

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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William Crow – interview transcript

Interviewer: Ewan Jeffrey

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Theatregoer 1945-68, on censorship, Irish Theatre, the influence of European theatre, visiting the first runs of Harold Pinter's plays.

WC: I suppose as an aside on Osborne and this great angle was the explosion that killed all the dinosaurs. It certainly wasn't in our view. But we enjoyed Osborne's historical plays much more. I am surprised that Luther and Galileo aren't done more. Albert Finney's *In Luther* had far more of an effect on me as to show the dead hand of authority and that wonderful argument on the Catholic Church. That was politically far more intriguing than Jimmy Porter railing away against his ironing wife in *Look Back in Anger*. Which to a certain extent, and I hate to keep on saying this, it was almost unbelievable. I am sure it was some of those back streets round Kensington, or it could have been Richmond, any one of these areas that started to stretch out from West London. That there was someone with such a smart accent, written by such a smart playwright, that actually cared about anybody, anyway. He wasn't just an idle bastard, but when he wrote *Luther*, there seemed to be a deeper intellectual coherence than just striking out against his girlfriend's dad. His background in the middle classes and the fact that he was working in a laundrette and all that bit which I suppose, in retrospect, and the more you read about it yes the more tiresome it all becomes and it wasn't terribly tiresome at that time, it really had very little impact. Whereas *A Taste of Honey* perhaps had more impact because it was fresh, but it was very limited in terms of political didacticism. I am looking for another word... There were other plays around that time, which were more interesting. I am trying to think of that one that was with Jimmy Jewel, who was part of the Jimmy Jewel and Ben Morris partnership, and just off the top of my head I can't remember the name of the play, but there were plays like that that were beginning to disturb your consciousness. Not disturb your consciousness, but in our case reaffirm and fortify our anti-establishmentism. By the way, we had very little knowledge of any kind of political theatre. I didn't see any of the union type theatres.

EJ: What about the Irish dimension, would that not qualify as political theatre?

WC: Yes, I'm sorry, I'm talking about structured political theatre. The Ewan McColl type. Although we were aware of Ewan McColl I don't think we would cross the road to see him. We always regarded him as being a bit boring until the Joan Littlewood experience came along. We were aware of other types of political theatre and as I said the Irish dimension. The IRA, Brendan Behan thing was very important and we would have gone to see more of those plays at that point in time. In the same way as *Chips* with Everything challenged the army or militarism - that and the other Littlewood productions were questioning and were cynical about the effect on what we actually come home to? Who won the peace or where is the peace dividend? There were elements of that. You made me think of something else at the same time as well, which is quite interesting. Of

course, at the same time, talking about censorship, we were beginning to get completely unexpurgated copies of Ulysses so there were others. One was reading Steven Didallas and The Dubliners. You were beginning to get other bits of Ireland that you didn't know about before, so you were fitting those in. Again, it was part of you know, this is the Irish dish this week. Okay, this is colcannon. You've got everything in there. You've got a play this week, watching Brendan Behan, and by the way are you are still reading The Dubliners and can we get a boat over to the Gate? We can get a boat from Liverpool and go and see some scene, Playboy of the Western World or something. There was an interest in all things Irish, but it wasn't always strictly in a political sense. The IRA was a bit of a dodgy lot, in as much as they weren't particularly read.

EJ: So where would you say that came from, purely from a literary point?

WC: It may have been driven by Irish actors. It was certainly driven by an element of novelty in the way that Joan Littlewood, and we would have associated Joan Littlewood as a producer, of a couple of productions, and there would have been a literary element to it that would have meant that it was a must have on the book case.

EJ: Would the anti-establishment thing come in as well?

