Practitioners Voices in Classical Reception Studies

Issue 2 (September 2010)

Helen Eastman, Theatre Director in interview with Lorna Hardwick Milton Keynes, 18th May 2009

LH This is Lorna Hardwick for the Reception of Classical Texts research project, Monday 18th May 2009, at Milton Keynes and I'm interviewing Helen Eastman who has come to talk about her work as a theatre director. Helen read Classics and English at Oxford, she's got now an increasing range of experience as a theatre director in various kinds of productions. She's also the producer of the Onassis programme for the performance of Greek drama which is based at Oxford. Helen, thanks very much for coming up to talk to us today. I'd like to start off by asking you about your undergraduate career – the fact that your study crossed those two areas: Classics and English. Is that something that's been important for you subsequently?

HE I think so, absolutely. It's a pretty formidable course. I think part of the reason it was created is, there was, obviously going back many decades, an expectation, all English students would know their Classics, and all Classics students would be avid readers of English literature. And I think there was a sense that people weren't coming through the academic system with that wide an overview anymore, and that was part of the reason why the course was created. But it's not a joint honours in the traditional sense of you doing half of one and half the other, because it is actually a course that looks at the wider themes of Western literature through/from Classics to Literature. It's an incredible preparation for that kind of broad sweep for looking at genres in literature. And with an incredible access to the people who are teaching you. I remember doing the tragedy paper which had some ludicrous title 'tragedy 5 BC to 1994' or something, and being taught by a Greek tragedy specialist for week 1 and 2 of the term, Latin tragedy week 3 and 4, working through Renaissance week 5 and 6 etc going through to modern drama. And when you think of the work that went into piecing together that teaching – from 7 or 8 different specialists putting together an 8 week study of tragedy! The encouragement to look really broadly is the root of reception really. It's basically asking you to look at 2000 years worth of literature. There are papers on comedy, satire, epic. So I thought it was fantastic actually and because of the bits of the Classics you don't do – basically you miss out on the history and philosophy from Greats – what you effectively end up with is studying Western literature, 2,000 years of Western literature, in as many original languages as you can manage. I was that rare breed who came up with a Greek, but not Latin, A Level, which I think is quite unusual, because I was a 17 year old who got particularly obsessed with Greek drama and managed to argue through a slightly reticent Classics teacher that of course I could do A Level Greek without A Level Latin because Greek came first, so clearly you didn't need to know Latin to study Greek. So I had quite a Greek drama bent to everything I was doing as an undergraduate. When I left Oxford I went straight to LAMDA (The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) to train as a director, and when I arrived there I reacted slightly against it and basically said I don't want anything to do with text for a year and I don't want to read any books or pick up a pen or paper – I want a completely vocational training because I needed a skills base, but pretty much then as soon as I acquired that skills base as a director, which was practical and vocational, it was time to go back to using a really broad knowledge of texts.

LH When was the point at which you began to get really seriously interested in the performance side – was that as an undergraduate? I mean, you'd come to the Classical material basically from a literary background, when was it that you'd started wanting to develope that extra dimension?

HE Well, I think alongside studying literature and Greek I'd always had an interest in theatre and … in a very hobby based way, as a youngster and done all that singing and dancing that you do when you're 13 … so I'd always had that interest in theatre. I'd never really married the things together in my head. I'd wasn't very exposed when I was young to what you might call serious theatre – I'd seen a lot of West End musicals and stuff – but I'd never made a marriage in my head between the idea of this hobby I had, that was drama and dance and performance, and the sort of serious academic thing I was doing. It wasn't until, with a group of students, in my 2nd or 3rd year, we went up to the Edinburgh Festival with a production of *The Cure At Troy* which was very much a student affair at the time , and it was one of those rare things that happens at the Edinburgh Festival where one reviewer decides they particularly like a production and reviews it and then everyone else

comes to see it and suddenly some small production in a very small theatre, in a very obscure part of the Edinburgh Festival, becomes incredibly high profile, and spectacularly manages to launch six people's careers. [Ed's note: *The Cure at Troy* is by Seamus Heaney, 'after Sophocles *Philoctetes'* (1990). Further information on the different productions is available from the project's Drama Database at www4.open.ac.uk/csdb/ASP/database.htm] I remember reading an interview with myself in, I think, the *Independent,* and being referred to as 'director Helen Eastman says this…' and I thought 'oh, Ok, well they think I'm one so maybe I can be one…' it was literally the first time it had ever occurred to me that you could … that I could be a director. That I could go into theatre. It was something so relegated in my head as being a hobby, and I was so busy doing my milk round and thinking about whether I wanted to be a barrister and doing my mini-pupilage and thinking maybe I wanted to work at the BBC – I'd *no* conception of making a career in the theatre really until literally that point, and I think in a weird life moment of everything coming together – I think it was my 21st birthday – and I was reading this article and I suddenly thought … and my sister, who'd always been a fierce critic who made me think that theatre was slightly horrifically pretentious and whose opinion I worried drastically about in everything turned round to me and said ' oh, so you're going to be a theatre director?' and suddenly it was very easy to just say 'yes, that's what I'm going to do' and that's how all that happened.

LH So, in a sense you'd almost become a theatre director before you decided to become one.

HE Mm. I think so.

LH So what happened when you went off to do some more formal training? You know, were there any nasty shocks in store or was it something you felt you were really suited to all along but you hadn't realised it?

HE No, it was an absolute shock and I kept trying to leave – I kept thinking I was in the wrong place and I'm very glad the principal kept me there. But it's a complete shock to go from a university culture that's about an hour of contact time every week and reading a lot of books on your own in the library to being in an environment that is extremely physically disciplined. You are there at 9 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock in the evening, and you're there wearing the right thing, and doing the right class, and so in some ways that was quite a shock.

LH What sort of classes did you have to do there?

