Simon Trussler Remembered

Simon Trussler, co-founder and co-editor of *New Theatre Quarterly* in 1985, the successor to *Theatre Quarterly* which he initiated in 1971, died in hospital in Kent on 30 December 2019 of a heart attack. He was seventy-seven. Not a sudden death, but one that the hospital staff thought might – just might – be averted, it came as a shock and a cause of deep grief, first to his family, and then to all who had worked with him or had otherwise been in contact with him. The tributes below to Simon's life and considerable achievements are by Nesta Jones, Nick de Somogyi, Dinah Wood, Steve King, and fellow editor of *NTQ* Maria Shevtsova, who has had the privilege of bringing them together in this issue of the journal. A life full of remarkable accomplishments – we raise a glass in Simon's honour.

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Nesta Jones

Simon Trussler: a Biography

I have known Simon since the late 1970s, when he was already firmly established as a key figure in theatre criticism, documentation, and taxonomy, and whom I regarded with a certain awe. At that time I was familiar with his books on John Arden, Edward Bond, Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker (co-authored with Glenda Leeming), and John Whiting; his contributions as a theatre critic in *Tribune* and the *Tulane Drama Review*, later *The Drama Review* (*TDR*, New York), and as radio critic to the *Listener* and *TV Today*; his editorship of *New English Dramatists* for Penguin; and as co-editor, with Charles Marowitz, of *Theatre at Work: Playwrights and Productions in the Modern British Theatre*, in which was recorded invaluable contemporary accounts of the work of major theatre practitioners such as Peter Brook, William Gaskill, and Joan Littlewood.

I learned later of Simon's early life in the 1940s and 1950s in the Weald of Kent, recollected by him several years ago in a vivid memoir, *The Hops and the Hopes*; his education first at Cranbrook School and then, having won a State Scholarship, at University College London, where he received a BA (Hons) in English Language and Literature, staying on to complete a Masters in English with a thesis on Henry Fielding. Unsurprisingly, he went on to edit *Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century* and *Eighteenth Century Comedy*, both for Oxford University Press (OUP), for which he also became Commissioning Editor of the Fourth Edition of *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, implementing his own scheme for extensive revision.

In 1971 Simon, with Roger Hudson and Catherine Itzin, founded *Theatre Quarterly* (*TQ*) as a co-ownership cooperative. In addition to publishing stimulating articles for ten years, the journal also provided a platform for a number of important initiatives. It spearheaded the campaign for improved provision of theatre information, including the publication of the first edition of the *Alternative Theatre Handbook,* a *Theatre-in-Education Dictionary*, and a range of other factual and bibliographical materials including the *World Guide to Performing Arts Periodicals*, *New Playwrights Directory, New Plays*, and two series – Theatre Facts and Theatre Checklist – to which Simon also contributed the single edition *David Edgar: Bibliography, Biography, Playography*. The catalogue of the exhibition *Bertolt Brecht in Britain*, held at the National Theatre in 1977, was jointly produced by its editors Nicholas Jacobs and Prudence Ohlsen, the Goethe Institute, London, and *TQ* Publications. It was a significant document that, with an introduction by John Willett, recorded and reflected on Brecht's growing influence on British theatre practice.

Moreover, as co-editor of *TQ,* Simon formed a Working Party for the foundation of a British Theatre Institute (BTI), following a symposium at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), and was a member of the Secretariat until the BTI was independently

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constituted; this body secured an agreement from the then Minister of Arts for provision for space for theatre organizations, initially in Somerset House, subsequently leading to the housing of the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. BTI publications included *A Classification for the Performing Arts* and the *Annual Bibliography of Theatre Studies*; and with *TQ* Simon published further works of documentation and taxonomy.

TQ also regenerated the British Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), hosting it from the journal's offices in Covent Garden; and it was here that I first encountered Simon during a meeting that was to lead to a joint project between the Centre and the Drama Department of Goldsmiths, University of London. I organized a small group of enthusiastic, resourceful, and intrepid students to undertake the fieldwork for a publication to improve access to and awareness of theatre in London, especially those venues on the Fringe. This was eventually published as *London Theatre* by London Transport, the British Centre of the ITI, and *TQ.* Apart from the romance of working with the Centre and *TQ* out of Covent Garden, I became acutely aware of Simon's forensic approach to research, of his diligence and capacity for sheer hard work, and the expertise with which he shaped and edited material; and I realized what an excellent addition he would be to the staff of the Drama Department at Goldsmiths. I discovered that he had secured academic employment early in his career at Enfield College of Technology and the Oxford Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies.