WC: It would do yes. It was another way of having a chip and also we came from a very secular background. It was interesting to get a feeling for what these Catholics or the Protestants were on about. There were windows being opened all over. There hadn't been a great deal of trouble with regard to Ireland. Well, we didn't feel that there had been a great deal of trouble with regard to Ireland, until the late 1950's/1960's when things started to rumble on. Of course they got progressively worse. We didn't know very much about the Easter Uprising. Let's face it until 1955/1956 you were still really interested in what the Labour government had tried or failed to do, not failed to do, but had unfinished. The returning Conservative party had come in and you were angry with the fact that the peace dividend had not been delivered and that there were still things like the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. There was these incompetent governments dragging us back. There was a war in, not sure if it was in Korea, and there was a Mau-Mau conflict in Kenya. You yearned for some kind of romantic involvement that was taken away from - which may have been an Irish/Catholic requirement. Also, there was this huge Celtic cultural dimension. One forgets the fact that ... I don't know whether it is fashionable now, but in the late 1950's early 1960's there was a lot of Irish music, a lot of Irish whiskey and a lot of Irish theatre and literature being consumed. Michael McClellmore, you know one man act performance artist extraordinaire, we were all half volunteering to go and fight for the IRA, even though it was Catholic and semi-non-socialist. This was an attractive, you know, perhaps it was going to be our Spanish civil war. There was a degree of empathy and the blokes on the street on the one hand you had these guys who were IRA chaps throwing petrol bombs and Molotov cocktails. They had long hair and drain pipe trousers and pointy shoes, they looked a bit like early Beatles and they were all coming from middleclass families and were highly articulate and had read all the best books and everything else. They all seemed to have gone to universities in Dublin, which wasn't at all true. Whereas the Protestants were unbelievably looking thick bastards, you know, who looked and sounded as if they had just come out of some British Army catalogue as to how to recognise a Protestant. There was a degree of sympathy on that side. The gear was very similar and one still played rugby with the Catholic Irish I remember, which had a degree of sensitivity. They were still included in the British Lions Rugby team and you went to see them at Twickenham. I can't remember why. Well, I can assume quite easily as to why we were very empathetic towards the anti-authoritarian Catholic IRA, even though we didn't go to church. We were ostensibly a peaceniks and we weren't particularly interested in their kind of Irish

socialism. I think they were of the left, but they had a lot of other good things that were going for them that we were rather attracted by.

EJ: So in terms of the theatre of the time, there wasn't necessarily overtly political draw to any particular plays, other than perhaps a sense of anti-establishment?

WC: Yes, I think that was more than a sense. I think we would have pursued anything that was known to be anti-establishment. Coming back to the point that you were making, the question that you were raising earlier about the Lord Chamberlain. If you had replaced the word Lord Chamberlain by anti-establishment, it would have been a very strong influence. Any form of what we would regard as being non-silly, semi-political interference would have been serious. Silly interference, that would just have been a joke. We are so used to courts saying "this book is about someone having sex on the grass etc" and we would all die with laughter and say that's all right. It's rubbish for the Fleet Street newspapers and so we regarded that kind of censorship as just being silly. It's the stuff that made secret policemen's balls so funny. It was so daft, it didn't really worry you. There was a lot of Lord Chamberlain stuff like that. You squirmed with embarrassment how awful the establishment was at looking at itself. Let's face it we were 17/18 year old kids and we were going "oh my God the tossers. Look what they are now doing to themselves". If there was any sign of real genuine anti-establishment, you would go "Yes, this is it. We'll bathe in this". If David Hare had been writing then and I think Arden had been less obscure, if there had been more political writers and more Dario Foe's in England the theatre audiences would have quadrupled. There would have been riots in St Martins Lane .

EJ: Did you find Pinter political at all?

WC: No, not particularly. I didn't feel any of the things that I subsequently began to feel about Pinter. Pinter was a little bit like ... there might have been a relationship between Pinter and 1984, that Clockwork Orange, somewhere of not being able to touch dimensions from that curious awfulness of another society where, I can't remember he name of the two thugs. Is it Goldberg and McCann? We have identified them before as being possibly Catholic or Jewish or renegade totalitarian or renegade fascist thugs, thugs in which societies always, always exist. I think there was an awareness that he was touching on an unpleasantness, but most of us came from around south-west and south-east London . The fact that I went to Grammar school, I still came back through streets and people threw stones at you because you carried a satchel and you wore a cap. Well, everyone had to wear a cap, but you sometimes you wore a cap with a bloody tassel on it, and aware that most of your ex-primary school friends had turned into Teddy boys. Even though you loved them dearly you would still meet them under arches occasionally and have these curious Pinter-like dialogues with them and not being quite able to understand their antagonism. There were people like Megane and they were also able to poke fun at you and in a way, point out that you cross the line. There was this Jewishness in Pinter that communicated to us as some kind of Grammar school ghetto boys in the London that was already beginning to change into a, I wouldn't say violent society it wasn't violent until the late 1970's early 1980's, but it was the beginning of razor gangs and people were beginning to behave in an anti-social way. There was this kind of thing that somebody was coming in off the road and hiding somewhere and that hiding didn't have a reason to it and you could stick all kinds of reasons on it. These two blokes coming in were coming to get him. They could stick all kinds of reasons on them, all kinds of labels as to why they were doing it, but it was becoming an increasingly familiar scene.