HE In my first term … they train directors in pairs at LAMDA, they have two there each year at LAMDA, I think they may have gone up to four now … and they always had a bit of a bias with their directors against university graduates. They'd mainly taken people much older, for example in the year above me I think there had been someone who'd been a stage manager for 10 years and wanted to retrain as a director, and someone who'd been a theatre manager who was retraining. We were the first pair of university graduates– and they plucked one from Oxford and one from Cambridge – and they were very concerned that we had a really good vocational understanding of actors' training so for the first three months they just shoved us on the first year acting course. So we were studying voice, movement, physical theatre, an introduction to acting through a fairly Stanislavski perspective. And then the sort of peripheral classes: fight, movement, Laban, Alexander, that kind of make up… So we did that for a couple of months, and then we moved to continuing classes in the morning while assisting guest directors in the afternoon. And then gradually by the end of the year we moved to directing and teaching a bit before we left. Directing courses is a really new phenomena, and they've now sprung up all over the place, and I frequently get asked to go and give talks on them and things like that –, and I'm always slightly curious as to how and what people are being taught. And there are now quite a few directors' courses around that teach directing quite theoretically. You have directing classes where you learn about different methods and different techniques and the history of directing and everything - what I did at LAMDA was absolutely not that. It was basically a sort of apprenticeship where you were attached to a drama school for a year. What you did was entirely decided in discussion with your tutor, who was the Principal, so effectively they gave us the timetable for the entire school and said which classes do you need to go to, and you would ring up a tutor and say 'I want to come this term, can I, to…' and so I ended up doing a lot of physical theatre and a lot of movement-based work because that was kind of the direction, at the time, I was going in. But we never had a single class in directing *per se* we didn't do any theoretical approach to directing.

LH That was something I really wanted to ask you about because there's this notion, isn't there, you know, Director equals Dictator, etc., and I was wondering about the extent to which you were

engaged with those kinds of issues in your training, or whether it was something you just had to contend with, as you developed your own practice and your own career?

HE I think it's really, really interesting in terms of how you are a director within a room, and how you manage a room full of people and how you discover a way for *you* to do that role. And it's very personal, and I remember – this is perhaps a gender based comment – but I remember in some bits of assisting I did early on, watching quite old male directors and the way they worked, and thinking to some extent this is really pointless because I'm never going to direct in the way you direct. It would never be appropriate to my personality or manner in terms of the way I would run a room. I mean when you're 21 and starting out as a director, you necessarily, I think, need consent to direct. I think all young directors are slightly hung up on everyone in the room respecting them enough to… And I was always striving for a manner which was – I don't think I've ever shouted at anyone in a rehearsal room – I was striving for a manner that was a massive move away from a slightly male dominated dictator-ish approach, which is not to say a lack of sort of artistic authority because I do work very collaboratively but I do direct and I do take artistic ownership of projects that I direct. But in terms of manner, I like to have at least a feeling in a rehearsal room that it's an extremely collaborative process. I have a particular aversion as well to the imparting of academic theories in a rehearsal room. I've watched quite a few…. On day one of a rehearsal process when a director is asked to give their, kind of, introductory meet and greet talk, it's obviously traditional to talk a bit about your vision of the play or the opera and where you see it going and I've sat through some quite academic treatises on certain texts or approaches to certain … and I think that is largely pointless in a rehearsal process, because actors can't use that information. You can't as an actor take hold in your head a theory on the play and carry that on stage with you in any useful way, shape or form. So, as a director your job, if you have a theory on a play or if you have a strong opinion, is to find a way for that to manifest in the production, but in the terms of the way you deal with actors it's all about them discovering a way to play a scene that might illustrate your theory on the play. But I don't think it's ever useful to literally tell an actor your academic theory on it, on a play. So, in some ways I'm possibly quite non-academic in a rehearsal room. But I'm fiercely academic of an evening when I'm thinking 'ok this is what I think about this, but how am I going to do that in a rehearsal room tomorrow in a way that doesn't actually involve me saying any of that, it just involves us working through a series of exercises to achieve that'.

LH How important is the particular way a company might have come together? You spoke of your initial experience with *The Cure at Troy* where you were working with a group who, presumably, you knew you could all work together and you took it from there. But as your career has developed, obviously there have been different contexts, different types of companies, different ways of selecting people. What sort of difference does that make?

HE I'm very lucky in that I've done an incredibly broad spectrum of work, from doing theatre to circus to opera, and with very, very different groups of people, with very different backgrounds and training backgrounds. One of the things I always say when I'm talking about directing to young directors, is that realistically, unless you're going to form your own ensemble that are going to only work with one very strong set of methodologies – so, unless you are going to be Stanislavski and form a company that works in a certain way – If you're going to be a practising director within the industry you will, in any company, you will have people with an enormous range of training and skills. You will, in your average ensemble, have someone who's done a kind of Stanislavski based training at drama centre and someone who went straight into doing telly at 17 and has never formally trained and someone form Le Coq and someone who did the Guildford musical theatre course. And part of your role really, as a director, is to find a way for all those people to work together in a way that… I'm a great fan of Declan Donnellan's attitude which is that basically your job is to help actors do it better, as a director. Part of it is about vision but a lot of it is literally being available to help people on a day-by-day basis.

LH So what happens if somebody really can't hack it?

HE I mean, I think, I believe in utter responsibility for casting. So I think if you've put people into a production you take utter responsibility for seeing it through with them. I can't stand directors who are rude about actors in productions they are doing. As director you cast them, so if they're having problems it's kind of your fault. I think that there's always a way to work with people and sometimes you have to think about different ways into roles. One of the most interesting aspects on that is directing opera, because often you haven't cast it. You need to go in and think, OK so how can this person play this role and what's the way to make it work for them, and how do I, literally, how do I plan my 9 to 5 day to make sure that every person in this is going to move forward today in some

way … and this person needs that, and this person needs that, and this person will hate doing that exercise, but they're going to have to do it because it's important to another person. But I think as long as you're keeping everybody moving forward in some way, then everyone feels comfortable within the process. There are some things I always so, I always do chorus work with all companies regardless of what the production is, because I think being able to be part of an ensemble that move as a group is fundamental to being part of any production. So although, a lot of the things I do obviously don't have choruses. I use the same tecniques at the beginning of pretty much every rehearsal process, be it an opera, be it a circus, whatever.

LH What about your working relationships with other practitioners on the team – designers, musical directors, and so on. What kinds of issue does that raise?

