

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

<http://sounds.bl.uk>

## John Haffenden – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Elena Parissi**

**25 November 2003**

Professor at Sheffield University. RSC during the 1960s.

EP: Let me start with a rather general question: what does the word "theatre" signify to you?

JH:Hm...I suppose more and more lately theatre means to me the plays I teach, particularly Shakespeare and, therefore, I have a very actually not very theatrical view of things; I am a text-based person. So...my sense of theatre is informed by going to the theatre, particularly in the sixties and then into the seventies, when...one had the impression that theatre was coming of age in all sorts of new and experimental ways. It was only later I was told theatre had come of age in the nineteen fifties. But, I did see one or two productions by people like Peter Brooke in the sixties, including the famous production of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. You've heard about that, do you know about this? And so that did give one a sense that, as it were the vitality that was known to be going around in terms of pop music and clothing, from 1962, 1963, actually it was all the Beatles in 1963 (laughs)-although I hardly ever went to pop concerts- that vitality was spilling on everywhere really. And I also have the impression that books like a famous book by, what's his name, Jan Kott, I don't know if you know that, called *Shakespeare: Our Contemporary* - I don't know when it came out, but it must have been early sixties, perhaps '63 or so...actually made theatre generally and particularly Shakespearean theatre much more radicalized. A much greater sense of the obvious symbolism of things, a much greater and deeper sense of, if I may so, post-Freudian readings in theatre. So, theatre became, to me at least, like I remember vaguely seeing a *Rattigan* play, for example, probably with my parents in the fifties, which, even then, and although I was just a teenager, seemed very tame. It was just people sitting round, you know, chairs on the stage and so forth, entrances and exits of a very ordinary kind, and suddenly you get this kind of thing, which is happening, I suppose for me from about 1962 or 1963. I left school in 1963 and I actually became a law student at that time, which is why I started going to the theatre- I think I told you the other day, because I got very quickly bored with the law. I was studying at...partly at King's College, London, partly at the Inns of Court School of Law. It seemed, as for most students at that time, to have a lot of time on one's hands, so, not frequently, but on occasion I would go off to a matinee in the West End on a Wednesday afternoon, or I suppose on a Thursday afternoon. And I sat there in the cheapest seats usually...being entranced by things...there was a play by James Saunders, for example, I don't know if you know it, called, what was it called, *The Scent of Ashes* or some such play. ...which I remember as being quite powerful and frightening, although I hardly remember what it was about any more. But let's move on through your questions and perhaps other things will come up.

EP: Under what criteria did you choose the performances you were going to watch?

JH: It's a good question, but...I don't know frankly! I mean, it must have been actually very mechanical. It wasn't even...I suppose I was reading newspaper reviews here and there...yes, I must have been, because how else would I know what to go and see? But very often, as I said, it would be quite mechanical. What was available that afternoon? Could I get there by 2:15 from my last lecture or whatever it was? (Laughs). But it wasn't all afternoon performances, but I really have the sense of being amongst middle-aged people (laughs) and I was quite junior, you know, ...and spending my five shillings, ten shillings, whatever it was to go there. So, I'm afraid my criteria would be probably quite random, although...I did have certain kinds of people I wanted to see. You know, Olivier, Gilgourd, Richardson, were still performing in strength on the stage; they were the senior actors. So, if you heard of something coming, like Olivier and his famous performance of Othello I mentioned this to you the other day...I think by chance I went actually on to the second night. Not...it might even have been the "press night", oddly enough, I don't know why. And I remember queuing for two and a half, three hours to get into the Circle of the Gods, or whatever it was. And I remember some royalty had been present down below, but I couldn't see anything of that, you know, they went into a box or whatever. I had no idea who was there. It might have been Princess Margaret or somebody. But I remember standing up to see this performance and being impressed by the sheer physicality of Olivier! That was the most extraordinary thing about him, I thought, 'cause in some ways he struck me as quite hammy, you know, overstated gestures and so forth. But, you know, the sheer physicality of what he did, you know, was riveting! You just knew that this enormously strong man was on stage, impersonating Othello very much almost like a kind of musical, black and white minstrel, Negro it seemed to me at the time. You know, you knew perfectly well this is a white man playing a black, although he did put on a strong, guttural voice. But.....as I say, the sheer, the magic came not so much from his voice, I felt; he spoke in what I thought was a strangely accented... I mean, I can still see him now as I think about it, that's why I'm looking over there, you know the way one does, trying to remember things. But...what I would imagine most people were carried away from that scene was his having an epileptic fit on stage, which was frightening! You know, the way he collapsed and writhed. I mean, you know, if you were nearer it must have been quite alarming to see! And I do remember, somehow he produced spittle! You know, extraordinary thing to be able to do! Perhaps he had some sort of powder or something, I don't know how he did it...and then the murder of his wife at the end, which was...quite brutal! You know, there was no suggestion that it was simply a formal act of killing her, but it was quite physical, as I say. But those kinds of things I say, you know, I'm rambling slightly, but I think my criteria for play going would have been the opportunity to see these great actors, more than anything. It wouldn't have been anything with the sense, ok, this is right-wing theatre or left-wing theatre or traditional theatre...whatever. It would just happen to be accidentally if I saw such things. So, you know, I'm afraid, not a well considered answer, but...

