

## Ed Kemp and David Lane - Responses

I loved Ed Kemp's re-naming of the dramaturg as 'traumaturg' - a play on words that captures the ambivalence surrounding the term, its association both with the traumas of production (and management) and the dream-spaces of creativity.

If UK theatre is slowly getting over the trauma of admitting the dramaturg into its dream-spaces, it hasn't yet resolved what might be his or her most useful function, or functions. The most usual role, as Ed pointed out, is close to that of the Literary Manager, primarily responsible for the development of new writing. Ed's role at Chichester was unusual, in that he had an input into repertoire, worked on adaptation, mediated for new work, commissioned articles, curated talks, set up play-readings and made contacts with new writing organisations (while remaining mindful of the limitations of Chichester as a venue for new work). This was closer to the role of the Continental dramaturg, though his sense of being 'the writer's representative in the rehearsal room' - even in the case of resilient dead writers, such as Lessing - might be less familiar in some mainland European contexts. The RSC, which employed Kemp as a dramaturg on Katie Mitchell's production of *The Mysteries*, is now experimenting with employing other writers in a dramaturgical capacity. It remains to be seen how this develops and what its influence may be on the UK theatre in general.

There are other roles for the dramaturg, of course (one need only look at the slow but steady appearance of the dramaturg in devising and live art contexts), but it was refreshing to hear both Ed and David examine and question the conventional activities of the dramaturg in developing new work. Rather than raise the much vexed and ultimately fairly unhelpful question of *whether* the dramaturg might be useful in developing work with writers, both asked the more fruitful question as to *how* this might be done, in particular contexts.

For Ed, at Chichester, this meant a certain realism about what might be done and what would ultimately be most helpful to playwrights. David, meanwhile, is developing projects that gently challenge some of the more entrenched systems of new writing development and that seek to encourage writers to develop work that draws on the visual, sonic, physical aspects of the theatre. This will happen, in the first instance, by setting up dialogues with artists from other disciplines - sculptors, composers and so on. While David sometimes seems almost apologetic for this project, as if it were a little outlandish, it seems on the contrary, very straightforward, intelligent and timely.

The post-seminar discussion began to revolve around the idea that writers need to be able to be 'more theatrical', to draw on all the resources of the theatre. I wholeheartedly agree with this, but I wonder whether, if we desire a more theatrically literate writing, we might need to probe further to address the problem. If writing is to be transformed, is this simply a matter of opening the tool-box? Or do we need to look more closely at the politics of form and process? This might also involve looking again at the politics of dramaturgical development of new work.

I came along to the seminar with two quotes in my mind (and in my notebook), one recent, one from nearly eighty years ago. Both present a challenge, one that interests me and one that I think David's project might potentially respond to...

**'[We] need to develop our political understanding of dramaturgical practice...we might ask what can theatre do, be and become...when the hegemony has become theatrical and power has become a mediascape of representations, violent performative acts, and staged lessons in discipline and fear, where is the alternative space, what can the artistic response offer?' (Peter Ekkersall, Melanie Beddie and Paul Monaghan, report on 'Dramaturgies I', Melbourne University, February 2002)**

**'It is understood that the radical transformation of the theatre can't be the result of some artistic whim, it has simply to respond to the whole radical transformation of our time' (Bertolt Brecht, 1928)**

Cathy Turner