HE I enormously enjoy collaborating with other key creatives on projects. And there are certain specific people that I enjoy working with across many projects. I'm lucky to work with a lot of very good writers because I direct quite a bit of new writing and I'm very interested in that process of working from very early stages on new plays and being part of that development process in terms of director/writer partnerships. I work a lot with Jo Wilkinson and I think that's where both of us are doing some of our most interesting work – within that collaboration. I've been working a lot with Alex Silverman, the composer, recently – again working collaboratively really from first ideas. I think the earlier you involve other people in a creative process the better the chances of really strong collaborative success. I think that's something I've learnt more and more over the years – the earlier your designer is involved, the earlier your costume designer's involved, the more total everyone's vision is going to be. I've also learnt how brilliant people are at their specialisms in the sense that, obviously directors have a good understanding of sense of space and design, but there's always that moment where a designer just turns around with an unbelievably brilliant spatial solution to a play and you kind of go, 'ok, that's why you do what you do', because actually you've just solved so many questions with just a totally different way of looking at how to use space. But I think when you're working on more commercial projects there's often a pressure for people to be brought in at later stages, rather than the luxury of a lot of collaborative time, so those relationships can be quite short changed by people being thrown together at the last minute to do stuff. It's an interesting … I'm working on a project at the moment call Speak Out for ETO [English Touring Opera], which is a big new opera commission, outreach commission, and there's an enormous number of collaborators. It's got animation, it's got a filmmaker, design, new composition, MD, and I'm finding it as much of a challenge to just lead that project artistically, as I am to actually direct it, in the sense that trying to pull together the work of seven creatives into one piece, that really is the work of seven creatives, a really, really interesting challenge. I don't do much work with animation and film and trying to integrate the work they've done properly into the whole I find really, really, challenging. Just because it's not a way I normally work. And I wonder if what we'll end up with is something very wonderful but very patchy and I'm not sure, I'm not sure how well that's going to work. I think increasingly as theatre become more multimedia in total, directors need to get better at managing wider creative teams than just a director and the possible input of a designer.

LH Now you talked about the very wide range of theatre that you've done but I want just for the moment to turn back onto the classical material of different kinds, and to ask you about the extent to which you feel that has intersected creatively with the other kinds of work that you've done. Has there been some kind of exchange process as you've built up your own career? Are there particular things in the way in which you approach classical material that have been perhaps influenced by other work that you've done, or vice versa?

HE Absolutely. I had this strange phenomena of directing this production of *The Cure at Troy* over many, many years, and in many contexts, from 1999–2005. It was almost like a directors' training ground in that I had the luxury of constantly revisiting it and reworking it in the light of increasingly more experience s a director [LH: *The Cure at Tory* is Seamus Heaney's version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*] and I think that the work I was doing on that, over that five or six years, was basically underpinning all my other practice because basically I was experimenting with various things – experimenting with chorus work and a particular style of chorus work which has now fed into a lot of my other work that isn't classical, for example, I direct an ensemble called Live Canon who perform poetry all over the place, and the way we work on poetic texts is the style we developed when rehearsing the *The Cure at Troy* and it's a rehearsal process and a style of delivering chorus work. To be specific it's basically a way of everyone knowing all the text and feeding into delivering the text in a way that isn't set, so any performance may be slightly different, people adding to the

chorus impulsively. They share the text between them. And we use that now in a completely different context, to approach modern poetry, as the chorus were.

LH I have a very strong memory of seeing you rehearse, many years ago, a production of the *The Cure at Troy*, I think it was at The Old Fire Station, in Oxford, where in that opening scene you had a group of people stepping round on the barstools, you know, a stepping stones image wasn't it?

HE Yes, the form that we found for *The Cure at Troy*, which was … what you might call a rough theatre aesthetic, a sort of storytelling aesthetic. That was also linked into all the other work that was happening for me at the time. That production sort of transformed in about 2002 , after a conversation with Jenny Tiramani, the designer, who said to me, quite politically, that it would be exciting to be able to perform that text because of the power of what it says, in pretty much in any context. She's originally from 7:84 theatre group, a performing all over the place sort of background, and she helped us to redesign that show so that it was entirely carried in the actors' backpacks – all the lighting, everything, so you could literally walk into any space and perform it. That experiment in form was about a wider kind of body of work I was doing at the time with the company Floodtide that I used to run with Kate McGrath, which was political in its orientation and looking at new spaces and new audiences and that possibly culminated when we did the *The Cure at Troy* on the docks in Deptford. We did a promenade performance leading the audience round. By that stage the company knew the text well enough to be just able to do that rather than do it in a theatre. So there was a whole level of experimentation with chorus work, with how to fuse visual and physical theatre with text work, with the political circumstance of the theatre happening, with a very stark design aesthetic which was about being mobile, about being able to carry stuff with you, storytelling, that all grew out of that production really. Then, as time's gone on, I personally still use my chorus work which I built up through that and through various master classes I went to at various points. I have stolen bits of from all kinds of other practitioners, but physical chorus work and textual chorus work is my way in with most actors and into most productions. I've just been working on *Alcestis* with some students at RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) and my brief in going into working with the 2nd year at RADA was very much about getting them to work as an ensemble and getting them to work as a chorus. It wasn't irrelevant that we were doing Greek tragedy as well because the other thing they needed to be studying was Greek tragedy, but in some ways the project sat at a point in their training where they needed to go from individual training to learning to work as an ensemble and Greek tragedy was the tool for them to do that.

LH You talked about the different kinds of spaces that you've used, and one of the things that really interests me about performances of Greek tragedy, whether in the original or in translation or in some kind of adaptation, is that often the approach to the chorus is so much constrained by the space that's available and also, I guess, by financial considerations like how many actors you can have, but mainly primarily by the space that's available. What has been your experience of trying to produce either Greek plays or other works which are drawing on techniques of Greek chorus where you feel the space makes things difficult – have you had to adapt or do you just choose not to do it in certain circumstances?

HE It is really interesting because it's a financial/logistic issue in terms of doing chorus work and also certain configurations of space lend better to chorus work perhaps than others. I think there are always solutions and I think if you apply the principles of chorus a surprisingly small chorus can give the effect of chorus because actually two people can't be a chorus – three people probably can which is what we discovered working with *The Cure at Troy.* There's also an increasing tendency, I think, with productions as well to use your protagonist within your chorus – for people to come out of the chorus, so you've got a storytelling troupe which helps you a bit with just sheer numbers on stage. I think once you get to three people, if three people work together to be a unit you get a choral effect. Even if there are quite strong individuals within that, once you get unity that goes beyond a pair or a partnership moving together, it looks like you've been born dancing or something, it looks romantic, it looks like a relationship. Three people working or moving together is not something we normally see, so immediately it makes a sort of statement about a group. It's interesting ... it does mean to some extent that Greek tragedy at its best often has to be at a quite high budget environment to provide a really epic sense of chorus. It always makes me quite sad when you see fringe Greek tragedy where what's been scrimped on is the chorus because to me the chorus is what's interesting about the form – to me that's what's exciting. There are plenty of good three handers in other points in theatrical history so although I am obviously interested in the protagonists and the intellectual and dramatic richness of what they're doing, what's unique about approaching Greek tragedy is this incredible form of the chorus. So I sort of almost don't really

understand people who want to direct Greek tragedy but aren't interested in chorus, because that's my passion about it. Therefore I think it's quite sad when you watch a production that's entirely focussed on the protagonist because then only half the play's there really, or an individual voice as chorus, it's very hard to make an individual represent anything more than an individual. It means that some of the most exciting Greek tragedy productions come out of contexts where there are lots of available people, so often student work, or even school work, can be really exciting because actually what they can offer is just volume of people, or projects with community choruses and stuff like that can be quite exciting.