EP: You told me before that you often read reviews. How much influence did these have on you?

JH: It would be difficult to remember, as I said earlier. I was...I was certainly aware of Harold Hobson as a critic and I would probably read his reviews at the time. Where were they? On Sunday Times? Dominic would know, of course. [Dominic Shellard, Head of Drama and Professor of English Literature, University of Sheffield]. I mean, I read him, but I can't remember where. It wasn't The Observer, I am sure, it must have been The Sunday Times. ...the reason I'm pretty aware of that is because I would read other good critics like, people like Cyril Connelly would write in the weekend newspapers, Raymond

Mortimer was still writing at that time and they were very considerate reviews, all of them, so I would think I'd be influenced by somebody like Hobson...let me think...I'm not aware of other critics in particular at that time...but...certainly Hobson would always influence me, I'm pretty sure of that, even, you know, I was eighteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen at the time. And I would think perhaps if he said something was really worth going, you'd find a way of going along. But...I wasn't anyone for reading much about theatre, theatre theory, theatre history at the time. I was into Shakespeare, I would read other playwrights, I couldn't stand Bernard Shaw. You know, one would read what came along, as it were, but mostly, I would have to say I was influenced by somebody like Hobson.

EP: Who went to the theatre during the nineteen sixties?

JH:(Laughs) Well, as I said earlier, I have this strange impression of being amongst a lot of middle aged and older people, who would come on coaches from the suburbs within reach of London, 'cause all my theatre going was in London...and...but I didn't mix with them, I would sort of chat with people you know, right up in the gallery, as I said. That was a very amiable crowd, you know, of quite young people...although I never saw the same person twice there, oddly enough. You know, you'd meet in the queue or something, somewhere, and chat about it and say something at the end of it, perhaps have a drink afterwards, but...so...down there, amongst the people who were really paying for the theatre, I have this sense of not very full theatres, not necessarily because these were matinees after all, very often. Middle-aged people, old people...people who obviously really loved theatre, or perhaps they just idolized the stars, I'm not sure, but we up in the "gods" we were sort of failed actors! (Laughs). I actually took an audition, just for the hell of it, once. Did I take two auditions? One audition at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, which I just thought I'd get it out of my system. And... I think one of your questions is "did theatre change my life". I think that changed my life, because, although they were very agreeable, they said to me, later, when I found out, you know, that I almost got through, I failed the audition and the way they could tell you you had failed was you were made to wait in the lobby outside, the way you had to wait outside my room here, for about an hour or two, and then they'd sent this little note, a little white note out to you, and there were four words on it, not signed even: "You may go now"...And that was it! Actually you'd walk out (smiles) crestfallen, etc, etc. Probably somewhere, in a file or so, I still got that note, but it sort of changed my life, 'cause I sort of said to myself at that point... "Change your life, in a sense that, theatre is not for you as a profession, you're not going to make that!" The law, which I told you I was studying at the time, was something that dissatisfied me. I was reasonably good at it, but I didn't like it! I was going to be a very very young lawyer actually at the time- one of the youngest. ...I was passing the exams like law and so on and so forth, but, I was falling in love with literature more and more and more and that's...so the combination of things, so it was a combination perhaps of changing my life because I was in love with theatre at the time, really a kind of loathing of the law and everything it stood for. Like Dr. Faustus, I said "Law is servile and illiberal" and...I thought...I didn't know the phrase at the time, but I thought something similar. So, it made me change university and I went eventually off to Dublin to take an English degree. So, it didn't change my life, as if to say, you know...I mean, things do, when you fall in love when you're a teenager and so on, those things change your life. I wasn't old enough to be absolutely changed by theatre but I do know I liked going enormously! That's what I can say on that.

