

Theatre Plays One & Two

by Trevor Griffiths

Romy Clark - *Red Pepper*, April 2007

Spokesman are to be congratulated for providing an excellent opportunity for new readers to engage, and old fans to re-engage, with one of Britain's most important progressive voices.

This lovely new edition gathers together in two volumes the texts of all Griffiths' plays that have been produced in the theatre, from 1969 up to 2006. This allows readers to follow Griffiths' development as a playwright, from the early one-act pieces, through the structurally and stylistically more complex plays, such as *Comedians* of 1975, *The Gulf Between Us* of 1992, *Who Shall Be Happy...?* of 1994, right up to the short piece *Camel Station*, written in 2001 and first performed in 2006. We can trace shifts in form, from what Griffiths has called 'critical realism' and the dialectic structure of point and counterpoint in the plays of the 70s such as *The Party*, to the more fluid, film-like, less linear way of writing of the 90s. The changes in form and style grow out of Griffiths' need to explore in greater depth aspects of the complexity and inter-connectedness of the modern world and his deepening interest in the life of the feelings, for example in *Thatcher's Children* of 1993 and *Who Shall Be Happy...?*.

The plays also provide us with an extraordinary socio-political documentation, through fiction, of nearly 40 years of British society. Griffiths always carries out meticulous research; his plays are thus the result of what he calls "evidenced imagination" – objective analysis and subjective experience and craft. His work demonstrates intellectual rigour, a deep understanding of politics and society and a passionate commitment to writing plays which engage seriously with the urgent issues of our time. The themes his plays deal with are huge; they include: sexual power and gender relations (*Apricots*), the individual v the state-party (*Thermidor*), revolutionary politics (*Occupations*, *The Party*, *Real Dreams*, *Who Shall Be Happy...?*), racism (*Oi*

for England), war (*The Gulf Between Us*, *Camel Station*), the role and nature of comedy (*Comedians*), and many more.

What makes the plays as enjoyable to read as they are stimulating is Griffiths' use of language. His stage directions are very detailed and written in a sort of poetic, impressionist language, which make the plays read almost like novels. The use of words and imagery is at times breathtaking ('*the future lies in an alley, its throat slit*', from *Who Shall Be Happy...?*), often moving (Dr Aziz's passionate speech in *The Gulf Between Us*); the humour is both biting and bawdy. The analysis is unsparing, but there is an underlying thread of hope and belief in the creative potential of all human beings.

Griffiths does not rant or propagandise; rather he treats the reader/audience with respect while demanding that we, in turn, pay serious attention to what is being said. He draws us in and encourages us to question the way things are and to ask: does it have to be like this?

Theatre Plays One - ISBN: 978 0 85124 7205 - 328 pages

Theatre Plays Two - ISBN: 978 085124 7212 - 271 pages

Price: £15.00 each

Also available:

The first ever full-length monograph on Trevor Griffiths is now available from [Manchester University Press](#).

Written by John Tulloch, a highly respected professor of media and television, it includes full annotation and bibliography/filmography, making it essential reading for anyone interested in television drama and television history.

