

Editorial

Ian Brown

The third issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Theatre* finds as its theme issues of nation, society and theatre. That it does so at the time detailed proposals are under development for the establishment of a Scottish National Theatre is coincidental, but timely. The articles in this issue of *IJOST* approach the topic of theatre and social authority from a variety of intriguing perspectives.

Bill Findlay's article casts light in an unexpected way on the work of Robert Mitchell for Glasgow Unity, seen as a company which challenged the theatrical establishment of its day and the authority of the dominant modes of expression. Findlay examines closely the evidence surrounding the nature of the famous 1945 production of Mitchell's version of Gorki's *The Lower Depths*. In this, he raises not only questions as to the nature of the theatrical processes involved, but demonstrates the difficulties which still obtain in research into contemporary theatre: primary evidence is often not easily available and the danger is that much may yet be lost.

Denis Agnew discusses the two most recent attempts to establish a Scottish National Theatre. His work on the initiative involving the Royal Lyceum Theatre and Prospect Theatre Company of the early seventies reminds the reader of the detail of a project that has sometimes been neglected. Agnew provides a number of new insights into the nature of that process as well as some hypotheses as to why it failed. He then addresses in significant detail the record of the Scottish Theatre Company in the eighties, providing a close reading of relevant management papers to cast a clear light on the nature of that enterprise. Again, he offers fascinating insight into the problems which seemed to prevent a company with national aspirations from achieving a sustainable existence.

Alison Burke addresses questions of power and authority in theatre from a different perspective. Her article analyses in depth the production of Sarah Woods' version of *Antigone* (2000), commissioned by TAG Theatre Company and presented as part of its *Making the Nation* series of productions (1999-2002). Burke analyses Woods' treatment of the Chorus, demonstrating clearly the ways in which Woods departs from and modifies Sophocles' practice. She then explores the power nexus of the relationships surrounding Creon and Antigone in Woods' version, concluding with a discussion of the presentational modes of that production, relating those to the dialectic of power established by Woods. Her fresh approach allows a stimulating review of a recent Scottish production of a classic theatre myth.

In the last of the peer-reviewed articles, Ksenija Horvat and John McGrath provide an updated bibliography of writing by and about McGrath, a playwright whose career has constantly led him to question and challenge established values in the state and the theatre. There are aspects of the production record which appear to be as yet incomplete, highlighting the point raised by Findlay that there are *lacunae* in the record and severe problems of availability of evidence in the study of contemporary Scottish theatre. Nonetheless, Horvat and McGrath provide a timely tool which allows us to recognise the range and depth of McGrath's work and provides an important resource for further research in that area.

This issue's forum piece offers a further heterodox view on the relationship of theatre and

society's power structures. Robert Rae, artistic director of Theatre Workshop Edinburgh, contributes a powerful personal piece discussing the need for, and importance of, adequate artistic expression in theatre for and by artists with disabilities. He clearly links his own initiatives to earlier radical approaches of the seventies and eighties in theatre and argues for the inclusion of exciting new initiatives in disability theatre as part of the mainstream of Scottish theatre, and indeed theatre generally.

These five papers add to our understanding of the nature of the complex interaction of theatre and national and social power structures and are each to be welcomed for that. Their scholarship and the range of their topics within the overall theme of this issue again mark the dedication of *IJOST* to exploring its themes through a variety of disciplinary approaches and from as varied a number of perspectives as possible.

The next issues of *IJOST* will exemplify this approach further. These issues will be dedicated to the work of Dr Roger Savage of Edinburgh University, a distinguished teacher and a key figure in scholarship both of the literature of theatre and of opera. Dr Savage's work, of course, extends far beyond the study of the themes of *IJOST*, but his work in that area is highly regarded and has been highly influential. Such has been the interest in celebrating the work of Dr Savage that the editors have decided to dedicate both the second Issue of Volume 2 and the first issue of Volume 3 to contributions received in celebration of his work.

Later issues will be linked to the major conference into John McGrath's life and work, *Plugged into History*, being held at the Royal Holloway, University of London, on 19 and 20 April 2002. This will be a major conference on a key figure in recent theatre history and *IJOST* is delighted to be able to offer its pages to help assist the wider dissemination of selected papers from that conference at the earliest opportunity.