LH What about things like the Messenger Speech, for instance? Do you find that is something which is perhaps particularly demanding of school or student actors?

HE Yes, I think it is. I think Greek tragedy is hard to do well, I mean it really is, and it requires such a fusion of theatricality and dramaturgy with text with physicality. I think the performance history of Greek tragedy in Britain sort of tells us that physicality is important. There was a fairly horrific period in production history where people stood still a lot and did Greek tragedy and it doesn't work. It's a very physical form. I think with younger actors approaching it, student actors, and acting school, that's really what they normally lack. I think it's true of university productions as well. There's an incredible academic understanding of the text and often a really low physical skill level to be able to be able to achieve. I mean what's really interesting to me, and perhaps the reason I took the post at the Onassis programme is that I think British theatre is starting to be able to do chorus because of a more general influx of European theatre techniques over the last 20 years we are starting to be able to do ensemble work and physical theatre and to understand chorus in its broader sense, not just in the Greek tragedy sense, in a way that British theatre 30 or 40 years ago couldn't handle a chorus.

LH And would that go with things like increased interest in dance, for instance, both in terms of participation throughout the community but also as a theatrical ...

HE Yes, I think so, I think we are creating and watching a lot more physical theatre in every sense. That's a return to a value of skills, so excitement in circus in all its forms in dance in physical clowning. We're getting more and more actors trained in that way, so we're getting more and more Lecoq trained actors , more and more people who aspire to be part of really good strong ensembles. That's been a fantastic developing trend in ensemble based performance ... all the theatre that's come out of Battersea Arts Centre, that's come out of the Lyric more recently. What for me would be interesting about the next stage of that is that there's been a bit of a segregation between environments where theatre is being devised, physically, and the text based tradition and surely perhaps obviously needs to happen now is marrying the visual brilliance of physical theatre with using text again and for me that's the most exciting thing about working on Greek tragedy is that it's an invitation ... you want to create work that looks as good, is as visually powerful, is full of visual images, as the best physical theatre/dance , but you want to do that within a textual tradition and actually marry it together and make sure that your visual metaphors and your text metaphors work together and that's really exciting to think can you make Greek tragedy that looks like Complicité but has a textual value as well.

LH I wanted to ask you about this question of theatre poetry which is so important for tragedy. The kinds of translated or adapted texts that you're working with in English, as opposed to doing it in Greek, what are the kinds of issues that you've experienced in terms of an Anglophone conception of what theatre poetry is as compared to what is going on in the chorus in Greek for instance?

HE I think it's a really interesting question because actually I've fallen foul a few times of thinking I'm directing the original when actually I'm directing a poet's version of it, and nearly therefore getting it horribly wrong. When I was doing the Ted Hughes' *Alcestis* I had to keep reminding myself to direct what was on Ted Hughes' page not what I thought was there because I knew the original, because you end up in an odd theatrical tension between the two. Understanding where a version diverges is important, but it is important to actually direct what you're directing. We nearly got the *The Cure at Troy* really wrong the first time round because I was directing the *Philoctetes* not *The Cure at Troy* and suddenly realised that actually dramaturgically they are two different things. There's an interesting ... the chorus literally have a different role. I think in a lot of contemporary translations by great poets there's a word hoard, to use a Heaneyism, or a metaphorical life, which comes from the locus or the identity of the translator. Which is not necessarily going as far as anachronism – which someone like Hughes' does go to anachronistic images – but even if it's still got a sense of another time and place and consequently the chorus, who are often communicating the poetry and

the metaphor of a contemporary aesthetic to an audience, sit in a different relationship to the original story because they become almost part of the world and location of the audience and they almost a become a frame to the primary story as it's being presented and that is a different dramaturgical setup to a chorus who are wholly within the original aesthetic. A lot of translators now use their chorus slightly more as contemporary commentators. Or literally the poetry has a relationship with the rest of the poetic work of that writer and so there's a kind of intertextuality. You can't read *The Cure at Troy* without reading *Seeing Things* which is the anthology that Seamus Heaney wrote at the same time. And in some ways *Seeing Things* sets out the metaphors really clearly that are used in *The Cure at Troy*, but without cross referencing they're slightly impenetrable at points. The relationship on stage needs to be different because the way you present the poetry makes a different relationship with the audience than if you're literally doing the original. So if you don't remember that what you're doing is a version you can actually construct the production wrong and it doesn't work. It's really interesting if you've got actors who are used to a slight Stanislavskian sense of identity to teach them how to approach it because sometimes there's a confusion of going, Ok I am this fifth century sailor and I'm using a contemporary metaphor how do I create my own sense of identity? And you have to take them away from a sort of psychological approach to identity and get them to play more of a function within a dramatic construct, but that can be quite difficult to make sense of. I think there's another interesting question which is about metaphor, where you're using a contemporary version, which is how you relate metaphor in the translation to visual metaphor, because actually most Greek tragedies have iconic visual statements in them which are part of their production history and they may or may not actually be contained within the contemporary texts and it can be ... you can fall quite foul of going for a slightly traditional visual set of statements which apply to the Greek, which are actually not the visual life of the new text.

LH How much do you think that depends on the fact that you're dealing with precisely the kinds of intertextualities that you have described? You know, there is the great modern writer, who is usually a poet rather than a dramatist and the intertextualities then with the rest of his or her work? Does it make a difference if you're working with a new text which is created by somebody who is primarily a dramatist rather than a poet – I know in a sense it's rather an artificial distinction but you see what I'm driving at, different points on the spectrum.

