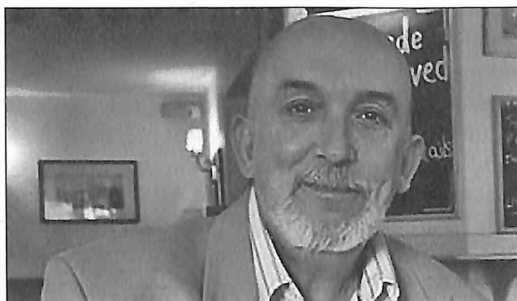


IN MEMORIAM: PETER BILLINGHAM



Armenian Shakespeare Association has been truly blessed by the participation of so many prominent academics in our conferences since 2016. We had the pleasure to welcome Peter Billingham to the third ASA Venice Conference in July 2019. Peter sadly passed away after a short terminal illness on 17 January 2020, just before the COVID-19 outbreak. We share his family's pain and grief over the loss of an exceptional man, compassionate human being, great scholar and talented dramatist.

Meanwhile, I cherish the memories of our brief encounter in Venice, his brilliant keynote speech, and his enjoyable presence during Venetian tours and meals. I will remember Peter as a true gentleman with a refined, genteel sense of humour, and excellent company around a glass of Italian wine (for Peter) and a glass of *spritz Veneziano* (for idle souls like myself!). But above all, he will be remembered through his dozens of books fuelled by his lifetime commitment to Christian socialism, passion for social justice, and selfless devotion to education and theatre.

In his obituary written by his long-time friend Philip Crispin, we learn that many of his twenty-one plays were produced and toured internationally (Guardian 16 April 2020), among them was the award-winning *Married Blitz* (1992) at the Triangle Theatre Company. His ground-breaking monograph on *Edward Bond: A Critical Study* (2013), echoed through

his keynote lecture at the Venice Conference. I was delighted to get his permission to include his excellent paper in the current Bazmavep publication. I hope that readers will take pleasure in reading his chapter, which not only looks at Shylock's character from a social justice perspective but raises some uncomfortable questions about our unfair world and dysfunctional society we live in.

«In our broken world of virulent nationalism, refugees and asylum seekers and global economic collapse, we have to persist in asking 'who broke it?'. In doing so we must not only "critique capital" and its continuing impact upon the world and the environment but our own complex involvement and unwitting collusion with it».

Not surprising, that Peter supported several charities, including Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières. A fervent defender of human rights, he joined the Soul of Europe following the war in Kosovo. He told me he wanted to attend the ASA's upcoming conference in Armenia scheduled for the autumn 2020, which never materialized because of the devastating war against indigenous Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. One wonders what his thoughts would have been regarding the massive humanitarian crisis following the brutal warfare which generated over 50.000 refugees, 10.000 wounded and several hundreds of Armenian prisoners of war and civilian hostages still in illegal detention.

Marilyn, Peter's lovely wife, who accompanied him to the Venice Conference, wrote a gracious letter to announce the dreadful news:

«He felt privileged to be there and even more gratified at the warmth with which he was received and the thoughtful interest in his paper and the wide-ranging discussions that it prompted - both formal and informal and with delegates who found a neo-Marxist cultural materialist interpretation of Shylock at variance with their readings and inclinations! Conversations afterward were both helpful to him and he felt to others. The Venice paper was the last formal presentation that Peter made in an academic setting».

Upon my return from the most unforgettable Venice experience, I received an email from Peter thanking for the warm welcome, asking for my address in order to send 'a proper thank you card'. A few days later, I received a beautiful bunch of flowers with a card: «A small thank you for all of your hard work and generosity of spirit. Kindest wishes, Peter and Marilyn Billingham». I still have Peter's little card on my desk reminding me to follow the same human principles, generosity of spirit that was the hallmark of Peter Billingham.

JASMINE H. SEYMOUR