Simon later obtained a Visiting Lectureship in Dramatic Criticism for Tufts University undergraduate programme in London, and a position as Director of a course on British Theatre for the School of Continuing Education, New York University. These were followed by appointments in the Department of Arts Administration at City University, the Department of Dramatic Art, University of California, Santa Barbara, and the Drama Department of the University of Kent. At this time his teaching was complemented by his work on *TQ* and associated publications, his editorships of *Theatre International*, a bilingual journal for the Paris ITI, and seven editions of the annual *Royal Shakespeare Company*, which provided critical and factual documentation of each season's productions from 1978 to 1985; and a critical 'Introduction' to Macmillan's *Twentieth-Century Drama.*

Before Simon entered academe more permanently, however, he co-founded in 1985 *New Theatre Quarterly* (*NTQ*) with his friend the actor, director, teacher, and facilitator Clive Barker, author of *Theatre Games*, whom he first met in 1962 over a pint in the bar of Unity Theatre. During the twenty years of their *NTQ* partnership the journal developed as an influential international forum for theatre scholars, practitioners, and researchers; and, in addition to co-editing, copy-editing, and typesetting each edition, Simon also contributed a considerable number of notable articles to the journal, ranging from observations on notions of Theatre Practice and Theatre Studies, commentaries on individual playwrights, considerations of popular theatre forms, and a personal reflection on his own work suitably titled 'Confessions of a Compulsive Editor'.

Fortunately, the opportunity arose a year after *NTQ* was launched to invite Simon to join the staff of Goldsmiths; and on this occasion I was to learn that his two distinguished academic referees were Professors Raymond Williams and Jan Kott, which said much about his own scholarly achievement to date as well as his regard for theirs. Simon swiftly established himself as one of the specialists in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama at the College and taught this area in the department with particular reference to Shakespeare. Concurrently, he provided also the commentaries for Methuen's student editions of *The Witch of Edmonton*, *The White Devil*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and *The Malcontent*; authored *Shakespearean Concepts: a Dictionary of Terms and Conventions, Influences and Institutions, Themes, Ideas, and Genres in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, also for Methuen; and edited the Swan Theatre Plays for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) with full critical commentaries to each of the fourteen editions. Moreover, Simon's interest in twentieth-century drama was still evident as general editor of the

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Methuen Writer-File series for which he provided an introduction to each of the thirty-five editions that featured a wide range of dramatists from Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg through to Caryl Churchill, Athol Fugard, and David Hare.

In 1990 Simon was appointed Reader in Drama when Goldsmiths became a School of the University of London, and two more significant professional advancements followed in subsequent years related to skills acquired through earlier desktop publishing and his personal research and scholarship. In 1993 Simon founded Country Setting, specialists in theatrical editing and typography, initially to produce *NTQ* for Cambridge University Press but later undertaking production of all titles for the specialist publisher Nick Hern Books (NHB), all plays published by Faber and Faber, and selected editions for Methuen Drama, the Royal Court Theatre, and Birmingham Rep, involving close liaison with playwrights and oversight of theatrical titles; and he was also Associate Editor for NHB's Classic Drama series providing introductions and/or editing, for example, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Jonson's *The Alchemist* and *The Devil is an Ass*, and Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem*.

During the previous years, Simon had been researching and writing *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Theatre*, which was finally published by CUP in 1994. This highly regarded seminal work was runner-up for the George Freedley Award of the Theatre Library Association, 1995, for 'an outstanding contribution to the literature of the theatre'. Moreover, ever the initiator, Simon was exploring the potential for electronic publication and became involved around this time with the *European Bibliography of Resources for English Studies*, of which he was the Advisory Editor for English Twentieth-Century Drama and Theatre, produced under the auspices of the European Society for the Study of English; and he wrote essays for the entries on 'Liturgical Drama', 'Melodrama', 'Oberammergau Passion Play', and 'Restoration Theatre' in *Encarta: World English Edition*, a Microsoft CD-ROM Encyclopedia.