EP: Do you remember how the productions were advertised at that period?

JH: Hm...the short answer is probably no. I mean they were all reviewed just as they are nowadays...whether there were advertisements on the newspapers I couldn't honestly say. So, you know, you're obviously taking subjective impressions and my impression

would be, I would learn about them not through television, although we had a television at the time, ...and...I'm trying to think...I would imagine that information was disseminated through the newspapers more and more. I didn't subscribe to anything, which, you know, arrived at the house saying what's coming. It's only at later years you get, you know, these bulletins of what's on in the Crucible, or what's on in Leeds, or Manchester. Those things didn't get to me. So perhaps word of mouth...I don't...I honestly can't say. I'm sorry about that.

EP: Could you please recall the best, in your opinion, theatrical event of the period?

JH: The question implies that I've seen everything, which I didn't at all. I do remember, you know, as most people say, this sort of mythic performance I mentioned earlier of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I knew the play slightly, I didn't know it well, but what was most remarkable about that was again physicality. It was performed in...although it was, was it a proscenium stage? But it was what they say, this big white box, you know, absolutely square box and the audience was on one side of the box. Not a particularly deep box, but filling the whole height of the proscenium, where actors would appear at the top of it and they'd be running up and down on ropes, they'd be juggling, spinning plates, it was like a circus coupled with a play and that was actually very entertaining and I remember, I think, people being pulled up on wires and so forth, so you had this constant sense of...you know, it wasn't just that dimension; people there and the space above them as it were, but the whole, the whole area of the stage and the proscenium being full of activity all the time. You know...I don't know how they trained the actors to do this, but clearly it must have been very arduous of them to be running up and down ropes. I don't quite remember the kind of mechanics they had. ...I do remember bottom at some point, or some sort of cradle going up and down, but not the detail of it. But just this sense of sheer whiteness. And I believe the actors were highly white in their costumes- I may be wrong in that impression...but just the fun of it really was like a sort of child's...and I was very far away I remember 'cause I was always at the deep seats, but looking down here it seemed like sort of magic kind of theatre going on. It must have been like a child with a doll's house, you know. And I've never seen anything like this, all this activity going on. You know, physical jokes...that kind of what I say, this three-dimensionality was very very impressive. The other thing that oddly enough I remember particular of the sixties, well I don't...perhaps it was later, you'd have to check, was a play by Ted Hughes called *Seneca's Oedipus*. It was his translation version of that play, which had John Gielgud and Irene Worth in it and it was highly a symbolic play. It wasn't so much again the action and, oddly enough, in that occasion I was much nearer the front, I don't know why...but I remember feeling that John Gielgud was almost touchable, perhaps within fifteen feet or so of me. But he didn't do anything physical. He was dressed in, perhaps it was some sort of sweatshirt and trousers, but I think he was all in black and then he had this sort of shiny domed head. And he would simply come on and I have the impression that he was mostly a narrator, but this terrific resonant voice of his, you know...I've always thought he was slightly hamming (laughs), but for this voice, you know, you've heard it, no doubt. But in the theatre it did have a magical effect; you just felt, you know, that somehow a) that he loved his own voice, which is always a bit off-putting, but b) somehow he could make the sound box very big and carrying, so that it would sort of carry through in a strange, ethereal, resonant way through the auditorium. And, by contrast, Irene Worth, I don't know how old she was, she seemed to me it'd be something around fifty, but probably she was younger, I don't know, but she was very physical. I remember her...squatting on the stage and striding and opening her legs and all sorts of strange things. The other thing I particularly remember was this extraordinary life-like phallus, which, you know, an erect male member, which must have been a twelve feet high or so, which I think fixed one or two

