Modern Foreign Languages & Literatures

Annual Newsletter - Fall 2010

DEPARTMENT HEAD'S MESSAGE

FACULTY NOTES

ALUMNI NEWS

VISIT BY PATRICE PAVIS

VISIT BY HIRAM MAXIM

GRADUATE STUDENT NOTES

JAPANESE SPEECH CONTEST

STUDY ABROAD
- UT in Paris
- UT in Russia
- UT in Spain

OUTSTANDING STUDENTS

ADVANCED DEGREES CONFERRED

FACULTY AND STAFF AWARDS

DONORS
- Acknowledgment
- Online Giving

VISIT BY PATRICE PAVIS

I am very pleased to report that the three-week visit to UTK (2/1-2/19) by Patrice Pavis, the French scholar, author, and practitioner of global theatre and performance, was by all measures a huge success. Over the course of his visit, Prof. Pavis presented four public lectures in Tower 1210-11 and in the Hodges Library Auditorium: "Interpreting Today's Performance," "Intercultural Performance Today," "The Ideal Theatre School," and "Aging in the Performing Arts." Undergraduate and graduate students and faculty from the departments of MFLL, Theatre, and English, as well as other members of the campus and local communities were in attendance. Following the lecture on intercultural performance, Christopher Morrow (Institutional Research and Assessment) conducted an audience survey ("Event Evaluation"), inlcuding questions related to the perceived intercultural/ global relevance of the talk. The results of the survey, which were provided to the RFTW Global Awards Committee, were quite positive and indicated the considerable impact of the event on the audience's awareness, understanding, and appreciation of world cultures. In the reception following this lecture, Prof. Pavis was happy to chat informally with students and faculty.

In the first week of Prof. Pavis's visit, he also met individually and in small groups with faculty and students of the three sponsoring departments and with Dean Bursten. Prof. Jed Diamond (Theatre) scheduled an introductory meeting with the MFA Theatre students who participated in Pavis's two-week workshop on the concept, practice, and art of "the performance of aging, which met daily for the final two weeks of his visit. As expressed by Prof. Diamond and his students, the workshop provided an exciting new approach to performance technique, one enriched by Pavis's in-depth knowledge of theory and global performance practices, and by his personal experience as a dramatic author. On Friday, 2/19, the MFA students presented a concluding performance exercise to an audience of mostly faculty and students from the three sponsoring departments.

In addition to the lectures, cross-disciplinary conversations, and the workshop, Prof. Pavis visited undergraduate and graduate classes in MFLL. In my undergraduate class on contemporary French culture, Prof. Pavis and his wife Dr. Elena Pavis, a practicing medical doctor in Paris, engaged in discussions comparing France's theatre culture (the cultural importance of theatre in France) and its health care system with the roles of theatre and health care in the U.S. In Prof. Mary McAlpin's MFLL

graduate class on critical theory, Pavis discussed the theoretical underpinnings of his recently published article on the importance of understanding the relationship between text and performance, "On Faithfulness: The Difficulties Experienced by the Text/Performance Couple." And he generously met individually with two doctoral students (S. Lloyd and S. Soares) whose dissertations I am currently directing and whose writing relies, in part, on dramaturgical methodologies developed in Pavis's writings.

The Pavis visit did much to stimulate common interests and to expand and deepen interdisciplinary relations among the three sponsoring departments, thanks largely to the efforts of the dept. heads and my colleagues, Jed Diamond and Stan Garner (English). Needless to say, the "Pavis effect" on the intellectual and creative lives of the UTK community extends well beyond any inventory I could attempt to cover--and well into the future. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity (provided by RFTW and department sponsors) to introduce this world-class scholar to Knoxville (and him to Knoxville, of course).

Les Essif
Professor of French studies

BACK TO TOP

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