EJ: It's incredibly sort of prescient in a way. If you think about today before they have the crisis of the West End, one of the reasons that they're not able to draw in the

audience as they once could is because of this fear of terrorism and so in some ways perhaps we are seeing at the beginning in the 1950's is something that has come around again in some way. This theory that the enemy is in the midst.

WC: Yes, but it wasn't... It was a kind of enemy that one wakes up in the middle of the night and has to face for the whole of your life. It was a nightmare. One of the people that you always thought to be a friend would let you down in some awful way. Or somebody would come in off the street and find out that you had taken some biscuits from the front of a market stall and want to drag you away. They would use all the kind of words that you would use in identifying you as being a person who needed punishment of some sort. There is a kind of punishment thing in Pinter all the time. He is always threatening a good biffing, a good beating somewhere "if we get hold of you we're going to do something to you". It is also part of the naughty game. That, I think, is still acceptable in terms of a social nightmare. The extremities to which perhaps nightmare has now stretched is way beyond ... I know you say that it has come round again, but I think it has actually come round as a maelstrom, a huge force which is quite terrifying. You really, really have got to be living in Bologna and go to a theatre next to the Bologna railway bombing to comprehend, or go to New York a month after 9/11 to comprehend that kind of fear. I find it different. It is a psychological disturbance to watch Pinter, but I wouldn't say that it has macro impact. We are all let down in our lives, either by ourselves or by people, friends or relatives that we put trust in. That has a psychological impact. The wounds heal over it and we are able to cope with it, but I think the vast psychological impact now of terror, I don't know, it's going to scar the entertainment environment, the West End forever. The sad thing about the West End was, I suppose adopting a different tack, that it always seemed to be cradled in this gloriously upper class world of going nowhere and being totally dilettanti and keeping dancing all the way through the Blitz. Whereas all the rest of us that went to the Music Hall and all the rest of that "East End London grit, say no more mate. Go and fill up another bucket of sand and make a cup of tea", we all realised what life was all about. Of course it wasn't like that at all. I don't think that they have ever been prepared either as a management or in the main as an audience to cope with it. It's a curiously artificial isolated world. It is only just being changed now by people like Nicholas Hockner and Mark Ryland. I don't know whether they are actually changing it, just as did John Osborne change it all, or did the Royal Court change it, or did Colin Dexter change it, or did Joan Littlewood change it? Joan Littlewood finished up doing what Dario Foe did, which was to tickle the stomachs of the middle classes making them believe that they cared about anything. This is the whole bourgeois platitude bit and nothing happened. Anyone that tried to do anything in the very reverse without the degree of intellectuality just became boring. I suppose there are one or two political playwrights now that seem to be doing something positive, like David Hare. Edward Bond, what a boring pillock he is. I've tried to watch Edward Bond but I find no redeeming factor in them at all. He gets all the working class accents wrong. He gets the working class dialogue wrong, and then he goes over the top with a few stagy frightening bits. How on earth he ever became a major playwright I will never know. There are two or three female playwrights who are hardly known who are much more effective at being didactic than he ever was. Caryl Churchill and people like that. I think in this country we have become parochial, marginalized. What do we do with Brecht? What do we do with Dario Foe? What do we do with Arturo Ui? We've ballsed it up. We went down our own totally boring little avenues of mundane middle class arguments going nowhere. Michael Frayne occasionally has shown the intellectual vigour to do something about it, but in the main there is a huge amount of repetitive, mindless dross.

EJ: I mean there is the school of thought that says in some ways theatre today has not moved on from Rattigan in the sense that what the majority of the people would like to see does not actually in fact challenge in the way that perhaps they would like it to.

