Clive Barker Remembered

Clive Barker, co-editor of *New Theatre Quarterly* since the journal was relaunched under its new title in 1985, died following a stroke on 17 March 2005, at the age of seventy-three. We plan to include a full commemoration of his life in a subsequent issue, and will welcome contributions – either directly relating to Clive's life and work in the theatre, or addressing issues close to his heart. Meanwhile,some briefer tributes are offered here – a survey of his life and achievements by Baz Kershaw, and personal recollections from his friend and archivist Dick McCaw and from fellow-editor Simon Trussler.

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Baz Kershaw

Innovative Spirit at the Heart of Theatre Studies

Clive Barker made an exceptional contribution to British theatre studies and its international standing. No one else of his generation travelled the extraordinary distance from a conventional stage-management course to become a world leader in actor training workshops, as well as an editor and scholar of distinction. He was a pioneer in bridging the uneasy divide between the professional theatre and its serious study in British universities.

Born in Middlesbrough, Clive might have followed his father into the steel mills, but his mother encouraged him to take a desk job in the emergent NHS. After National Service in what was then Malaya, he looked for work in the theatre. Stints of packing props for ballet companies, and sweeping stages while great actors threw tantrums, gave him a healthy scepticism of the profession.

He was, however, among the first to see the importance of play, and its roots in childhood, for professional actor training. This insight was important, but the way in which he linked it to bodily awareness, posture, movement and spontaneity – though clearly part of longer traditions – was his alone.

His book, *Theatre Games* (1977), was enormously influential for theatre practitioners and teachers in many countries. Its freshness of thought and imaginative instruction was presented in a highly accessible form, astutely combining practical advice, a digest of games, and stimulating theories.

The success of *Theatre Games* was built on the best of radical foundations. Barker was involved in Arnold Wesker's visionary, but ill-fated, Centre FortyTwo project, and with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop at the height of its success, acting in Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* (1958) and learning to die, as he was fond of relating, in twelve different ways for *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963). He made his directorial debut with Shelagh Delaney's *The Lion in Love* (1960).

For almost two decades following *Theatre Games*, he worked on the international theatre workshop circuit, at the highest levels. Participants in these workshops, numbering many thousands, were treated to a method that was brilliantly inventive in its lack of presumption and ever-present humour. In this, Clive had the touch of an outstanding creative innovator.

He was also a steadfast champion of alternative theatre in its most challenging and socially useful aspects. For many years, he was on the board of the prison theatre group Geese and, more recently, even as he grew ill, gave unstinting support to the learning disability company, The Shysters.

Clive also enjoyed a substantial career in university teaching, academic publishing, and applied scholarship. In 1967 he joined the fledgling Drama Department at Birmingham University, then transferred, in 1976, to Warwick University's Theatre Studies Department, from which he retired in 1993.

For twenty-five years, he was a co-editor of *Theatre Quarterly* (subsequently *New Theatre*

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Quarterly) as it increased its international readership. He encouraged its down-to-earth approach to scholarship by always being in touch with the 'shop floor' of theatre. Never one to parade his knowledge, he was still a happy authority in discussions ranging from the French medieval stage to contemporary radical theatre in Cuba. This eclecticism informed a string of still undervalued, uncollected essays. Most recently, he helped to open up new areas in twentieth-century British theatre history through his co-editorship, with Maggie B. Gale, of *British Theatre Between the Wars, 1918–1939* (2000).

Always a collaborator, Clive excelled in bringing a humorously sceptical eye to the pretensions of both the theatre and its study in British universities. He had a terrific capacity for creative participation with others, but especially those who had some of the roughest deals in life. Even on the day he died, he was with a drama group of children with cerebral palsy.

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Simon Trussler

A Generous and Pervasive Presence

Clive somehow was always there. One of the first plays I ever saw in London, in my first year at UCL – from the vertiginous upper circle at the Royal Court, on Friday 13 January 1961, a tattered diary tells me, – was his production of Shelagh Delaney's *The Lion in Love*. Then, just a month or so later, he directed a revival of Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*, which I saw twice, the second time having persuaded a couple of friends who had stayed on in the sixth form that this was the best way of rounding off their day in town. We sang 'The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling' on the tube afterwards with the same gusto as on a previous visit we had giggled over our variations on Alan Bennett's sermon from *Beyond the Fringe*.