HE No, I think it's a really important distinction – because I think a poet will render you the words that are spoken in a poetical and metaphorical aesthetics, that's part of their personal expression. A dramatist is often trying to solve the play for a modern audience, dramatically, and is trying to construct it ... poetic translations very rarely restructure. They might give it another life or another dimension verbally, but dramatists tackling Greek tragedies do often try to solve, as it were, the issue of the chorus within the version they're writing. So they very specifically assign it to three different voices, or they offer some kind of dramatic solution and become involved with a dramaturgical reconstruction of the original which is … Sometimes that's linked into the fact that translation's been done as part of a production process and so actually what you're seeing in that is both a writer and a director's input into how the piece is working and quite a lot of texts you read you have to remember are constructed on the page after they've been developed in rehearsal. But I think there are very few dramatists who don't attempt solutions of what they think the problems are with Greek tragedy for contemporary audiences to make other plays. What is interesting is where you have someone who would probably identify as both , someone like Colin Teevan, who is coming at both of those angles at something … With the producer of the Onassis programme hat on I've obviously overseen the commission of quite a few versions of Greek tragedy at various levels of remove by … and it's quite an interesting an process. The Timerberlake Wertenbaker *Hippolytus* that we worked on earlier this year was a very, very interesting mixture of creativity and fidelity and actually quite a lot of original Greek phrases were used within the translation and where it was felt that the *sound* of the Greek was really all you needed – particularly where it was a big expression of something spiritual or something really guttural and emotional that actually the sound of the Greek would communicate more to an audience than an English translation – which was an interesting technique and I think it worked quite well.

LH So it's the affective qualities rather than the decision that something's untranslatable - you know, a particular concept or something?

HE Yes, I think so. But if you look at something like a Martin Crimp version that's a very dramatic … that's a dramatist creating a new play, essentially, out of an original source material, and I think, to me, that's a dramatist's approach, rather than a poet's approach.

LH You mean, really, you're thinking of something like *Cruel and Tender* for instance.

HE Yes, that strikes me as a good example of a dramatic re-working of it, as opposed to a poetic reworking of it which is much more about … Martin Crimp's approach is quite total – 'How do I take this play' and 'How do I re-create this play for a modern audience', as opposed to 'How do I take this text and re-express it' which is … whether you're trying to make a dramatic re-construction or a verbal re-construction I think is quite a different thing.

LH You've referred at several points to this question of modern audiences. Now I'd like to ask you more about this. For example, in your own work, which has been presented in a whole range of different contexts and to different constituencies - what kinds of assumptions do you make about a modern audience – and particularly with respect to their attitudes and expectations towards a Greek play?

HE That's a really interesting question because there is always expectation – and there's quite a range of possible expectations, from people who know plays inside out and are therefore primarily interested in how its been re-rendered – they're interested in adaptation for audiences who literally don't know the story and who are there to watch the play for the first time . And there's baggage, there's people who come expecting it to be boring and there's people who come not expecting to understand something . It's very similar in some ways to working with Shakespeare in the sense that there's a lot of people who feel they know plays that they may not actually have read, or may not actually have seen. You have to bear an audience in mind as you prepare a work but you also have to be aware of the range within that audience and therefore you cannot in some ways make a piece of work that will satisfy everyone. I find I'm more aware with Greek tragedy than I might be perhaps with other things with no production history, because I'm aware that there are a lot of people who love Greek tragedy very much and will have seen all the major productions of something that have happened in the last twenty years and will look at what you're doing in dialogue with other major productions and it's not that you necessarily have to care but it's worth knowing.

LH How important do you think the…, well, let me call them the classical lobby… is? Just to give an example: I did an interview with Ian Ruffell not long ago, who did the close translation that David Greig used for his version of Euripides' *Bacchae*, and one of the things that Ian said, was that his translation was the most footnoted translation in history, because although actually they knew it was going to be used rather creatively they didn't want to leave hostages to fortune, you know, for irate classicists to muscle in. That seemed to me, actually, to be an extraordinary thing to say.

HE Yes, I think it depends slightly on where you're making the work for. For example, if you're doing the Cambridge Greek play you need to acknowledge that probably a very high proportion of your audience will be students of classics in some way, shape or form, and it would seem crazy to not, therefore, give consideration to that weight of knowledge and expectation in an audience. [Ed's Note: Helen Eastman was subsequently director of the Cambridge Greek Play *Agamemnon* in 2010.] But if you're making a show for a mainstream theatre audience then classicists will be a very small proportion of the audience and it matters much more to me to make the play come alive for people who have no knowledge of it and for it to just be a rollicking good story and a really good piece of theatre. And it's really important to this canon of work that productions of it are cutting edge in terms of the fact that they are at the front end of what's happening in theatre, so that it isn't relegated to something archaic. I think, therefore, that you have to make work that stands up with the best contemporary theatre. I don't think there's any value in traditionalism for the sake of traditionalism because I'm not sure it achieves anything for anybody. At the end of the day, all that matters is whether something is good and whether an audience enjoy it, and are captured by its imagination and its qualities. I also think you have a duty as directors not to just play out intellectual arguments and debates in production, because actually, for a lot of people, it may be the first, or the only, time they see *Antigone*, and really you need to just show them that story really well and let them enjoy it, rather than showing them something which is a slightly odd take on *Antigone* and which forms part of a debate they will never be interested in. Actually, you have a responsibility to make sure that every generation gets to see just some really good productions of the plays. I think young people have a natural engagement with the material when it's done well because it's very iconic, it tells very simple, strong stories and it can be very visually exciting. When it is very visually exciting I think young audiences get caught up on its physical power and relate to it quite quickly and immediately and actually I think they're almost the least … have the least need of conversion, if you see what I mean, they go for the simplicity and storytelling.

LH Is it actually more attractive to somebody who is a creative artist to be thinking well, actually they're going to work with audiences who don't have baggage, who don't expect it to be boring, or expect it to be done in a, you know, certain rather purist way and just treat it as a play that is being done for an audience today and forget about the rest of it?

HE It's quite nice if you've got a different title. For example, if you're working on a version where the title doesn't necessarily tell people that it's Greek. There's a slight freedom there. There's a recent show I directed called *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, which is a kid's version of Aristophanes' *Birds*. It's now toured to forty cities round the UK or something. I think in about four cities we said it was a version of Aristophanes' *Birds* and everywhere else it was really just a good kid's show about x, y, and z. Because we were making sure people knew that it was truly Aristophanic in the sense that it was riotous, slapstick, extremely silly, very political – satire in places – and visual and spectacular and all the things it should be. But the moment you say it's Aristophanes, people's expectation is of something rather boring and dry and unfunny. So Aristophanes didn't actually get a mention on a lot of publicity material – although he was very duly credited in the programme. But it's an interesting question about your average parent booking tickets for a children's show. They are substantially more likely to book it on the basis of lots of quotes which say this is hilarious and silly and great fun , with some brilliant photos, than they are because it's Aristophanes. And occasionally in cities we did separate mailings that were specifically to classicists saying this is based on Aristophanes . But certainly in marketing plans that would always be … you know, there'd be Target Audience 1, parents da.da.da…. Target Audience 2, schools da.da.da. and somewhere down near Target Audience 11 would be … and do a mailshot to classicists in this town. It was certainly not its intended audience, it was meant to be absolutely mainstream children's theatre.

