

# The Variety of John McGrath

The sixth issue of the International Journal of Scottish Theatre, the last under the present editorship, takes as its theme, The Variety of John McGrath. Each of the peer-reviewed articles included in this issue is based on a paper presented at the major conference on John McGrath's life and work, Plugged into History, held at the Royal Holloway, University of London, in April 2002. This publication, effectively of a double issue, has been prepared in tandem with the preparation by the University of Exeter Press of a collection of essays, interviews and papers inspired for and by that conference. The latter will be published under the title, *Freedom's Pioneer: John McGrath's Work in Theatre, Film and Television*.

The variety of the range of articles in this issue of *IJOST* reflects the range of dramatic forms in which John McGrath engaged. Each author focuses on a different aspect of this range and, in publishing these papers, *IJOST* has chosen not only to deal with those aspects of McGrath's work which can most directly be seen to form part of the history and experience of Scottish theatre. Certainly, the illuminating papers by Randall Stevenson and Olga Taxidou can be seen to deal directly with aspects of his work for the Scottish stage, but both explore fascinating questions of international import. In any case, the mission of *IJOST* has never been to focus narrowly on its central interests. The articles by Stephen Lacey and Jonathan Bignell, therefore, set McGrath's work in wider theoretical contexts, those of critical theory and of television studies. This wider context both enriches and derives strength from McGrath's work in Scottish theatre. Robin Nelson's article examines in new detail the processes by which McGrath's iconic achievement, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*, was prepared for television and raises issues about the nature of the play both on stage and on screen. Nadine Holdsworth provides an important framework for our understanding of John McGrath's variety in her article, focusing on the nature, range and depth of his productivity, both south and north of the Border, in one highly creative year. Finally, this issue's forum piece is a selection from the transcript of two conversations between John McGrath and Colin Mortimer. These date from 1980 and provide fresh insight into McGrath's concerns at a particularly creative and fraught period of his career.

This issue can, therefore, be seen to reflect not only of John McGrath, but also the variety of perspectives now brought to bear on the study of aspects of Scottish theatre. A theme often identified by Randall Stevenson has been the way in which the critical study of Scottish theatre and that of the theatre of the rest of Britain and Ireland has often been carried on each in isolation from knowledge and understanding of the other. The inclusiveness of the topics of the articles in this issue stands against such mutual neglect. In this context, it is an interesting reflection that it is common in Drama degree courses in all parts of Britain to see special study of American or Irish Theatre, much less common to see such study of Scottish Theatre. It may be of significance that Manchester University has just appointed the first Professor of Scottish Literature south of the Border. The quality and confidence of understanding of the particular nature of the achievements of both literature and drama in Scotland are likely, then, to become more integrated into general scholarship over the next decade. As this happens, it should become more common to see courses in Scottish Theatre alongside those in, say, Irish Theatre in Drama degree courses throughout the UK. Certainly, this issue suggests that there are matters of common interest and value for all study of theatre to be derived from a properly contextualised study of Scottish theatre.

During the preparation of this issue, my own position has changed and I now work freelance. In order to ensure continuity, I agreed to complete the editing of this issue. This done, with some small pride in *IJOST*'s publication record since its foundation, I step down from the role of Editor.

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