I already knew that the theatre was where I wanted to be – which was why I was studying for an English degree, because in those days you could only study drama in what we then called the provinces, and that (with a due nod to the Coventry Belgrade) was not where the theatre was happening. So I'd noted Clive's name, and a little later in the same year engineered a brief meeting – at the old Unity Theatre, on the same evening that I saw my first-ever Brecht, a revelatory production by Heinz Bernard of *The Visions of Simone Machard*. (My diary also claims, to my initial disbelief, 'drinks at Boyd Neil's afterwards,' and I do now recall being dragged along to the conductor's rooms in the White House, Regent's Park, having had to be told who Boyd Neil was. I did not need to be told who Clive Barker was.)

And so both Heinz and Clive were persuaded to write for *Prompt*, my first venture in editing a theatre magazine. By then Clive was caught up with Arnold Wesker's brave but doomed Centre FortyTwo, for which a purpose-built theatre had been designed by Forbes Bramble, architect and author of the two plays that UCL took that year to the Edinburgh fringe (my first appearance on a stage where people actually paid for their tickets). Clive and Forbes wrote about their ideas in the same issue of *Prompt*.

By the time the Round House happened, and the edifice complex took over, Clive was in the West End revival of *Oh! What a Lovely War*. He and a fellow warrior, Brian Murphy, were hatching a plan to write a history of Theatre Workshop, and recruited me to impose a little editorial discipline on the idea. As it happened, Clive and I shared a publisher, Giles Gordon, then at Gollancz, and he bought the idea. Sadly, Joan Littlewood did not, but only issued a definitive veto after many hours had been spent talking it all through, and beginning to interview the major figures – the most memorable outcome of which was a rambling but riveting interview with Ewan MacColl of which the first instalment appeared in the original *Theatre Quarterly*.

Ah yes, the original *Theatre Quarterly*. I had a clear impression that Clive was a contri-

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butor to the first issue, but memory is fallible and deadlines were never Clive's strength. It was not in fact until the fourth issue that his seminal article 'The Chartists, Theatre, Reform, and Research' appeared – an article so seminal, indeed, that it would today seem redundant, its plea for a serious approach to popular nineteenth-century theatre having been so fully answered. Clive continued to write regularly for the old TQ, and in 1978 joined me as Associate Editor.

By then, of course, he was well into his second, academic career, briefly interrupted by a return to directing for which he charted the reasons in an article for TQ16 (1974), headlined on the cover as 'A Professional's Farewell to University Drama'. Looking back now, the article pinpoints unerringly the conflicts and compromises seemingly inevitable at the interface between vocational and academic drama; but I think Clive was a little embarrassed by the apparent finality of that headline (mine, not his, he would remind me), since of course in the event he returned to university teaching, after a spell directing at the Northcott in Exeter.

I think he was also a little embarrassed by what I always felt was a signal accomplishment – that he rose to become a respected theatre scholar and supervisor of many a brilliant doctoral dissertation without himself having a university degree. Neither had Joan Littlewood, and despite his many disagreements with his old mentor, Clive fully shared with her a belief in the calling and the dedication of the 'scholar clown'. Ideas, information, and pertinent connections flowed from Clive in an unceasing stream, and his generosity towards his students (not to mention fellow-researchers and NTQ contributors) in sharing his wisdom at the cost of his time and energy helped to account for the books that sadly were only written in his head – his unrealized full-length study of stand-up comedy a particular loss.

There was a good deal of mild complaint from Clive about my copy-editing of his early articles, on the lines of, 'You make me sound like an academic.' Like the brilliant autodidact he was, Clive soon learned to sound as much like an academic as was needful to make his voice heard, but without ever losing that voice amidst the modish jargon to which academic drama is (perhaps especially, self-defensively) prone.

We lost touch for a little while, when the old TQ went under and we were both going through turbulent personal times. Then came a phone call out of the blue: Cambridge was interested in reviving the journal – would I come on board? Eighty-two issues later, we were still shipmates, until, only a few days since we'd last spoken, another phone call came out of the blue, that Clive was dead. Two years previously, that would not have been unexpected, when he suffered a first stroke following triple by-pass surgery: but he had fought his way back from that, as he had from earlier cancer surgery, drawing on just the methods he had studied and taught actors for physical well-being. Now his death was shocking, and somehow deeply unfair.