giggles from people in the audience- I remember that. I just remember feeling they do that...and it was almost so moulded from life and it was coloured gold and this was some kind of symbolic thing they would bring on and off, to no particular purpose I'd seem to think, but just to make this huge statement about, you know, the Freudian sexuality of this play, obviously. But, oddly enough that's one of the things that I remember most vividly, that play. And it may, as I say, be because very unusually I was much nearer, I think I was in the stores, I must have been. And, you know, you're there suddenly, if you're used to seeing the thing from thirty yards back and suddenly you're within twenty feet, it makes a huge difference. But, I'd hope to think much harder, you know, one day if you come back we can go through lots and lots of plays of the period, because, you know, off the top of my head I can't remember what I saw and then suddenly you say to me "did you see theatre", oh yes I did as a matter of fact...but those two theatrical things I do regard as kind of events for me, you know...

EP: Was there any particular play that you did not like and what were the reasons for that?

JH: I'm trying to think...again here I have a slight problem, because, you know, one mixes up with productions he saw later...and I do forget the dates of things. I can remember seeing a production, for example, of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, but I think that must have been in Dublin. No I honestly can't say I saw anything that I didn't like but, you know, I was very rarely bored by anything. I can remember, oh Gosh, what's his name, Arthur Miller, a play called *Incident at Vichy*, which was based on an incident in, what was it? I think it was a kind of a heroic Germanic incident, whereby for some reason a German officer in a prison camp had swapped places with one of the inmates during the Holocaust. That's what I remember; it may not be, you know, how one, somehow, makes the play, but I remember that as being, ...not so much of a good play, but just interesting- that's the way I think of it. But, as I say, even that wouldn't be a bad play for me; I would have enjoyed it a lot. Before I forget, the other one I remember quite vividly but it may again be of a later period but I think of it as being in the Sixties...was Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, again with Olivier in it. And that was actually again most remarkable for the physical powers of Olivier and I remember being extraordinarily impressed by this...because at one point, Olivier, what was the old man's name in...is it Ryan or somebody's name? You know the play? A very long play and then again it wasn't in the least bit tiresome. You just were there all the time. You know, these quite strong actors supporting Olivier. And Olivier was this sort of elder of the family and at some point got on the kitchen table and was going to change a light bulb on the stage. And I remember this vividly because it was just shocking! (Laughs)...he then got what looked like two milk bottles, or they may have been wine bottles, and stood on them on the table (laughs) to change this light bulb (laughs). And you just thought "Oh my God", you know, "he's going to fall, he's going to break his neck", you know...I mean, it was one of those moments of sheer theatrical bravado, you know, actually a stupidity, because I remember reading, a couple of days later they stopped him doing that, but I have this memory that I saw this happening. I'm thinking, I can remember almost getting clammy with nervousness for him (laughs). It's extraordinary how in some of such moments, he knew it was obviously, you know, a kind of coup de theatre to bring that off. He must have practiced it, you know, enormously, but, as I say, it's...I remember two bottles, they may have been more than two, but you know, what a stupid thing to do! (Laughs) On the kitchen table, on the bottles and then getting up to change that light bulb! And then I read the play several times, I used to teach it ten years or so ago to an American Studies group, I can't remember even if it's in the play but I always, I see this play as characterized by this moment of therefore...and I suppose it had a theatrical purpose; it made him seem

