

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

<http://sounds.bl.uk>

Corin Redgrave – interview transcript

Interviewer: Ian MacKillop

Actor. A Midsummer Night's Dream; Daniel Barenboim; George Devine; The Entertainer; Arthur Miller; modern cabaret; the National Theatre; Trevor Nunn; Laurence Olivier; Look Back in Anger; George Orwell; John Osborne; Royal Court Theatre, London.

IM: I'd like to work out either now or afterwards everything you've written because I've looked around places like the internet and so on and I haven't really got a good list I mean you must have one on your CV tucked away somewhere I suppose.

CR: Oh it's short enough to be still in my head I think.

IM: But plays for instance, I mean three radio plays?

CR: Four radio plays.

IM: Can you tell me about those? I think first of all a round up of writing. I imagine that the book about your father, radio plays and quite a lot of political writing I should think.

CR: Yes.

IM: I mean... I don't know if you write a piece every month.

CR: I do yes... yes, well every two months anyway.

IM: Every two months. Do you have a column for instance?

CR: I write the editorial in a magazine which I edit called The Marxist.

IM: I looked up The Marxist on the internet and couldn't find it.

CR: I think it does have a website, yes it does, so I write for that, I mean sometimes more extensively than the editorial, but every issue I write an editorial and I write occasional pieces of journalism, recently I suppose for the Independent, New Statesman, The Times and The Mail on Sunday as I was telling you. Those are only occasional pieces, perhaps four or five a year.

IM: Is The Marxist actually an official organ of the WIP?

CR: No it's not, it's the official organ of the Marxist Party whose members once were members of the WIP but no longer and in fact not for some time, not for fifteen/sixteen years.

IM: I see. Are there any political writers you like especially? I mean, you clearly don't model yourself on anybody, but who do you read?

CR: There are a number of political journalists I like very much, Robert Fisk I suppose heads the list and there are others.

IM: Hitchens?

CR: No, I don't like Hitchens, I don't like his work at all in fact. He belongs to that small group of people who moved either sharply or in a series of gradual faltering steps towards the right and have been people of bad conscience ever since, either apologising for that or attacking their erstwhile co-thinkers, usually the latter, and I think there are about three or four of them.

IM: Bad faith?

CR: Yes people of bad faith. Christopher Hitchens I think is perhaps the most notorious bad faith journalist writer. David Aaronovitch is another. No I don't like him but I like Fisk a lot and there are others. There are a number of American journalists I like very much writing for magazines like The Nation, The New York Review of Books. Jonathon Shell is one whose work I like a great deal and there are others like Maureen Dowd, or Paul Krugman who write for the New York Times. Yes, Paul Krugman is essentially an economist but he's broadened his writing more over the past few years and he writes about all kinds of matters political now, he's very good. I like, of course, Noel Chomsky very much, but the greatest of all writers sadly left us only a few months ago, which was Edward Said.

IM: I've just read his pieces about Palestine, you must know that collection of pieces written for Arab papers.

CR: Yes, yes, mainly for Arab papers [Al-Hiatt?].

IM: So he would be quite at the top of your list.

CR: He would be.

IM: And have you read him on literature much?

CR: Not so much on literature, though I have read *Culture and Imperialism*. I love his essays on music also, which I find enormously helpful, they encourage me to listen in ways that I haven't listened before, which I think is the essence of good writing about music. The other writer I adore also longer ago is Glen Gould, who's extremely iconoclastic and perverse but never, it seems, for [petty?] bourgeois simply because that is his cast of mind and because that's the way he sees and hears music and he's constantly refreshing to read.

IM: Boulez, perhaps, have you read?

