sœurs* as *The Guid Sisters* and the coruscating emotions which seemed uncomfortably near to home in *The Real Wurd*. Now that the Traverse in Edinburgh, that mainstay of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, is also presenting Scots versions of the work and the plays are being re-exported to North America, there is a feeling that the Scottish Theatre is standing on its own two feet and that it should not be intimidated by the fact that it does not have available to it, as large and imposing a repertoire as the Irish theatre. The strength of the Scottish theatre is its diversity and lack of either definitions or strait-jacketing conventions.

The potential to move forward, to find a new repertoire and a new type of theatre is offered by another of the legacies of 1990. Glasgow's Tram-

way theatre has provided Scotland with a new type of theatre space. The final article in this edition introduces this new theatre and discusses its potential role within contemporary theatre culture. With Neil Wallace as Programming Director, Tramway is set to develop as a potentially rich platform for imported and indigenous theatre. Parallels have been drawn between Tramway—a disused tramshed with highly adaptable playing spaces and galleries—and the Cartoucherie de Vincennes in Paris and the Mercat dels Flors in Barcelona, but Tramway has, as yet, failed to secure a strong producing voice. Whether Tramway, and Scottish theatre generally, can compete on the international level on which theatre is now organised is discussed in this paper which offers an optimistic perspective on contemporary theatre in Scotland. The development of Tramway, in particular, and Scottish theatre in general, should be fascinating to watch.

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