It was at Goldsmiths that I got to know Simon well, first as a valued colleague and then a trusted friend. I became aware of his deep affinity with the county of Kent and how he settled there to raise a young family in the village of Great Robhurst, near the village of Woodchurch, where, in addition to his scholarly pursuits, he developed exceptional skills at both brewing beer, a beverage of which he had a profound knowledge and enjoyment, and perhaps more surprisingly DIY. I remember phoning him at home one day to discover that he was not only setting questions on theatrical topics for BBC TV's *Mastermind* but also rewiring the house. He moved later to Kingsdown near the seaside town of Deal to a charming picturesque residence named 'Oldestairs', built in the early twentieth century by a theatrical impresario, situated on a road just off a shingled beach from which rose a cliff head offering, on a clear day, an excellent view of the French coastline. This was to become not only the new family home but also an ideal place for Simon to situate and develop Country Setting.

'Oldestairs', decorated mainly in the style of William Morris, was on three levels: parallel to the road was the middle one where the front garden was located and the main entrance, which led into a large hall with the sitting room, kitchen and dining balcony adjacent to it; above, on the upper level, were the bedrooms with balconies and views of the hills, cliffs, beach, and sea; but it was the lower level which held the most fascination. Here was Simon's office, replete with computers, printers, photocopier, filing cabinets, comfortable armchairs, small tables, and floor to ceiling bookshelves holding a remarkable archive – all of Country Setting's output, copies of Simon's authored and edited works, and his personal papers.

At the back an archway led into a library of books, scholarly journals, theatre magazines and ephemera that Simon had collected over the years. A large rear garden to the house with an extensive lawn, shrubs, trees, and a summer house could be seen through the windows of a small glass-panelled seating area furnished with well-used wingback chairs and side tables – a favourite spot where Simon would settle in the evening to read proofs and, no doubt, drink his favourite on-tap draught beer. I was aware, of course, that this whole basement area was an extremely busy

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working environment where Simon spent long hours writing, editing, telephoning, and typesetting; but to me it was also a kind of idyll that represented intellectual curiosity and rigour, creativity and reflection in equal measure. I loved visiting this special place and on occasions when I was accompanied by a colleague, I delighted in showing them this cornucopia of theatrical treasures and a lifetime's literary achievement.

Simon left Goldsmiths in 1997, his departure heralding later in the year that of his close colleague Bill Naismith and mine – the three of us, although of different temperaments and backgrounds, were of the same age and outlook, and thus shared many historical, political, and cultural points of reference. Simon was greatly missed by his undergraduate and research degree students who were inspired by the breadth and depth of his knowledge, appreciative of his kind but firm approach, enjoyed his wry humour, and were thankful in various ways for his patience and compassion. Moreover, many young and more seasoned academics and researchers were indebted to him for his encouragement, mentorship, and the opportunities he provided in advising on and helping to place their work for publication. Simon, however, continued to co-edit *NTQ* with Clive Barker, producing at the end of the decade an edition containing an 'Annotated Contents and Author Index' of both *TQ* and *NTQ* from 1971 to 1999. In 2000 both of them were appointed Senior Research Fellows and later Professors of Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance (RBC), which associated their individual current and future work, and that of the journal, with the institution. Quite coincidentally I was appointed to the role of Head of Graduate Studies at RBC the following year, so our professional paths crossed again.

Simon's publications in 2001 were D. H. Lawrence's *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd and Other Plays*, which he edited, introduced, and annotated, for OUP; and the launch of a major initiative by NHB, The Shakespeare Folio series of parallel and modernized texts to which Simon was typographical consultant, with first offerings, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Twelfth Night*, published during the year. Clive Barker died in 2005 and Simon dedicated the subsequent edition of the journal to him, and has written movingly about their friendship and professional relationship in a forthcoming book about Barker's legacy. Simon had already invited Professor Maria Shevtsova to join *NTQ* in 2003 as co-editor, to which she fortunately had agreed; and, with her input, the journal continued to flourish, going from strength to strength. In 2006 Simon authored *The Faber Pocket Guide to Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*; and *Will's Will: the Last Wishes of William Shakespeare*, commissioned by the National Archive, was published in 2007.

Simon retired from RBC in 2011 and was awarded an Emeritus Professorship, after which he focused on *NTQ* and Country Setting. The last play-text he produced for Faber and Faber was Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*. At the end of his Author's Note, Stoppard named Simon as the copy-editor of his most recent plays and revealed that 'We spent many gentle ruminative hours on the phone preparing texts for the printer' – a poignant and pertinent observation from one master of his craft acknowledging the importance and value of the other. Indeed the care and precision with which Simon meticulously laid out a text on the page was a masterclass in typography, demonstrating his deep understanding of the playwright's dramaturgy; providing an invaluable guide to actors, directors, and designers about the intention, shape, and rhythm of a scene; and underlining his concern to represent the work in its most perfect form in print.