CR: I haven't, no. I admire - inordinately admire - what Said did and what he was doing with Daniel Barenboim and which still continues. I think this is the most hopeful avenues that one could find because it really stretches a way of looking at problems from outside if you like those problems, well inside and outside, and showing, in a way, that what you see is, of course, so absolutely obvious, and yet it took two men of great outstanding courage and vision and talent to make that happen: to have young Israeli musicians playing alongside young musicians from Egypt, Palestinian musicians and the Lebanon and so forth, in an immensely talented young orchestra. The talent is part of the point of course, they are all very fine musicians, it's not just an experiment in togetherness, but the playing together is also the point and the level of understanding that they arrive at about music becomes a pointer to a level of understanding that can be achieved not only by themselves but by others - by everyone perhaps - if they're willing to cast aside the shackles and the blinkers that people want them to wear. I remember going, it must have been ten years ago now, to a performance in Paris by two companies, one Israeli company led by [Iran Banyar?] and the other Palestinian led by George Ibrahim called the Al Casaba Company and they were performing *Romeo and Juliet*, which is not a new idea, I mean there have been attempts to use that as a kind of cultural bridge before, and one can see there are good reasons for that; but here for the first time was a Palestinian and Israeli company playing the Montagues and the Capulets, and they played it pretty well, not, I think, as well - if one can make that comparison as these young musicians played Beethoven for example but pretty well, certainly well enough to give one real pleasure watching it but of course the fascinating thing was to watch a Palestinian Romeo trying to climb up to the balcony where an Israeli Juliet was standing. The other fascinating thing - and rather alarming thing - is to see how many people wanted to stop that performance from happening. That was more difficult to do in the case of Barenboim, because Barenboim has such immense stature as you know, but even Barenboim can be subject to that. His very far sighted introduction of Wagner to an Israeli audience was, as you know, not barracked by the audience: he simply said 'I well understand those who will not want to stay for this, and please do not stay if you feel that you're going to be offended by it' and a few people, very few I think, walked out,

the rest stayed and there was not barracking from those, in fact quite the contrary, from those who stayed but outside by the people who never heard it. [laughs] Of course, it's always from those quarters that you get this intense anxiety about what is being done and there was intense anxiety and many threats to the audience you know not to go in and watch this and it went ahead but sadly it petered out because under the stresses of subsequent developments. What is so remarkable about Barenboim and Said's – what is it called? Orchestra of the – I forget, I won't attempt because I'll get it wrong, about their orchestra is that it's been brought together at the most difficult time, and it's not only succeeded, it has flourished.

IM: Is there a name for that? You said not just an experiment in togetherness but is there a name for that sort of crossover looking at problems from the outside. I'm trying to avoid the expression you know [inaudible] or something like that, but I could imagine that that's the sort of thing you do isn't it, collateral damage as a sort of entrepreneurship of understanding. I've just made up that phrase.

CR: I don't know of a name for it exactly because...

IM: Is that what you'd like to do more of, or one of the things you do?

CR: No, strangely enough the things that I do always seem to me to be, you know, necessary, logical and totally accessible to everyone and it's rather to my surprise when I discover that they're in any way controversial. I went upstairs to Nick [Heightener's?] office with Roger Michel who was directing the In Honour and we both said 'Can we use the Lyttelton loft...' - which had been a theatre, it had been the fourth space for new work and it had been returned now to become a foyer - but 'Can we use that space in the National Theatre for weekly cabarets in the period leading up to the war?' and we expected that proposal to be welcomed with open arms because it seemed such a clearly popular idea, and indeed so it proved to be, but it actually met with a lot of raised eyebrows to begin with because - I don't want to be unfair - I think Nick and his General Manager were feeling that they might be constrained by the rules and regulations surrounding the operation of the National Theatre, that it must not become politically partial to one side or the other. They worried whether this might perhaps affect anything we could do on the war, and they were inclined to wonder whether we shouldn't have one cabaret devoted to people who were for the war, which seemed to me to be impossible to achieve even assuming one wanted to do that, which I never would.

IM: I think I read an interview with you where you said there were three sorts of people... I mean against it, and for it, you couldn't think of anybody and nobody wanted to.

CR: No, and I couldn't think of any artists, except rather disreputable ones, who would wish to appear in a cabaret for the war. Anyway that didn't happen and all was well. We did about six leading up to the actual war itself and during the war itself and they proved to be very popular. My original idea you see was – and this is why I went in

rather innocently – it was modelled on something, it was modelled on Dame Myra Hess playing lunchtime concerts at the National Portrait Gallery.