LH When you're dealing with something which has got political satire, is that, in a sense isomething which is always, inevitably, very contemporary. Do you find that even in the course of a particular run, or a tour, you're having to change and update references which have become yesterday's jokes and you want a new one?

HE Yes, *Cloud Cuckoo Land* was updated for every performance – which I am sure Aristophanes updated for every performance – I'm sure it's completely true to the spirit of the original. There was a song in which there was the line – he was singing about birds – and song had the line 'and if you think of who's in charge right now, it's hard to think a chicken would do worse.' And as this line was played out these giant pictures suddenly came up of … Well originally, it was Bush, Blair, the Queen and so on … and these caricatures were changed several times, so I think the most recent lot were Boris Johnson and, etc., etc. So there was constant updating. Our biggest fear with that production was one of the actors had , at the very end where the gods would have arrived in the Aristophanes, Gordon Brown arrives in *Cloud Cuckoo Land* for the final negotiation of peace, and we'd trained up an actor to do a pretty formidable Gordon Brown impersonation – he came out and talked to the audience and whereupon the birds ripped of all his clothes and started trying to roast him for Sunday lunch until he agreed to all the eco-demands that the children in the audience had. It was a very fun, riotous moment of theatre. But he lived in fear of having to convert to doing David Cameron impersonation because nobody can impersonate David Cameron, because he has absolutely no definable features whatsoever. This poor actor had spent so long getting Gordon Brown down to a fine art that he was in absolute fear that he was going to have to convert this. And when the production went international, and did some international dates, we had a very good staff director on it who used to just have to try and make sensible decisions about what they thought people would, and wouldn't, be able to get. It was in Poland for a week and she spent quite a lot of time checking the recognition of 7 year olds : Do you know who this is? when shown a picture of Bush or whatever. It's really different with tragedy because there's not that same kind of spirit of … in general Aristophanic translations are very rarely seen as poetry, and so re-writing them and ripping them apart and changing them on the night is seen as par for the course. I think anyone would be very surprised if you did that with a tragic text … but, then again, the political references are very often that much less specific.

LH Yes, I mean , on that basis would tragedy, for instance, go international more easily than comedy because you're dealing with the kinds of big issues which are actually common to almost every time, place, culture…?

HE Yes, I think so. I think that's the reason why Aristophanes is much less done and much less performed in that it's quite time/place specific. If you're going to be true to the spirit of the original – comedy will be political and up to the minute and specific – you don't have a product with a very

long shelf life. *Cloud Cuckoo Land* wasn't really intended to be, but it is, a satire about global warming. That's because those are the political issues that came through it when you start writing a contemporary version that's all about the planet and building new cities and habitats – that's the politics you're going to find within that. And so I think that Aristophanes productions that try to be unpolitical, or unspecifically political, and also don't have that kind of pantomime element of bad jokes that have been written in on the day, are almost, always horrifically dull and horribly pretentious, and a bit pointless. Whereas tragedy trades in its ability to have cross-cultural and cross-time essential themes which is why it is so tourable, if you know what I mean.

LH One of the argument's that's always put forward in favour of theatre is its transformative potential. You've talked a lot about entertainment and enjoyment and audience engagement and so on, what would be your line on theatre as transformation or is that not a particular line of argument that you'd want to see?

HE No, I think it is. I think most theatrical experiences are transformative in some way, be it a major way or a small way. And those experiences stay with us and build up with us and linger with us in a way that … For most people because it's such a sort of physical experience to go to the theatre and watch something within a group of people … those memories of an emotional experience often stick with us far longer than stuff we read or stuff we just look at because you remember the whole experience of seeing something in general. You remember who you went with, you remember the occasion, and I think that's why it can be that much more transformative. Obviously some productions aim at that much more political provocation, they aim to change the way we think, so clearly if you're going to see *Molora* as a version of the *Oresteia* that provokes us to political thought [Ed's Note: published text: *Molora,* Yael Farber, 2008; see also documentation on the June 2007 Oxford Playhouse performance at www4.open.ac.uk/csdb/ASP/database.htm). It's interesting whether a production's aiming at a very specific political message or whether it's aiming at an emotional transformation. In some ways it's not transformative for us to feel emotions in the theatre for certain characters, it doesn't necessarily make us go out and live our life in a different way or change things but it does keep us emotionally alive and responding communally to kind of fundamental human stories. Because of the different experiences people can bring to watching Greek tragedy I think different audiences can be extremely different in a way that … I think you get a much more uniform approach to a contemporary audience going to see a contemporary play than you do to an audience going to see a Greek tragedy. You'll get an audience one day that's 400 school children having one response and you'll get an audience in the next day that's a very theatre going, literate audience, and particularly if you're touring work you'll just meet different audiences who respond on really different levels – emotional levels, political levels, literary levels to the piece in a very continual dialogue, and I think for most audiences, particularly if the chorus are talking directly to the audience, if there is that eye contact interaction performances can be very audience-reaction dependent. I think they should be, I think that whole dramatic construct of having a chorus who talk to an audience is about it being an event rather than something you watch in the way you watch cinema. I think it has to be interactive for it to make sense to of that extra choral element to it. I went to watch the filming of a television programme on Friday night, by a comedy group called We Are Clang, and they continually referred to the Department of the Audience, and they told us various things we had to do as Department of the Audience – things we needed to shout back, things we needed to do and where, we fulfilled a function in this recording and it was quite interesting. They were filming us a lot and we were part of creating … and I became really interested in it, and I though OK so you're filming it … it's a sort of a sit-com without a fourth wall and so we are part of what is being made and we are coming together for this evening to be the Department of the Audience for you. And for all different reasons – some of us are here for professional reasons and some of us are here to be entertained on a Friday night, but what we do will become part of the product when this is broadcast. This audience will be one audience and the audience watching it will be another audience and I wonder how much successive audiences of a Greek tragedy's response starts to build into a production as it runs.