WC: I think it is possible right because it has been starved of creativity at the producer and playwright end. I don't think we fail as a country as a nation in providing the actor fodder. We are good at that and I think we have the enormous enthusiasm to do these things. What we've lost is that creativity that enabled people to throw up a few boards and get something that was didactic and fresh with mystery and blood and a sharpness to it. Like the Croxton, I forget the name of the Croxton pamphlet, where the Jews nail the bed of Christ to the wall. You can imagine the audience created hell. I mean this is worse than bombing the theatre whilst we are in it. The blood of Christ starts to ooze out of the casket on the stage and you know it's going to migrate up the walls and that they have really upset everything. This was done in 1450 or something, and this was far more effecting, far more dynamic than what has been done with Edward Bond's rather incoherent stoning of a baby in a pram, with most of the people on the stage not knowing that they were supposed to be speaking in a proper working class dialect or not knowing what they were anyway. We are nowhere near it. We wasted 550 years of theatre just to perpetuate something that is a little bit more serious than Salad Days. Are we not surprised? In Europe they don't do that. I'm afraid that I don't know. It is an area that I don't know enough about, but there has been theatre in Europe that enables one to fill the rivets in your spine. It's not in Paris, it's not in western Europe, I'm sure it is in eastern Europe. Just as Andre Vidos' *Ashes and Diamonds* was made in Poland, there is an awareness of visual pain, which is very, very strong. Some of recent Russian and even Iranian cinema has been very ... we are incapable after 150 years of industrial revolution, or whatever it was, we have become an absorbent, spongy like mass, rather like a soft atoll where you can jump up and down on it and it has no effect on it whatsoever because the people are unable to respond or have not been given the stimuli of something that would enable them to respond. That is the terrible tragedy of talking about what we talk about. That for a period of time from 1955 until 1965, there were all kind of enthusiastic idiots like me going to the theatre. I was in a formative state and so were all my friends and we enjoyed a huge helter skelter of change and wonderful things happening around us. It all came to nothing in the end. Some wonderful performances since then though don't get me wrong. I have been going to theatre for 45 years, sorry 50 years, but we can still go down the road and watch ... I won't mention the name on record and see the appalling stuff that is being done in the name of theatre in this country.

EJ: I was reading something the other day, I can't remember what it was, that said where are the Nora Torvals, where are the Willy Lomands for this age? What's happened? So it is quite interesting.

WC: It's quite interesting because the system, it's such a beautiful idea. We give you a box and all you have to do is put something on a couple of bits of board in there and you can do what you like. No one is going to get upset. Well okay, they might get a bit upset, but that is part of the show. You're all locked in and you are able to get on with it and it is so cheap, but apart from that we will pay you for doing it. It can be done as a club and some of you can come and participate if you like. You say this to a bunch of five year olds and they say "that's fantastic", you know, yes we will come and collect money from you. They are getting part of the show and it's far more refreshing and far more imaginative and far more unrestrained than anything that you see that has been carefully structured and promoted by umpteen angels and paid for left right and centre and then pre-advertised by some mentally deranged shit who presupposes that his advertisement is going to convince us that this tripe is going to rivet us. Pre-advertise for

weeks and weeks and then previewed and then at the end this vast expense in plush seats we've been delivered another load of old rubbish and this is a nightmare. If anything should be Lord Chamberlainised it should have been that process. Of course it only persisted what had been happening since the beginning of virtually the 19th century. Until 1955 it was 155 years of unparallel rot. There were a few high points, most of which I know nothing at all about and I should know more. Granville Barker and JB Priestly and Terren Dellow and . things that mainly occurred because of European trends and then we all slap our hands together and along comes John Osborne and we hope against hope that it is going to change our lives. Just as we hope that Dylan Thomas would change poetry or some of the films that were made would change cinematography in this country, but it didn't. We remain the last bastion of just about every conceivable form of smug establishment there is because we all turn into it in the end.

EJ: It's a bit depressing.

WC: It's not meant to be depressing. I think it actually hones your critical faculties because what it does is that you are able to determine quite easily who were the Mozarts, who were the Beethovens and who were the Bachs of British theatre. We have talked about the Beethovens, Bachs and the Mozarts. They are the Pinters and the Shakespeares. I mean these are first-rate writers. Hold on a minute, I've got two, now there were a few in Shakespearean times, The Marlowe. Have you tried to compare a Marlowe play with a modern play?