IM: I remember seeing her in the film Listen for Britain.

CR: And I thought 'Well, that's the sort of thing, people want a certain level of culture in times of danger and stress' and my idea of a cabaret is not that it be just beer and skittles, it probably doesn't exist any more anywhere but it should provide a kind of means of expression for all kinds of things; so song and poetry and music or just somebody making their own personal observations about it. That would be some form of sustenance. You can never tell from those film excerpts of Myra Hess playing, because the sound quality is so poor, you don't know what her playing was like, but the most interesting thing is the audience, there's a mixture of people in uniform and people not in uniform clearly deeply absorbed in what they were hearing, and that is fascinating and that's what I thought these cabarets would do and I think they did to a certain extent. People were deeply absorbed for about an hour and that was a very good thing.

IM: Yes transported really. I mean, I've been always interested: the musicians are in uniform, some of them, aren't they.

CR: The musicians were in uniform actually, yes indeed.

IM: And there were celebrities there with ordinary people, I mean Sir Kenneth Clarke sitting next to the Queen Mother. Did the programmes survive? They must do in an archive or was there a printed programme?

CR: No there was no printed programme, literally we would get together and the essence of cabaret - at least with this kind - is that you manage to get some wonderful people performing by dint of asking them at very short notice, sometimes on the morning itself.

IM: 'Are you free next Monday?' sort of thing, yes.

CR: Yes exactly, I mean that's how radio for example manages to get magnificent casts often to do plays, because they take it right up to the wire, they do their casting right up to sort of 48 hours before. Well we would assemble our programme literally up until the morning. We probably wouldn't know until an hour before exactly what was in our programme and then we would get together and we would write out a running order and it would be like that, so actually the only record of it that survives, it was not as far as I know recorded, no I don't think any recording or any programme survived. It wasn't advertised except on the National Theatre website because it happened at sufficiently short notice for them not to be able to find contingency money in their advertising budget.

IM: Who performed?

CR: Oh it was wonderful, I mean a constantly moving cast of people. We had the best actors, the best musicians, the best singers – Ian Holm, Judi Dench, Vanessa - all sorts of people performed and read poetry, played, sang, there were terrific casts of people.

IM: Own choice?

CR: Very occasionally we would choose for them. I think in one case only someone said 'I'm sorry, this is such short notice I haven't got anything up my sleeve, can you think...?' so we probably said 'Well, do a Wilfred Owen poem or something like that' and he did. We also got writers like Patrick Marber, Jo Penhall, Will Self wrote for it and again that was a very last minute thing, they'd usually provide the script about ten minutes before. It's fun working that way, it's also rather nail-biting, but it is fun. Jo Penhall recently wrote a wonderful script for something I did at the Royal Court - Jo Penhall, he wrote Blue Orange - he wrote a marvellous script of Cherie Blair at prayer communing with her maker about the problems [laughs] of life at Number 10 Downing Street, with particular reference to Guantanamo. She, of course, is a lawyer in human rights, and I won't say one likes to think because I'm not sure what it would be like to be in her shoes, one imagines that those shoes must pinch quite a bit from time to time.

IM: Perhaps, yes. The National has been quite good, this seems a bit like an unknown National Theatre, I mean I haven't heard of it except from some website thing, I didn't know about Collateral Damage 'til quite recently, and it seems to be an informal site.

CR: Yes I mean, in the last two years of Trevor Nunn's time there were plans afoot to have a late-night cabaret, and I think that Henry Goodman was the artistic supremo of that, but it never got off the ground. The idea would be that an audience would pitch out of something at ten o'clock, go for a meal or have a drink, and then find that, lo and behold, next door was a cabaret and they would wander into that, a very good idea and I think indeed it does get taken up. They do foyer events, which are usually music, you know, some good groups playing in the foyer, and they have an excellent space for exhibitions, and they've done, for example, a wonderful exhibition of Cuban photography not so long ago. I think this was the first time that a cabaret was done in response to events outside the National Theatre, over the water and the world at large. The Royal Court devoted a week to doing it, they did it every day for a week, we did it for six weeks once a week so it amounted to the same thing, except, perhaps, ours didn't need such intensive planning in such a confined space of time.