LH When you were talking about the chorus facing out and engaging with the audience, that is, an additional function, which goes beyond the notion of the chorus as in some way mediating. It's actually, in your terms, encouraging the audience and spectators to become a part of the play to engage with building up its resonances, its meaning, the kind of way in which the dynamics of the audience, the atmosphere of a particular performance, are also having an effect on the actors rather than it being just one-directional …

HE Although I've enjoyed the performances I really, really, disagree with a Katie Mitchell approach to Greek tragedy which has a fourth wall. I don't have a problem with anachronism, and it is horribly anachronistic to put a fourth wall in a Greek tragedy, but I think it doesn't do justice to what is there in the form to ask your cast to ignore the audience. They don't always in Katie Mitchell … , but quite a lot of it is done quite self-consciously 'I have my back to you as an audience' which I think takes away the whole … the sharing quality, and the storytelling quality that I think is implicit in the chorus and their existence as having a dialogue with the audience about the play. When they're commenting on the play, that's not just an aesthetic comment, it's an invitation to a dialogue and a discussion of what we've just seen and every time I work on a Greek tragedy I become increasingly convinced that huge amounts of eye contact and huge amounts of that kind of interaction with the audience are really, really, important in that the chorus are dramatically there to lead the audience through the story. It's an interesting question and then you only start to see whether that's working when you see it in performance – it's not something you can really crack in the rehearsal room how that will work. Obviously poetry on stage can be pretentious if done badly , and it can be distancing to a modern audience if they're not used to listening to verse text … and I think one of the ways around that that gives an utterly non-pretentious humanity to Greek tragedy is if your chorus can deliver poetry straight into the eyes of an audience with a very human quality with a very unpretentious physicality and sense of interaction and I think for me that really, really, helps . I find if there is a fourth wall you end up watching tragedy as a time piece, you end up watching it as something that's up there, to be looked upon, rather than participating in it as an experience. And the more I was playing around with form in the rehearsal room with *Alcestis*, and we ended up putting this piece in thrust largely so the audience could all see each other, because it became a communal experience – they watched each other watching the play, as well as everything else. So it became a ritual in the sense that there were all these people gathered together to watch something and that play treads tragedy to comedy on a very tight line, and they were laughing – big belly laughing in places – and other places were very moving, but the ability of everyone to be able to see each other doing that lifts it … The modern theatrical construction of sit in the dark and watch something with lights pointed at it seems to me to be quite anathema to Greek tragedy in the sense that it takes your participatory element out, it says sit in the dark and watch in the way you do when you go to the cinema or something, I don't think that's helpful. There's a really rigorous debate and questioning going on in Greek tragedy if you don't get your audience into that and the best Greek tragedy is where there's a sense of occasion. You know, when you go to see Greek tragedy somewhere where there's a sort of bustle and excitement about the whole atmosphere before you even get to the play, it makes you feel like you're part of something, that you're part of some kind of human exploration that's going to take place for the next hour, as opposed to watching something passively, and lots of companies are doing really well at encouraging that. I'm not an enormous fan, I have to confess, of the Kneehigh Greek tragedy but, the one thing they do is demand an interaction and an engagement from an audience which I think is really true to the spirit, the possible spirit, of the thing.

LH I think what you're saying there both works with and against the ancient contexts of community, spectating, because in one sense there is participation in what is perceived as a really important experience. On the other hand, as you pointed out, in the ancient context it's broad daylight, it's – certainly in the larger theatres, I'm thinking of the theatre of Dionysus for instance – the spectators would be a long way from the main performing area, because people were masked there are not the same possibilities of the more intimate contact with the audience and so on. And yet, it seems to me, that what you were saying you would be after, is the kind of buzz and involvement and engagement which is analogous to the ancient experience although it's taking place in a very different physical context.

HE Yes, I think you're trying to create the idea of it being a social ritual where everyone is going to watch this story. I think the open air thing is really interesting because although, yes, you're further away from the performers and they're wearing masks, importantly you can all see each other as an audience. I think possibly that's a really key part of it. The moment somebody puts someone in the dark, it invites you to be individualistic. It says, be shut off from the people around you who you can't see, and have an individual response to this. It invites you to be passive. And I think if you're somewhere open air during the day, it's not an 'end-of-the-day' relaxation thing, it's part of your day and the expectation is active and you can see everyone else, so it immediately says this is going to be collective, we're going to have a collective response, it's not just me in the dark. The expectation is of a much more active involvement. It's very interesting the theatre during the day

thing, I think. It's very different to theatre of an evening which is a relaxation activity. So, yes, you're further away in a Greek theatre and everything else, but you are very visually part of a group.

LH So, let's imagine for a moment you had your choice of Greek play, you had your choice of location and production style and production values and so on, what would you most like to do, and where, and how?

HE Oh, that's a big question. I think I'd like to do something as I said part of an event, part of a festival that's about a huge mass of people coming together to watch something. Possibly open air, possibly in a Greek auditorium. I think they're exciting places to watch Greek tragedy and there's a kind of intertextuality with the actual physical landscape, which is quite exciting. In terms of a play, that's a really good question … I've got an absolutely burning desire to do a fantastic *Prometheus* as something of a huge spectacle, that's maybe what I would say, with a lot of music and a lot of … yes, a lot of spectacle.

LH Would you work with masks?

HE Masks are an interesting thing. I think, if you've got good enough physical performers, masks are very exciting, because actually, when you start to tell emotional stories through the physicality of the body they can be much more powerful and much more guttural. And also I think it can be much more moving to take human facial expression out and force people to listen to words. I wouldn't if I was doing it in Greek because I think that you're double distancing your audience by language and by lack of facial expression. If I was doing it in English I would consider masks. Masks are very useful for a chorus, I think, because they give everybody a unified aesthetic. I had a really interesting play around with modern potential versions of masks recently. Choruses are the obvious things … but choruses in balaclavas, choruses in dental masks was quite interesting. But things that take the individualism out of people's faces are quite interesting. But I think the 'event' thing is quite key to it really, so a performance as part of a festival 'feel' if that makes sense. I'm less interested in making Greek tragedy within completely conventional theatrical constraints. I'm very interested in doing more Aristophanes, having done *Cloud Cuckoo Land.* I mean that was done for kids so we had to find the appropriate level of naughtiness to a 7 year old and equal for an adult. So a naughty joke for an adult had to be rendered by an equally naughty joke for a 7 year old which was normally something about poo, inevitably, which is incredibly naughty if you're 7. But, having done that, I'd be incredibly interested in doing an adult Aristophanes with an appropriate level of outragedness. I think it's a really, really, interesting way into political satire actually, with a slight distancing. And the combination of fantasy narrative with really political satire is genius. Aristophanes cracked something there. You never see modern political satire within a fantasy satire narrative. It's an incredibly good idea in terms of a balance between specific referencing and something more. So possibly more Aristophanes I think. I'm quite interested, as the Onassis profile probably shows, in responses to group tragedy that are not necessarily that immediate or direct they are not necessarily productions of Greek tragedy. The reason we went with the Clod ensemble last year was that I thought it was a really interesting response in *form* to Greek tragedy rather than in content. Although it did have some content links with Greek tragedy. Most interesting was an exploration of what a modern chorus was. So, it had a formal relationship to the original rather than a content one. I'm interested in seeing more projects like that take the dramaturgical ideas of Greek tragedy and explore them rather than necessarily exploring the myths or the stories. So I hope we get to do considerably more work in that direction. I'm very interested in site specific and, sort of, guerrilla chorus work, and the stuff that Clod Ensemble do creatively in choruses in the street which ask really interesting questions about chorus accidental audiences, about what groups or group activity now represents to us as a society. What the groups we belong to, the choruses we would say we belong to in terms of our community, our religion, our identity. The creation of a chorus within a contemporary landscape asks really important questions about identity and group involvement and that I think are incredibly politically pertinent. When I watched the Clod chorus moving around – to give it context, basically this is a chorus of 20 women identically dressed and their exploration of chorus work started in Greek chorus work and developed into a very contemporary almost danced-based aesthetic. But they were released onto the streets of various cities – it's happened in London, Warwick, Oporto and Oxford. And they sometimes move as individuals around space and public spaces, but you recognise that you've seen several identically dressed people and you start to have this sense of repetition and then they come together and work as a chorus, and people found that funny, people found that threatening, people found it exciting. They had different responses to what 20 identically dressed women meant. There was a wonderful interaction with the police, where a policeman stopped several of them and asked them