Commenting last year on a submission to NTQ about site-specific performance, Clive wrote to me in an email:

Perhaps you should appoint a scribe to follow me around Nuneaton. I refuse to be an outsider and sheltered resident. I engage people in conversation in the streets and they respond strongly. I have some great contacts and I enjoy each day. I thought I was simply repeating what we did in InterAction with the Santa Claus Union and Happy Hello Day in different circumstances. Now it seems I am superpostmodernist. Ah, well. I've just returned from a walk and saw a lovely eight- or nine-year-old boy with his parents. I told him I wanted a haircut like his but I couldn't find a barber to do it. I had a series of exchanges with his parents, but it was his smile that brightened up the day. Which hadn't gone badly – I went to the residents' coffee morning and won four prizes in the raffle. Nuneaton is full of people who look totally miserable but who suddenly come to life when I speak to them. Perhaps I need a structure so someone can write about me and put me in a context with Derrida and Lefebvre. I live in hope.

Yes. And so he did. Clive never abandoned the sense of community and sheer joy in living that some kinds of site-specific and community theatre seek worthily to regen-

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erate in our global village where no one knows their neighbour.

That email is also a useful reminder not only of another of Clive's old affiliations, with the proto-site-specificity of many of Ed Berman's proliferating schemes to turn the humdrum head-over-heels, but of a typical Clive recognition that, whatever it was, it had probably been tried before, and needed writing about, so that theatre people could stop constantly trying to reinvent the wheel.

Clive determinedly continued to travel after his first stroke, his last major expedition to Odin Teatret birthday celebrations (yes, another of Clive's affiliations), and, as Baz Kershaw records, he had left his Nuneaton retreat for York, where he was running workshops for children with cerebral palsy on the day that he died. That, in a way, is a fitting memorial to his life; more permanently, it is pleasing to be able to record that the new library at Rose Bruford College, which houses Clive's archive, is to be named after him, at a launch in the autumn when Eugenio Barba hopes to be swinging the champagne bottle.

Which reminds me of all the things I've failed to mention about Clive, from the idea of the Fun Palace to his early participation in ISTA to the lifeline he gave to scholars from the then East Germany, struggling to maintain the dignity of their discipline in the face of an oppressive regime. He will be mourned by many other friends in Eastern Europe, and it is notable that one of the last contributions to which he gave enthusiastic endorsement was from a writer in Croatia.

And then there was *Theatre Games* – to which others have paid proper and fuller tribute, and which for actors and actor trainers will be another lasting memorial. As I was saying, Clive somehow was always there, and in theatre and theatre studies his slightly sceptical, invariably commonsensical, brilliantly intuitive, and instinctively connective presence will remain a valuable guide, an affirmation and encouragement of our best intentions and a healthy corrective to our worst.

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Dick McCaw

The Comeback Kid

I picture Clive Barker surrounded by plastic bags of all colours, shapes, and sizes, each one crammed with pieces of paper. This was the encyclopedia of world theatre that he carried about with him: there were facts, anecdotes, commentaries on plays, playwrights, theatre forms, theatre companies, theatre movements – and more stories than you could tell in a thousand and one nights.

Some of my most vivid memories of Clive are of him bringing to life some play by a foreign playwright that I had never heard of, by the end of which I felt like I had been there myself in the audience with him. It was not just the volume of material, it was the range: from Madonna to Morecambe and Wise, to Joan Littlewood, from bebop jazz to grand opera. He once sent me a cassette of *Emmanuelle 2* because it contained a particularly good example of the Indonesian martial art *pencak silat*.

Another image I have of Clive is of him in Poland, at the final rehearsal for a performance of an Ann Jellicoe play, which was going badly. Nobody seemed to know where they were going, or what they were doing. Clive leapt onto the stage (despite his arthritis) and proceeded to marshal the actors. I do not know what he said, but within forty minutes a scattering of bewildered actors had become a focused company ready to put on a play.

Clive used to call himself the Ringo Kid, after John Wayne's first starring role, in *Stagecoach* – a guy who drifts into town, does what he has to do, and then moves on. I think he was much more the Comeback Kid, who just could not be put down.

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