This love of and respect for the English language is evident in his own writing, which seems to me to always flow with a particular style, eloquence, and clarity, whether he is conveying complex ideas, presenting an argument, defining character and action, describing an incident, or simply telling a joke. In his professional and social life Simon was always courteous and considerate, quiet of voice and with a lightness of touch that informed all his accomplishments. And yet his often self-effacing manner was combined with a powerful sense of purpose evidenced by the courage, drive, and tenacity required to deliver such ground-breaking projects as *TQ*, *NTQ*, and

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Country Setting, all of which were conducted with the utmost integrity and achieved with characteristic modesty.

I shall continue to miss Simon's wit and wisdom and, especially, my visits to 'Oldestairs' where over lunch or a cup of tea we would discuss *NTQ* articles, or problems arising in my other work to which Simon would offer elegant solutions; and our regular telephone conversations, often initiated by my curiosity concerning a new play that Simon might be typesetting or a query connected to some obscure piece of theatrical minutiae that only he would know. Whatever the initial reason for visiting or talking to him, we always slipped into familiar patterns of conversation regarding not only the work in hand but perhaps also updates on our respective families, recollections of plays and performances we had both seen in the past, the state of the current political situation, and the best kind of gossip; and, although both of us had mellowed somewhat over the years, these encounters were always revitalizing, thought-provoking, and rewarding.

It was a joy and privilege to have known Simon, this exceptional and gracious Man of Kent whose generosity of spirit and humanity shone through all he attempted and achieved. Simon was a rare person of principle and vision, and he should be celebrated now, and in the years to come, for the immense contribution he has made to theatre scholarship and practice. And for those of us who knew Simon and have reason to be grateful to him either personally or professionally or both, we must ensure that his legacy is secure and passed on for the benefit of those who come after.

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Nick de Somogyi

Simon Trussler: Man of Letters

'Page sixteen, line five, to read: cap-F-*Fuck off* – vocative roman comma – ff- and fi-ligatures throughout – *you arse* – UK spelling a-*r*-s-*e* , delete hyphen, one word, *hole* . . .' I trust that Simon (no fan of the Lord Chamberlain) would forgive my breach of linguistic decorum in evoking here the sometimes surreal nature of our fortnightly exchanges over the last twenty-odd years. For it was – among other things – my job to proofread the plays that, as the presiding genius of Country Setting, he copy-edited and typeset for Faber & Faber, and then (what with the pressurized deadlines of looming opening nights) phone or (latterly) Skype my dictated corrigenda to him directly. Given recent trends in modern drama, it always amused me to imagine what some inadvertent eavesdropper would make of our deadpan recitals of such otherwise inexplicable profanity. ('Well spotted. Done. Fuck off, comma . . .')

It might have made a decent scene in a play, it struck me, whether as farcical misunderstanding (Alan Ayckbourn), ludicrous absurdity (Simon Gray), vague menace (Harold Pinter), or wry anecdote (Alan Bennett) – all of whose works (and countless more) Simon Trussler's exhaustive expertise has secured into posterity. Of course, our Skype sessions ranged wider than identifying the odd typo, and the breadth and depth of his knowledge of theatre comprised a constant education and delight. After all, when we worked together on Alan Bennett's *Allelujah!* (2018), it had been (and I had to check this) fully fifty-seven years since Simon had 'giggled over' Bennett's mock-sermon from *Beyond the Fringe* on the tube home.

That memory comes from Simon's touching tribute in these pages (*NTQ* 83, 2005) to Clive Barker, whose production of Shelagh Delaney's *The Lion in Love* ('One of the first plays I ever saw in London') opened at the Royal Court in December 1960. 'I already knew that the theatre was where I wanted to be,' Simon recalled of this time – which, in time, he was, following a contrived encounter ('on the same evening I saw my first-ever Brecht') with Clive himself, who became a lifelong friend, and with whom he later co-founded *New Theatre Quarterly*; having meanwhile built a career as a theatre critic for *Tribune* and embarked on a portfolio of critical

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