EJ: No, I have never done that.

WC: Well, it is quite interesting because the psychological impact of a Marlow play, if you are talking about psychological impact, just reading it and I don't want to sound very .. but read Edward II or Tamburlaine. It has infinitely more ground swell vibrations, tectonic plate movement than any plays that appear to be about violence or people's behaviour towards man of today. It probably had huge political impact at the time and might also have been heavily censored by the Lord Chamberlain. Talking about politics and theatre land we can't produce anything on a Marlow scale and we're not even talking about ... In many respects he was better at what he did than Shakespeare, but we don't have anyone in that same category or capability at all. You think and then talk about it's a bit depressing, you think of the sheer bloody inertia to move a population to go and see ... moving young people of your age to go and see plays and we can't even match stuff that was done 500 years, or 450 years ago. It is a bit frightening.

EJ: It is.

WC: This comes from a man who loves theatre, who loves to see a bit of a show. A bit of Peter Shaffer or swoons when he goes to see something that is even moderate. A bit of John Mortimer, Two Stars for Comfort at the Garrick Theatre, mainly because he is such a lovely, lovely actor. Crumbs, having said that I forget his name, the lovely pock-marked face of Trevor Howard. The Brian Clough of the London theatre. Drink problem, fag problem and everything, you name it.

EJ: We have almost run out so better stop there [...INTERVIEW PAUSES]

WC: Remember the middle classes.

EJ: Did you feel any links with the military background with Wesker?

WC: No, actually... yes, Chips with Everything. Yes, very much so. I think I saw that when I was in the army and this business of nipping over the fence to get the coal, I did it. I knew it happened. Yes, I bought the t-shirt, I was there and we did it. We lived in a spider hut. It was a tin spider hut and there was a stove going up through the middle.

We had our boots round it, which dried at night and when the coal ran out some bugger would always have to go out with a bucket and dodge the guards and bring the coal in. No, exactly and we had families that talked like the people in *Roots* and we had people coming in saying "mum, so and so is going to get me into the theatre" and they would all laugh and say "oh yes, and what are you going to do with your job down the road then?" All that and they used to take the piss all the time and families would all sit around on a Sunday afternoon and take the mickey out of you. There was a strong identification there. Pinter we loved but he always scared the living daylights out of us. I mean the first time we saw Pinter plays, the hair stood on the back of your head. You are talking about young people in their late teens, early 20's as a group that went "shit, this is unbelievable". Unlike everyone else, even N F Simpson. They used a flow of dialogue. They used a pace in their actions. Pinter seems to thrive on non-pace. There were gaps and there seemed to be no need to explain anything. Beckett had done it as well and I can't remember the chronology between the two, but there was this man who was able to use words in a very, very curious multi-dimensional way that made you feel uncomfortable. Literally like looking at a painting by Magrit, where you are looking at it and thinking that this is not what it all seems. I have come out of here and have I got it properly? I think we probably saw one of his first performances at The Lyric at Hammersmith, *The Birthday Party*. I was looking for the programme. In fact I have only got one copy of the programme that was from a production in 1984.

EJ: Was this the ill-fated production that was closed?

WC: I don't know. The one at The Lyric?

EJ: Yes.

WC: It might have been. We wouldn't have even known. I think that we just trolled along there, but I haven't looked into that. I ought to look into my notes.

EJ: Hobson saved Pinter's reputation or paved the way for his reputation with that famous review.

WC: Yes, yes, I have read it. I have written something about it in an essay about a year and a half ago. It must have been the one that closed. Then we say it again in the West End and I have probably seen it four times in my life. The impact was probably greater than any other playwright I have seen, modern playwright. I mean I still get winded by Shakespeare, as if someone has hit me in the guts. When you saw Schofield in *Lear*, but Pinter was cerebrally demoralising. You came out and went "wow". This was it, this was Zen. This was the beat generation. This was going to take us on. I don't think anyone else around that time had the same effect. We began to change in terms of taste and I think inevitably become more middle class as we came out of the army and went to work. Around that time I started working for an advertising agency as a writer, a copywriter. You write the advertisements. I started to write, curiously enough, with a friend of mine called Chris Laydon who is still a great friend of mine, plays for the BBC. The first one we wrote was about the Castleray government of the 1817 Kato Street conspiracy. Why we got involved in this, he came in with a form, which said that we could get some money if we write a play. Since we were spending all day writing advertisements we decided to write it. We researched it at Marylebone Library from the newspapers of 1817. It was great, the *Marylebone Chronicle* I think it was. I was invited over to the BBC club for lunchtime with a lady friend of mine, who was a secretary to one of the BBC producers, and asked what I was doing now and I told him that I was writing a play. He laughed and asked what it was about. We said it was the Kato Street conspiracy. We actually did give him the script at the time, but I don't think that the version that we produced was ever performed on radio. We got a couple of jobs out of it. We went out interviewing railway men for 100 years of the London Underground,