IM: Is this something that Trevor Nunn has envisioned?

CR: I don't think so, no. I mean he envisaged, as I say, a late night cabaret, that would have been presumably more a musical satirical dramatic confection of some sort or another, but this was long before the war started so I don't think its source was in events taking place outside the theatre, whereas ours was. We wouldn't have necessarily thought of doing, say, a cabaret about the Hutton enquiry, that's something that the

Tricycle Theatre does very well. It does these dramatised documentary plays justifying war, one would love to see justifying war now, watch it unfolding. It was fascinating, it was excellently performed and beautifully staged. I never saw *The Colour of Justice* which is the one they did on the Stephen Lawrence enquiry, which was very successful and reached an awful lot of people, it played to many audiences all over the country, but this was a really fine piece of work and of course it could not but give you such a different impression to the conclusions that have actually come out by the man in charge, Lord Hutton himself, has actually drawn.

IM: You're talking about fairly recent things aren't you?

CR: Yes that was called *Justifying War*; that was their title, and a good title too.

IM: We began by talking about political writers you like, you moved on to the Barenboim initiative, you said you didn't like the bad faith commentators, Hitchens for instance. What about past writers, do you read Orwell or Burk, I mean, what readers of the reader would think of as classic? Political meditators I suppose you'd say, Payne.

CR: Well I do read Orwell, yes of course. I have very mixed feelings about him. I wrote a piece for *The Guardian* not so long ago when his notebooks surfaced, in which he had named - was it 130 people, or am I exaggerating? - for Celia Kerwin, including my father's name, and I was interested at how his reputation still seems to work in his defence, in that people like Timothy Garton Ash and others wrote saying 'Well, this is a rather questionable thing for Orwell to have done, but actually, of course, it didn't actually hurt anybody and really we shouldn't be beating him over the head posthumously with a big stick for something like that, one can understand that'. I thought that was a rather astonishing view to take. It seems to me that regardless of whether or not it actually hurt people - and I could name one or two that were hurt before and after the list by that kind of list making, including myself - that its intention was clearly to hurt people. It was clearly to say 'These people should not be trusted.' Now officially they should not have been trusted to do what? To write patriotic articles? Well that's daft. Nobody would ever have approached them to write patriotic articles because they were not notably, in a conventional sense, patriotic people, although many of them could have mounted a defence on that score that they were deeply patriotic perhaps. Conventionally speaking they would not have been asked to carry out that task, that was just a kind of fig leaf for the exercise, and so I wrote an article saying what I thought of it and saying that I thought Orwell must have known, for example, that some of the people on his list had been blacklisted by the BBC during the war, and others were blacklisted after, and that even as a sort of addendum to a putative blacklist his list of names was a thoroughly disreputable thing to have drawn up. I was pleased to get a letter from Edward Said saying 'Well done for attacking that shit Orwell'. He thought Orwell was a man of bad faith. But no, I do read Orwell, and of course, a lot of Orwell I like. I think on politics it's a strange shift that Orwell makes from a position that was certainly never of the revolutionary left - he didn't claim to be - but to a position where he seems more and more to endorse the Conservative, and even a reactionary, viewpoint. I mistrust his fabled common-sense, I don't like the quality of common-sense particularly, though he is of course the supreme spokesperson of common-sense. I dislike that appeal to 'Well, everybody deep down knows this because it's self evidently true isn't it?' so there's a lot of things that I... though I would not have dared to express

myself on Orwell publicly or even privately in a letter as Said did. I can see where that's coming from, yes I can. Oddly enough I'm doing a play now by John Osborne which shows a much more extreme version of Orwellitis.

IM: Yes [laughs].