very... the older man, threatened by the children, at odds with his family, treated with...awe and rage by his sons and so forth. But it did have that theatrical effect of establishing of this extremely velar man, you know. You couldn't but feel that this man, although, presumably again, what was he, in forties, fifties, ...the character's an aged actor as I remember, I can't remember his name now. But, I thought I just mention that as one of those...it's...that's how I remember theatre, in moments like that, rather than a complete performance, as it were; an interpretation which I carry away and, oh, that's changing my view of O'Neil and whoever it may be. Anyway, just thought I'd mentioned that...

EP: Who would you vote as the most inspiring post-war playwright?

JH :Most inspiring...difficult word that "inspiring", isn't it? Depends on what you think. You know, I can almost say in terms of negatives, although dutifully I've gone to Beckett's plays over the years, I've never really got a Beckett play, you know (laughs). I can see what they're doing intellectually, but for me they don't work theatrically. So, I'd have to do it by elimination. ...I'm trying to think...I'm not sure I can answer this question actually, I'm sorry about this, I'd love to help. But the most inspiring...as I say, it would have to be in terms of individual plays, because I'm not sure, I would say, I could see, you know, like kind of a sequence kind of plays by...Osborne. Did I see any play by Osborne? I saw a production of Look Back in Anger but that would be much later, that would be probably in the seventies and I can't even remember where it was. I can remember it because it was that actor, who now has completely dropped out of sight...a very good actor in his day, I don't know what happened to him, but...I can remember people like...it's funny how I always remember the actors! I remember Peter Stuart, but he must have been in the seventies, mustn't he? In various sort of Ibsen productions. And Patrick Stuart had had this amazing booming voice, actually I thought it quite...slightly annoying in the theatre, I must confess. And I remember one or two Shakespearean actors, including that chap who had a nervous crisis on stage and went off to be a boomy, B-movie actor in Hollywood, what's his name? He did a marvelous...Hamlet. I remember that sequence of Hamlets by, you know, great actors, but I couldn't give an honest answer to who was the most inspiring playwright.

EP: Did you notice any immediate differences in the British stage after the abolition of censorship in 1968?

JH: It would be difficult for me to say that. If you could date that Oedipus thing for me, it would seem to me to mark a point where sexuality was, you know, right in your face suddenly, rather than being something intimated through language, gesture, etc. etc. ...it's very difficult for me to know 'cause I actually, oddly enough, I would be going less to the theatre after '68, because then I was moving away and had moved to Dublin by then, you see, where there was no theatrical censorship, although films were censored in quite ridiculous ways. But from the mid-sixties, so my theatre going was early sixties in London, and then from the mid-sixties I am in Dublin and that, as I say, is where I saw Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, I'm sure of it now. So I couldn't say. It seems to me there was a good deal of mentions of sexuality on stage. I don't suppose that I was even aware from the late fifties into the sixties of huge censorship going on; it didn't affect me. I did actually see a production of Saved, but I don't think it was the initial one. I seem to remember seeing that in Exeter; a very good production. And I remember quite upset by that...that baby stoning scene. It is...was horrendous I found and it just went on and on. And...you felt so incited by it that certainly in me I felt that need that it was real and I had to get up and stop them from doing it! You know? And you had to remind yourself that it was theatrical, you know, but it also seemed to me, and perhaps I was just a prick in those days, awfully gratuitous, you know, so the censor in me was

working. But, you know, in general, I would have to think of in terms of specific productions like that to have an answer.

EP: Do you believe there are issues that should NOT be put on stage?

JH: No, not at all! I can't imagine it, nor do I wish for it, no...No...I'm a great believer in John Mortimer, you know, the Nobelist playwright and better known really as a lawyer. He's been totally anti-censorship all his life and...and so am I. I mean, you know, obviously certain sectors of society as it were had to be protected, children and so forth, but for adults no...no, I would think not.