which I think was a cheap way of getting interviewers. The development of this pseudo theatrical interest was maintained against a background of more rigorous application of zeal to our middle class lives, particularly advertising agencies. In our spare time we went to see more West End type theatre which we would have initially disdained. Our morals slipped a bit and of course we finished up going to see things like Hair, which had the attraction of being the flower power element. You could see bits of the beat generation and bits of love and peace and be fair to everyone. This was vaguely related to the kind of socialism that was attractive to us, but nebulous in as much as I think that we were more attracted to wearing potty clothes covered in flowers and things like that. That period lasted quite a long time, it probably lasted right the way through the 1970's and we still continued to go to the theatre.

EJ: Did you feel any sense of ... I'd like to talk a little bit about the Lord Chamberlain, because one element of the project is the impact of the Lord Chamberlain. Whether he had no impact at all on your theatre going or whether the sense of change went.

WC: I wouldn't like to say that he had a great deal of impact. There was a knowledge. You see there was a whole raft of things, again looking at theatre as only being one flavour in the stew. There was a whole raft of things that were subject to some kind of conscious or unconscious censorship. The books you could read, Lady Chatterley's Lover and all that stuff, which one was aware of. Also, the way that the fledgling television was being managed. My father was a rigorous censor of what we could and what we couldn't read at home. The newspapers were fairly self-censoring in a way, so theatre was under the cosh. However, we were aware of the fact that someone would stand up on stage naked, or a baby would get stoned in a pram. I can't remember his name, but we were aware that these things would happen or someone would pee on the stage or someone would walk around in a loud Irish accent talking about the qualities of the IRA and this would be subject to this Lord Chamberlain's cosh. Bits would be left out, but that didn't titivate our reasons for selection, they didn't affect it over much. In a way they had always been there. The salivation that the critics went in for because things were being done at the theatre club at the Royal Court and then gradually migrating their way onto the West End stage, wasn't felt as being wonderfully titivating by us. We were the grey prols, we tended to dress up a bit funny, but we were the grey prols down the line. In any case, what we were reading and what we were seeing was far more exciting compared with anything that Lord Chamberlain may or may not be letting off the hook. I'm not being terribly specific. One was aware that one was going along to see something that had been modified by the Lord Chamberlain. Whether we were going to contribute towards the gratuisis of the critics, or their patronisation, is another matter completely. We were already reading Henry Miller Tropic of Capricorn and all that stuff. How far can you go? It's almost as if people are writing history, forgetting that you've got university suffrage of libraries and for the first time universal education and you've got about a million people coming out of school in 1955, all of whom were pretty well literate. Right the way from the top of the country up in Manchester in the north and right the way down to the south, there are all kinds of people grabbing all kinds of strange cultural and artistic influences. You didn't really rationalise it over much. There was only in theatre history, looking back, "Yes, that was another H M Tennent production that came from the Royal Court by courtesy of the Arts Council. Yes, if you look back in the history it was subject to this that and the Lord Chamberlain". I don't want to put too much of a downer on it, but if it had been condemned by the Lord Chamberlain it wouldn't have been high on our list of, or modified, theatre requirements. On the other hand, the reverse might have been true. I mean the last thing in the world we wanted to go along was some kind of critics route to Oh Calcutta! That was a joke and a lot of the theatre criticism of that time, of Royal Court plays and

some of the stuff being done by northern playwrights, the criticism itself we regarded as being antiquated, arch, patronising. We were in a way ahead man, what is this bloke on about? These are living in this self-indulgent stones throw from the Garrick club community, all having their glasses of manzilla, or whatever, in one of the Soho restaurants, talking about something about which again is as rarefied as that bloody audience below. This was completely and utterly disconnected from us. We had a purer concept of our own reaction to art than they did. They were writing it for the Daily Mail and Lord Beaverbrook and these people that lived in stockbroker Tudor houses and wore brogues and tweed suits. They vaguely knew what they were writing for, but they weren't writing for us. It was a different way of looking at it and again if you look at the programmes they were writing for those audiences. They weren't writing for that frozen few at the top.