CR: One that Orwell probably would not have acknowledged, and maybe I'm being a little unfair, but it's a brilliant play, *The Entertainer*, because it takes a family whose head is a washed-up Music Hall entertainer, and you know all this, but it takes it at that moment when Britain is embarking on what many people hoped would be its last imperialist misadventure, which was to recapture the Suez Canal. The figure of the father or the grandfather, Old Billy, belongs to a previous generation of Music Hall entertainers, of the generation of George Robiant and the great music hall entertainers. He's an extraordinary figure, because he's racist to the core. I mean, almost every utterance of his in the first scene - which is his scene basically - is about blacks, Poles, Irish, he hates them, he says so, 'Riffraff'. He loathes the fact that Phoebe has let out one of the rooms to a black dancer who's playing the Winter Gardens that week, who is also a queer yes, he loathes that, but he doesn't say anything about him being queer but about his being black, he loathes him.

IM: It's Archie who says...

CR: Archie has very ambivalent feelings about queer men and quite often appears under that guise himself. Billy is clearly a character for whom Osborne feels considerable affection and in him you see that whole sort of medley of old ladies bicycling through misty mornings in villages that Orwell talks about and that has so appealed to the right wing, to John Major in particular that he misquoted it famously on a couple of occasions. [Laughs] As being the heart of Old England, a vanished thing which tugs at our nostalgia, whereas in fact of course it's also compounded with a kind of prejudice and racism which provided the subsoil for the very invasion that Orwell - sorry slip of the tongue there - that Osborne is inveighing against. After all, all the same things were said about Nasser and in our production we've got Eden's voice at the Tory party conference that year comparing Nasser to Hitler, comparing the invasion of Egypt with the invasion that ought to have been to have prevented Germany from its expansionist fascist plans pre war. All those ghosts were resurrected for us then and the fact that he managed to do it, to get away with it for as long as he did (although he was a relatively short lived Prime Minister, 1 year 270-something days) is because he was sustained by that kind of thinking that Old Billy represents.

IM: 'It's the blackies'.

CR: Yes, yes: it's people who haven't got any respect, it's people who are not British, who don't doff their cap when they should.

IM: Does the play really inveigh against the Suez misadventure? I mean, is it really anti-Suez?

CR: I think it was at the time, yes. I mean now, looking back of course, one reads all of Osborne's subsequent attitudes into it and one sees traces of those attitudes already present in *The Entertainer* and therefore one reads it in a different way, perhaps, to the way in which it was intended at the time. I think that insofar as you can put yourself into Osborne's frame of mind and interpret his text as he wrote it and as he meant it, yes, I think it is anti that. I think Osborne was appalled. Osborne was arrested sitting down in Trafalgar Square along with Wesker and Bolt and my sister protesting against the H bomb and so on. His most famous journalistic outburst which was called *Damn You England* was precisely triggered by the trumpeting headline in whatever it was, *The Daily Express* or *The Daily Mail* saying 'It's our bomb now'. And he wrote 'Damn you England, why should you have your bomb, what's it for?'

IM: That was in declaration wasn't it, or was it conviction?

CR: Was it? I forget.

IM: Yes, I suppose it is saying that there was the adventure out at the Suez Canal, and look how sordid England is back home; and there is the boy... the son goes out there and is killed, isn't he.

CR: The boy is killed yes.

IM: And there are some people like the daughter's boyfriend who is wanting to go into, not the PSO is it but some sort of work in Africa, is that right?

CR: No he's training to be a solicitor I think or a barrister, I can't remember which. The daughter's boyfriend does appear very briefly at the end of the play, though not in our production. In one scene, Graham he's called, and Archie's brother Bill also appears very briefly and both those brief appearances have been cut in our production because they come so late in the day that they can't be more than just ciphers I think.

IM: Does Bill bail him out?

CR: Bill in the past has bailed him out, and offers to – no it's the relations in Canada, sorry, who are offering to bail him out by taking him off to Canada.

IM: You say at the time, I was going to say, what were you doing at the time of *The Entertainer*?

CR: I was in my last year at Cambridge, because I remember – no sorry that couldn't be right, I was in my last year at school, yes that's right. I remember going with a friend of my father's who was a very distinguished economist called Dennis Robertson to see *The*

Entertainer. I had already seen it at the Royal Court, and we went to see it at the Palace Theatre where it had transferred, and just before we set off I got a telegram saying that I'd won a scholarship, so it was a very happy evening. So that's what I was doing when that appeared. My mother was a member of that company, that great company that started up at the Royal Court called the English Stage Company which launched John Osborne of course.

