

Reflections

Ladies and Gentlemen. Friends. A very warm welcome to you all.

We meet here on this unique day of Remembrance – national, international, personal –

to witness James's funeral, to celebrate his magnificent life, and of course to wish him a very **Happy Birthday**, for today is his 95th birthday – 11.11.22 – a perfect symmetry which has not gone unnoticed, and which he may even have arranged.

My name is Tony Morris and it is my great privilege to say a few words in honour of James.

Which poses a very DAUNTING challenge. For I find myself faced with a practically impossible task:

How to convey the spirit, let alone summarise the life, of one of the most remarkable, creative, energetic and multi-faceted people any of us has ever met?

How to begin to do justice to someone who, amongst their achievements:

- set up the Hampstead Theatre in 1959 (described in the Theatre's recent tribute as 'a monument to his wisdom, his art, and his life'),
- established, with his beloved Hywel, in the remote hamlet of Bleddfa, Mid-Wales, in 1974 a Centre for the Creative Spirit which hosted art exhibitions, lectures, music and poetry recitals, book clubs, retreats, and so much more besides,

- co-founded Frontier Theatre Productions – about which more later,
- directed countless plays in NW3, the West End, America, and beyond,
- revived the career of Noel Coward, taught Vanessa Redgrave and Mike Leigh, championed the work of a youthful Harold Pinter, directed John Gielgud in his very last stage play, inspired and encouraged countless other distinguished actors, some of whom, I'm delighted to see, are here with us today,
- penned the award-winning stage adaptation of *84 Charing Cross Road*,
- wrote 21 books - for both adults and children -
- worked as an Agony Uncle, a radio- and, as I only recently discovered, TV presenter,
- was ordained as a non-stipendiary priest,
- received, in 2020, the Dunstan Award 'for his distinctive contribution in exploring over 65 years the relationship between art and life, the creative and the spiritual',
- led innumerable theatre and ritual workshops,
- authored myriad reviews and articles,
- inspired the creation of meditation groups in London and Bleddfa, reflecting his own commitment to a practice which he maintained for over sixty years,
- raised *hundreds of thousands* of pounds for great theatrical and creative causes,
- cooked marvelous meals and hosted celebrity-strewn suppers,
- created at least five stylish homes, and designed and laid out their gardens,
- wrote – and indeed **continues** to write – a fortnightly blog.

(For I have to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that, James being James, has sent me enough blogs to last until at least 2030 and beyond!)

As I say, it's impossible to do justice to all this. But fortunately I don't have to be definitive – because everyone in this room today, every one of us, will have a sense of James' qualities, through our own unique, individual contact with him over the years. And in this individual contact we will invariably have been inspired, enlivened, and encouraged to glimpse the sense of a larger possibility, a more energised and creative way of being in the world.

So, let me briefly tell you of my own connection with James. It happened some 35 years ago. I was setting out very tentatively into the world of book publishing. My first job was at Routledge and Kegan Paul, where I was given responsibility for the theatre list, and my initial task was to introduce myself to all the distinguished writers on that list. James was the author of far and away the best-selling title, *Experimental Theatre* (currently in its fourth edition and still reprinting). So I dropped him a line. He replied by return (of course!) and we agreed to meet.

I have to confess I was rather nervous, being so inexperienced and in such esteemed company. But I needn't have been. We struck it off immediately and a conversation began which was destined to go on for more than three decades, growing to include, not only books and theatre, but also psychoanalysis and Buddhism, ritual and meditation, landscape and trees, and, on one memorable occasion, the merits or demerits of wearing open toed-sandals with socks.

In that very first meeting were encapsulated all of James qualities. The enthusiastic openness. The generosity of spirit. The connections. The awakening. The **galvanic** energy. Above all, the simply **terrifying** speed with which he replied to things.

And that's just my experience. I am sure it's the same for so many people in this room today. Just imagine that! This vast space filled with letters and home-made cards and envelopes bearing that distinctive, flamboyant, impatient, and, it has to be said, increasingly undecipherable script ...

And that was in the days before email!! Who here has not been the recipient of a **blizzard** of emails, peppered with giant capital letters, mis-spellings, mis-quotations, excitable questions, inexplicable gaps, and a veritable **FOREST** of exclamation marks !!!!!!!

How many lives have been touched in this way? How many doors and windows have been opened? How many paths illuminated?

These were James's favourite metaphors – doors, windows, pathways. The idea of both looking out and looking in. The sense of possibility in all directions. Of vision. And the image of the journey, to which he returned again and again. *Inner Journey, Outer Journey. A Radnorshire Journey. The Journey Thus Far. The Continuing Journey ...*

And when he went on to co-found another theatre company for actors over the age of 60 it was called Frontier Theatre Productions. One of James's favourite theatrical exercises was to encourage actors to take an imaginary journey to the frontier to see what one could experience in that moment. Something fresh. Something possibly even dangerous? But something infinitely energising and compelling. Worth exploring.