EP: In what aspects do you think that today's theatre is different to that of the nineteen sixties?

JJ: This is again, it is a question I can't answer...oddly enough, although I go to occasional things, I'm trying even to remember the last thing I saw in London. It would probably be a classic, it may, might be a Shakespeare. I hardly go to the theatre nowadays. I don't know if that's a factor of being middle-aged, I have no idea. I have much less tolerance for tiresome performances, or weak performances. I have actually left the theatre (sighs and smiles) after the interval, you know, in the last eight, ten, fifteen years, simply because I thought "well this is just boring, tiresome, it's not getting anywhere". So, you know, I'm not a good person to ask that; it's not as if...as I say, I have this huge phase of theatre going in the sixties, probably left it in the seventies and by the nineties, you know, I...I can't say. You know, things I remember of recent years is that...what's his name? Frenchman producer, director, ...is he based in Canada or in Paris or somewhere, who at the National Theatre did a performance again of *Midsummer's Night Dream*...which was based in water a few years ago. And, I'd heard about that and I thought "I must see this!" It was just, you know, in many ways absurd, but extraordinarily interesting to see all the same. You know, they were walking around in ankle-dipped in water all the time, all the actors, with an old-fashioned bed on stage, where the intimate things, you know, took place...but it seemed to me to be a kind of gratuitous experiment, 'cause I couldn't see the point of it otherwise. You know, although the text gives a basis for saying, you know, there's been a bad season because the fairy came and the queens are out of joint and so on, but this notion that the whole place was...should be completely flooded (laughs) seemed pointless to me and I couldn't see it. But it was very entertaining and you just felt sorry for the actors, you know, getting very wet, it must have been very cold! (laughs). And you just felt this kind of awkwardness about it all, although it was done well and it filled, you know, a huge open stage in the largest theatre at the National. But one remembers it again for that kind of theatrical gimmickry rather than for an interpretation. So, you know, as against recent years and as against former years, I honestly can't make that contrast.

EP: Do you believe that terms such as "good theatre" and "bad theatre" exist?

JH: As a huge category you mean? The things which will make for good theatre, is that the sort of thing you mean, or things that will make for bad theatre?...I will only have to follow a guard instinct here...I dare say professionals wouldn't differentiate in that; I don't suppose I would. You know, and here I am picking at somebody...in terms of theatre I only have to teach Shakespeare nowadays and I never teach contemporary theatre or anything about twentieth century...I suppose, you know, it's horses for courses. I think, you know, if you find the right venue and the right actors, you can do an intimate two-hander...as well as...something much grander in conception. So, it's not a distinction I would certainly make. Certainly in my time I've come across very wordy plays, as again Shaw, who I've never got on with! I can tolerate wordy plays just as long as they are, you know, in long monologues, giving me a scene. After all, there are long pieces and if it's done well you can play with it because it's capturing your imagination,

the flavour of the language. I don't like wordy plays which are just words and are not doing anything with colour or metaphor, or a kind of narrative, a scene, an idea that's getting to you. But I can put up with a lot, really. I do remember seeing a play called *Home*, years ago, by David Storey, which was essentially, there must have been other characters in it, but essentially a two-hander with Gerald Richardson and John Gielgud. And it all hinged on the charm of these ageing actors. I do think it was probably not a particularly good play, and I remember coming away with no great sense "well, has this moved? Has it mood?" And I think it was two acts. Has it mood...you know, it was almost like seeing Beckett from another kind of mode (smiles), 'cause you felt, you know, Act I was not particularly different from Act II and where had you got? I'm sure there was some mental crisis or social crisis between these characters, but I remember feeling mostly that wasn't...one was amongst a company of old boys, you know, as if they were in a club and they were enjoying each other. And that was bad theatre actually, because...you felt that twinkle of Richardson, which he was capable of, that it was a kind of joke between him and Gielgud. I'm not sure how much depth that was for the performance. So I'd rate that bad theatre, but I don't think it in terms of a conceptualisation, I would think that...you know...obviously there can be very bad plays. I don't understand the distinction between good and bad theatre otherwise.