IM: I saw it at the Palace, I didn't see it at the Royal Court, it must have been the same time, maybe I got a scholarship at the same time.

CR: Yes I should think it would be.

IM: The winter of whatever it was.1957.

CR: The winter of '57 I think yes.

IM: And was it in the same season as Titus Andronicus?

CR: No it wasn't, no, Titus Andronicus came later, that was two seasons later at Stratford in 1959. It was nothing to do with the RSC, well, it wasn't called the RSC then, it was nothing to do with Stratford, it was the Royal Court.

IM: Of course it was, it was the Royal Court Olivier Production wasn't it, with Brenda De Banzie and not Vivian Leigh in a mask. Who played Old Billy?

CR: George Ralph. Arthur Miller wrote a fascinating piece about it actually. He was in London at the time with Marilyn Monroe, I say at the time, shortly before when Look Back In Anger was on, and of course Olivier was directing and starring in The Prince and the Showgirl with Marilyn Monroe and said to Miller 'What would you like to see, old boy?' – he said 'I think I'd like to see this new play at the Royal Court'. Olivier pursed his lips at that slightly, but agreed that they would go together. At the end of the first act, they came out for a breath of air on the steps of the Royal Court and Olivier said 'Shall we leave?' and Miller said 'No, I think it's interesting, very interesting' – Olivier said 'You do?'

IM: And Olivier said 'Well, what do we want with this?'

CR: Yes 'Shall we leave?', and Miller said 'No, we should definitely stay' and Olivier did one of those double takes, because clearly you could not but respect Arthur Miller, he was already - with Tennessee Williams, and had been for some time – America's greatest playwright. It was like watching the cogs turn round in his mind. A few days later he wrote to George Devine and said 'Has that young man written anything since?' and Levine wrote back and said 'No, but he is writing something now, I haven't seen it yet,

are you interested?' and Olivier said 'I might be'. The first act arrived, he sent it to Olivier and Olivier, seeing the first act, thought that he was meant to play Billy because that appears to be the dominant male part at that time, and accepted to play Old Billy on the basis of the first act, and because it was by Osborne, and because Miller had said 'That is the playwright', which says a great deal of course for Olivier's instincts as a showman, as, if you like, the impresario of his own career, that even without necessarily understanding what it was that Miller liked about *Look Back In Anger*, he realised that this was a train that he ought not to miss.

IM: And said 'I am Archie Rice' didn't he, later on, that was the nearest thing to what he was like, he thought.

CR: Yes, I think he did.

IM: And you worked after graduating, almost straight away at the Royal Court, with *The Scapegoat*.

CR: I actually appeared in *The Entertainer* - in the film of *The Entertainer* - whilst I was still at university, before I became a professional actor or director, but you'd have to strain very hard to see me! In the film the part of the daughter and of her boyfriend Graham, both parts are built up quite a lot and there's a scene where I think the boyfriend takes her to a party of his chums and his chums are the sort of chums that are pretty awful types: [Laughter] clutching bottles of champagne, sliding down roofs and shouting 'Hooray' and 'come on, let's pour another bucket of something over someone'. Anyway, I am one of those types who slides down a roof: it's shot in fairly indistinct light, I'm not even sure that I can discern myself but I know I'm there. It's true I wrote off to George Devine at the Royal Court and I got a job as Assistant Director there, and the first thing I did was an adaptation of Leonid Andreyev *The Seven Who Were Hanged* which was called *The Scarecrow*. And then I appeared as Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

IM: With Ronnie Barker as Bottom.

CR: No, Ronnie Barker was Quince, Colin Blakely was Bottom. It was a wonderful cast - Nicol Williamson, Alfie Lynch, Ronnie Barker, Rita Tushingham, Lynn my sister - an extraordinary cast actually, David Warner playing his first part on leaving drama school; I forget which one he played, I think it might be *Flute*. *Thisbe* was Nicol Williamson. It was critically an absolute disaster and the critics were pretty harsh on all of us. They were very harsh on Tony Richardson for even thinking of doing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Royal Court because he was thought to be the sort of great godfather of all the new realist school of playwriting and why would he be doing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* they all asked. We were just hooted at and in fact we were so bruised that George Devine who was a very kind man and very good towards the young brought us all together to do a Sunday night production of *Twelfth Night* so that we'd have something to think about and take our minds off the awful notices that we'd all been given.