EJ: How much was a programme?

WC: Well, you've got all sorts of funny old programmes. These were about six pence each. Sometimes you would have the stamp round the outside and that was a shilling. Oh What a Lovely War was six pence and you would still have upmarket cigarettes in there. Olivier was a very upmarket fag and you would have Martell brandy. There wasn't a bottle of alcohol in our house from after the war until about 1960. We wouldn't know what martini was. It varied between six pence and a shilling. Oliver, The Art of Living, even in Streatham Hill was a very good theatre. They were all of a format for a period of time. Very much like this kind of format, very simple, very small. Living for Pleasure, I mean that would be something that we fell into. They were very, very seldom glossy. View from the Bridge, I did admire immensely American playwrights. Arthur Miller had almost the same impact on me as Pinter and so did the writers who wrote On the Waterfront, and produced it - Elia Kazan. Occasionally you got an attempt at more ... this was a wonderful programme. The Strand did this. This was Ionesco's Rhinoceros and you've got these lovely drawings by Ionesco in there, which are almost a little work of art. I'd would love to know where they are, but they were delicious. This was one of the few attempts that one observed to lighten the programmes up. Usually they were like this. You had Hot Water by Gas and then you had a picture of Alec Guinness or someone like that or Terence Rattigan or someone. Then you had a very potted biography there and then straight into this bit and then advertising for next week, and then biographies occasionally and then Christian Dior stockings. I don't know who could afford Christian Dior stockings. What else was there? St Martins Theatre, that was quite ... there was a very Irish thing, Dublin International festival. We actually went across to Dublin and went to the Gate Theatre to see some Irish plays, because we were so entranced by Irish theatre. Here we have by JM Synge Playboy of the Western World, which I adored immensely and you've got Siobhan McKennah was in it and Donnel Donnelly and some of the other actors who were involved in some of the London/Irish type performances of The Hostage and stuff like that. The Mermaid became an area that we started to go to because that developed its own ... The Ginger Man at Streatham Hill Theatre, again the Irishness JP Donlevy, Sebastien Baldangerfield. In the back here you've got some nice accident repairs, that's quite working class. British Red Cross Society, Bark, Streatham Hill and then one or two Chinese restaurants. I have got loads more. Taste of Honey, Sheila Delaney. Look After Lulu, by Noel Coward. New Theatre - we would probably have gone there because we fell out of the pub opposite, or it was the only place that we could sit down in. But it did turn out to have Vivien Leigh and Robert Stevens. Peter Sallis, my goodness me. We probably became quite unconsciously expert at acting and productions.

EJ: Did you have a favourite actor or favourite actors?

WC: Only the nexus of Peter O'Toole, Robert Shaw, the boys who were coming out of the north, Tom Courtney. All of whom were bit of the lads in The Long, the Short and the Tall, they would be in Bent. They would be on the front line. The old actors and actresses now we weren't particularly fond of, except Olivier. Olivier still drew you because he was a consummate - I shouldn't use that word. He was a great complete entertainer on stage. Even though his vowel sounds were always beautifully enunciated, he got there in the end and so we would respect him, but we would much more respect the whole mass of upcoming, particularly northern actors and actresses, or Irish ones. Anyone that didn't come from the southeast preferably. They seemed to have the true metier of what theatre was all about. On the other hand some of the plays that came out of the north, the Stan Barstows and all those things, were already beginning to be dated to us. They were behind the French, behind the Italians in terms of social realism. They were always walking up and down dreadful alley ways when it was raining and carrying umbrellas and getting pregnant and doing daft things and then bumping into black people or into "queers" and so there was all this kind of rubbish and we were saying hold on a minute we are past that, let's get down to the dialectic, let's stop frigging around with trying to station symbols all over the place so that little flags where this is supposed to be a working class bloke or this is a silly pregnant mum.