EP: Since you teach theatre, obviously you read theatre as well. Do you believe that reading theatre is different to watching theatre?

JH: Yes, undoubtedly it is, there's no question of that. Nowadays I feel I can get more out of a Shakespeare text by reading it, than by seeing it. I dare say every reading I have is coloured by theatre I've seen. Some bad productions I remember, every time I read *A Winter's Tale* nowadays, I can hardly tolerate it, because a bad production comes into mind. (Laughs). It was just so awful and the actors were so bad that it lingers with you, you know how that can happen? But clearly the theatre adds that dimension of the spoken word, the physical presence of an actor, the interaction of actors, but equally, in complex plays like Shakespeare I always feel that something is lost in theatre. Verbally they're cut, or...particularly rich speeches with conceits and tropes and developed metaphors and so on and so forth, they move too quickly to be taken in, so you can get an occasional impression of something vivid and wonderful as being said there, but the action is stronger than the language, as it were. And in ideal theatre you want that compliment between the two, it seems to me...it's always a sort of wonder to me that Shakespeare's contemporaries, the so called groundings and everybody else that went to the theatre then could tolerate Shakespeare! (Laughs). You know, it's just a miracle to me that...I suppose it was like seeing something quite other world and extraordinary for them. I can only imagine that. You know, I can't imagine they would follow all the language, you know? You know, in my sort of conviction about Shakespeare, there's something in Shakespeare that's quite vulgar, in a sense that he would use language just because he came across words, you know...to impress, to give glamour, you know, it's well known the range of his vocabulary was beyond anybody's at the time, beyond anybody, Ben Jonson, or whoever. And...so...one must be in sense that the audience was enjoying them just because of the novelty of these issues of language and tumbling out of actors and so on, something phenomenal happening. But it also must have made them laugh a good deal, I suspect. ...laughing not just at the cruelty one knows they laughed at in something like *Lear* but even in some quite serious speeches, they must have been, regarded the tension between the magic of language, as I say, spilling forth and...the absurdity of it in some curious way, as well as being impressed by the spectacle of theatre. So...I've probably drifted a long way from your question, I'm just ruminating here, you understand, but I don't know if that's the sort of thing you want...



EP: One final question Professor Haffenden: in your opinion, is theatre education, is it entertainment, or is it both?

JH: Oh, it has to be both, doesn't it? I suppose that any theatre which has educational, pedagogical, or doctrinal, or partisan effect, I have a total resistance to anyway....so I tend not to like playwrights like Edward Bond and to some extent people like Howard Brenton or all those sorts of playwrights of the last thirty years whose name begins with B (laughs), because I do think they're lecturing me. I do feel that huge element of...it's not that I'm at odds with their politics, but I don't want it thrown at me, I have a huge resistance to that. But that doesn't mean to say I swing entirely into the entertainment end of the spectrum. You know, I want enlightenment, I want illumination, I want...I want glamour, I want challenge, I want intellectual challenge; I don't mind political challenge but I don't want a play which is nagging me. And I always felt the plays of Edward Bond had that deficiency. There's a huge crudeness in some of Bond's plays that I find...which really gets up my nose. And it may get back to that early production of *Saved* I saw. I expected something better. That sort of thing about Shakespeare that he wrote, I can't remember what it's called; I should know...I lost its name. But again, I saw that while I was teaching at Exeter University. I liked it better but it seemed to me also to have elements of windiness and preaching in it, of the wrong kind. It was as if he was allowing his own political preconception to deny him the theatrical appreciation, as it were. It was that tension and I felt it then, so as I say, theatre that preaches, i.e. as educational, although obviously it develops the mind, sensibility, etc. etc., I would always want first and foremost that magic which I remember from such productions of the Sixties.

EP: Well, thank you very much for this interview Professor Haffenden.

JH: Thank you very much.