When James's memoir *Opening Doors and Windows* was published in 2009 one perceptive reviewer described him as 'interstitial'. James liked that word: 'interstitial'. Someone who lives in the interstices, in the spaces between things, at the crossroads of possibility, always connecting. I think it helped him to make sense of his own internal contradictions, the complexities he had inherited as a result of his parents' unhappy marriage and his unsettled, itinerant childhood. His life's task was to resolve those seemingly centrifugal impulses into a rich, multi-faceted combination which held together and cohered.

That, clearly, is what drew him to both meditation and to theatre direction. They were different expressions of the same impulse – to interrogate, to experience, to connect and to resolve different possibilities.

As he once wrote:

THE CHALLENGE HAS BEEN TO WEAVE THESE SEEMINGLY DISPARATE STRANDS INTO ONE PATTERN. IT IS LIKE THE TASK FACED ON THE FIRST DAY OF REHEARSAL BY A THEATRE DIRECTOR: HOW TO WELD A GROUP OF INDIVIDUAL ACTORS INTO AN ENSEMBLE SO THAT EACH COMPLEMENTS THE OTHER.

James could be **VERY** precise with his directorial notes. Oh Yes! This event here today is surely one of his finest productions, and you may all be absolutely confident that every detail of it is being monitored by him from somewhere up there in the 'gods'!

With that in mind I can't resist reading out to you a couple of emails I received a while ago.

The first is dated 3 October 2020, and is entitled **My Eventual Demise** Exclamation Mark! Exclamation Mark! Exclamation Mark!

(In the interests of brevity I've confined myself to three!!!)

DEAR TONY –

**I AM GOING TO RECORD SOME VERSES FROM PSALM 139 WHICH I HAVE LEARNED BY HEART, AND YOU MIGHT WANT TO PLAY THEM
(KEVIN WILL HAVE A COPY OF THE RECORDING)**

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE TO ADD THAT JAMES IN HIS FINAL BOOK 'THE CONTINUING JOURNEY' WRITES HOW THIS CONTINUES RIGHT UP TO THE END. JAMES DID NOT BELIEVE IN HEAVEN, HELL OR PURGATORY: THESE ARE MAN-MADE CONCEPTS, BUT THAT THE JOURNEY OF LEARNING AND DISCOVERY CONTINUES –

-- AS T.S. ELIOT SAYS 'OLD MEN SHOULD BE EXPLORERS STILL'

It was a favourite quotation of his.
(Or misquotation, if you like)

His other favourite was from George Herbert:
'In age I bud again.'

Then there was this email, dated 22 January last year:

DEAR TONY –

IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT TO GET A SMILE OR EVEN A LAUGH AT A FUNERAL WOULD BE SPLENDID, SO HERE IS SOMETHING YOU MIGHT WHEN THE TIME COMES WANT TO WEAVE IN!

JAMES WAS KNOWN TO HIS FRIENDS AS EITHER JAMES OR JIMMIE BUT HE ALSO DELIGHTED IN SOME OF THE OTHER NAMES HE WAS CALLED - - AS ON ONE OCCASION WHEN HE WAS PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED AS JAMES LOOSE-EVANS, AND AT ANOTHER TIME AS JAMES BOOZE-EVANS, AND HE EVEN RECEIVED A LETTER ADDRESSED TO JANE ROSE-EVANS!

(PS: IF YOU BUILD THESE SWIFTLY TO A RISING CLIMAX YOU SHOULD GET A LAUGH, BUT WHETHER YOU WILL GET A BETTER LAUGH ON JAMES BOOZE-EVANS RATHER THAN JANE ROSE EVANS, YOU MIGHT ASK KEVIN WHO HAS PERFECT TIMING AND WOULD ADVISE!)

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, if nothing else you can now see why I became a publisher not an actor.

Thank goodness for Kevin, who has been an absolute rock in recent times, who has played such a blinder in caring for and loving James, like Hywel before him, and who, along with Norman, has overseen the arrangements for today with such generosity and aplomb.

Thank goodness also for Dr Jonathan Sheldon whose care and expertise were unwavering to the end.

To Celia, to Chris, to Kate, Tony, and Tusse, to Christina and the musicians, to the caterers, to Marjorie, and to all of the people whose lives find expression in this glorious Church. THANK YOU.

And, most importantly, thank you to all of YOU, to all of US, for committing so wholeheartedly to this production.

For it is in every way a **co-creation** born of love and friendship, admiration and respect.

The list of James's supporters over the years is endless. And that in itself says all you need to know about a life well-lived.

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I've been re-reading *Inner Journey, Outer Journey* recently as part of my preparation for this day. I landed on this quotation (p.65) from another hero of James's – of both of ours in fact: Thomas Merton. I could have taken any page and any quotation, the book is so rich in James's wisdom, but let me leave you with this.

'We are already one', wrote Merton, 'but we imagine that we are not. What we have to recover is the original unity. What we have to be is who we are.'

Thank you James / Thank you Jimmie.
Long may the journey continue!
Happy Birthday!