IM: And was it really a bad production?

CR: I don't think it was a really bad production, I think it was just context. I'm sure if it had been mounted elsewhere it would have been seen differently.

IM: They often had bad luck and reviews Royal Court classic productions didn't they? There was a very good one I thought called The Changeling with Jeremy Brett.

CR: Oh yes.

IM: And also there was the notorious Alec Guinness Macbeth wasn't there that didn't work.

CR: Yes indeed.

IM: I saw you talking about Alec Guinness on a TV programme, about him visiting your father late at night. Your father liked visitors late at night and Guinness would pop in and unburden himself. There was an interview with Simon Gray as well, wasn't there, and I read somewhere you were going to appear in a play of his.

CR: I wish I were. I still hope I shall, but it's not definite yet. It's a new play, and a very fascinating one, about the great robber baron Duvine, a man who sold paintings and sometimes sold fakes too... and his friendship with Bernard Berenson, or rather his relationship with Bernard Berenson, they weren't exactly friends. It was called The Pig Trade, it's now changed its title and it's an absolutely fascinating play, I love it. I just hope it does hit the stage soon.

IM: I did a magazine with him for quite a long time, a little literary magazine with Simon Gray called Delta.

CR: Oh yes, I remember. There was a furious controversy with Margaret Drabble.

IM: That's right, years and years ago, and she was thought to be the devil.

CR: She was absolutely taken to task up and down the hills.

IM: Yes. When you have performed radio plays or classic text on radio, have you learned more about them as you do it? What did I hear you in? A Victorian series on the radio I think, no it was Tolstoy wasn't it?

CR: No, no I don't think so. Well I have not done very many classic plays broadcast, I'd rather like to do more because I enjoy doing radio, but mainly I seem to be the only author whose plays I do on radio.

IM: Yourself.

CR: Yes! No I have done one or two others it's true. I did a very fine adaptation of Bergman's Autumn Sonata, which is from a screenplay of course by Bergman, and I enjoyed that immensely.

IM: That's an astounding film isn't it.

CR: It is an astounding film with some wonderful performances, and a sort of renaissance for Ingrid Bergman who is superb as the mother. Sometimes my research takes the form actually of cinema. I did, I thought, a very good play not so long ago at the National Theatre called Honour, which is about a very close up, rather minute analysis of a break-up of a marriage, and it happened that the National Theatre were screening a very comprehensive retrospective of Bergman's films, so I was very lucky because my research consisted then of just walking the few hundred yards from the National to the National Film Theatre and watching the whole of Scenes from a Marriage, which was the series that he did for Swedish television which I think is one of the great achievements of twentieth century film making. Extraordinary performances not only from Erland Josephson and Liv Ullmann but all the actors.

IM: That may have been the whole version of it.

CR: It was, yes. I mean, they've said it recently about something else, you know 'The whole of Sweden watched', which of course sounds very impressive... except that the whole of Sweden is less than the population of Dalston practically and probably have not much else to do on a long winter's night – no that's a ridiculous thing to say actually.

IM: I think somebody said to Bergman, 'It's going to break up a lot of marriages' and he said, 'Good!'. [Laughter]. It's chilling, isn't it, really.

CR: Well, it is chilling, but it's chilling because you recognise so many things, not only from your friends but, alas, from yourself. Honesty is such an overused word in relation to art and literature and film making, and very often things that are praised for being searingly honest are nothing of the kind in my opinion, but I think that Bergman has a remarkable honesty. It's quite distressing at times, both in his writing and his film making, and yet it's not that kind of appalled reaction to the honesty of somebody who wants you to look at the painful scar of a wound that you know you actually can't look at. It's somewhere to the left or right of that, but it certainly is painful.

IM: Thank you.