why they were identically dressed, to which a red lady replied to the policeman and his co-colleague, Why are you two identically dressed? Which is a fair question, about what uniform means and that kind of thing. But the most wonderful with that thing was seeing audiences created because there was a fantastic moment in Cornmarket, which is the main shopping street in Oxford, where people were going about their business and gradually realised there were all these matching women all over the place. On a given signal the girls did, slightly cheekily, three quick poses based on their ideas of pity and fear. So, kind of classic, 'straight off a Greek vase' poses and then disappeared. And this wonderful kind of laughter erupted throughout all the way down Cornmarket as they disappeared, and people followed them off. Suddenly you had turned several thousand shoppers into a momentary audience, who then all seemed to start conversing with each other about what it was, and what had just happened. Suddenly there was a sense of some kind of community that had experienced something.

LH Do you ever get tempted to think well, you could take that one stage further and actually have the shoppers, the accidental audiences, becoming actors for the moment?

HE Well, I think yes, there's a really interesting question about when the relationship between a chorus and an audience. Because the audience are effectively another chorus. They've got all the same principles, in effect, as a chorus and I think there's an interesting question as to whether you can make your chorus your audience, and whether you can use an audience in that way. One of the things that was quite interesting was that at the end of *Cloud Cuckoo Land* – when the audience came into *Cloud Cuckoo Land,* partly to keep the kids entertained in the foyer, they had to fill out on a slip of paper 'in my ideal city there would be…' and then they wrote it down because we'd been thinking about ideal cities in the sky – and then at the end of the show, several of these were plucked out of one of the birds hats and these questions were directed at Gordon Brown, who was trussed up like a chicken at the time, but it turned, the audience momentarily into the chorus because they were questioning the play. They were asking the questions, they were making the demands of the characters in the play. They were doing exactly what a chorus normally does at that point in the original, which is to ask political questions of the characters and respond and reflect on what they were doing, but effectively the audience were doing it, which made them the chorus for that part of the play. I think there are some really interesting questions about what you can potentially … how you can dislocate those roles. Susie Wilson, who directed the Clod ensemble thing, once people came indoors to watch the actual theatre show, you just watched the chorus. There were no protagonists on stage. Which was really interesting, it was an interesting political and philosophical and dramatic exploration of whether the chorus can be protagonists – which is an oft asked question in dramatic practice. I've done that with groups of 17/18 year olds making work: can you devise a piece in which the chorus are protagonists – and that has communist overtones of political exploration . But she used the soundscape as the protagonist to this piece where you watch the chorus so there was a complex sort of soundscape using bits of text, both contemporary and Greek, using music, using sound, that was what drove the piece forward. So you were watching the chorus but sound was providing the protagonists' roles within the composition of the piece. I think as we work out … as contemporary theatre makers we're starting to get better at understanding the form of Greek tragedy. And as I've said, I think that's a lot to do with getting better at chorus work *per se* , not just with relevance to Greek tragedy but inevitably people are just pushing around and exploring how you can take the roles of Greek tragedy – protagonists, chorus, audience, and move those around. There are different ways to construct that three-way relationship, and who your protagonists are, what's the relationship between the audience and chorus , is that an interchangeable relationship can one supply the function of the other. I'm trying to think of examples of productions where the chorus are within the audience and it strikes me that there must be. Someone must have done that – to place their chorus within the audience and create the idea of the audience as the mass – that's obviously a potential way of making that relationship between the two. What I find difficult when watching Greek tragedy is when the chorus are relegated in that relationship. I'm thinking of the RSC *Hecuba* where the chorus were standing in a semicircle behind the protagonists and completely relegated from any central role. They were exactly in the wrong place.

LH They sort of sat on the wall

HE yes, they had no communication with us as an audience.

LH Finally, Helen, I'd like to ask you about an area of interest that I know you've developed recently, and that's writing. Can you tell us what you'd like to do in that direction?

HE It's a really exciting new development – in some ways it's not a new development – it's just about the role that writing's having within your career because I've always written, I've written shyly. A lot of the work I'm now doing has more of an altering role. I'm devising a lot more work, and consequently dealing with a lot more creation of text within that role, particularly the project I'm working on at the moment. So a confidence with that is growing, so probably that's where the development in my career over the next 10 years will be – is that I'll start to write and write more confidently. How much that will relate to Classical work I'm not sure. Part of the reason, slightly cheekily, why I've been directing the Live Canon ensemble for the last year, is to revisit the canon of British poetry and have an excuse for geekily pouring over thousands of poems in putting together those programmes of work. But for me that's been a sort of journey back into poetry which I haven't really been exploring for the last 10 years, really with an intention to write more. So at the moment there's a couple of strands coming of tentatively writing some drama, and tentatively working with a few composers on something that might loosely be called librettos, and writing some poetry again. Quite how that may or may not manifest itself professionally I'm not sure but I'm pretty sure that's where my work's probably going to go over the next ten years or so.

LH Well, we shall keep watching that space! Thanks very much Helen for coming here today.