

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## David Davies – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Jamie Andrews**

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Actor, Pinter's *The Room*. Bristol Old Vic; Bristol University drama department; *The Cherry Orchard*; *Dartington Hall*; Susan Engel; Fulbright students; the Green Room Theatre; *Look Back in Anger*; method acting; modern drama; Peter O'Toole; pauses; Harold Pinter; rehearsals; reviews; *The Room*; Auriol Smith; the Theatre of the Absurd; well-made plays; Henry Woolf.

Read other interviews about the first production of Harold Pinter's *The Room* [here](#).

JA: ...February, 2008. We're in the British Library Recording Studios at St. Pancras.

DD: Yes, and hello, my name's David Davies.

JA: OK, David, thanks for coming in to talk to us for the Theatre Archive Project.

DD: Very pleased to do so.

JA: We're looking at the production of *The Room* by Harold Pinter in May '57. But if we can start off by going to the beginning of that academic year, and really if you could just explain what you were doing in Bristol at that time?

DD: Yes, well, I was starting my second year at Bristol. And I was studying drama, along with history, geography and Latin. I'm afraid I was having difficulties with Latin! I'd had difficulties in my first year, and I was having equally the same difficulties later. But nevertheless, drama was my love. And to talk about drama in particular, which is what we're here for today, I think it was in that period - in the autumn - that we did a production in the Green Room of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. I played Mitch in that production. And of course at that time we were very much influenced by the method school in America. James Dean was my hero, [laughs] needless to say. And he'd just appeared in *Rebel Without a Cause* in a recent film, and I think I rather styled my performance on James Dean, playing Mitch, which was entirely wrong because he wasn't that kind of a character. Nevertheless, it did help us to get to know some of the American Fulbright scholars who were over at that time. Hope - I can't remember her second name, bless her - but she helped to direct... in fact I think she did direct *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And we had one or two... well certainly one

'known' person in it: Mike McStay, who has been in quite a few films, and did quite a lot of work for television. And I think he's still acting.

JA: And he was studying at Bristol at the time. He was [President of the Union].

DD: He was studying yes. I think he was the actual President of the Union. A great guy and a fine actor. And we got on very well together.

JA: Can I just ask about the mechanics of the Green Room? Can you just kind of explain, was that a separate society, or was this part of your drama course? Or was this something you took on?

DD: No, no it was separate. I mean, the Green Room was... well, I think they called it the Green Room. I'm pretty sure we did. I mean, it was the old squash court wasn't it, and that's where we put these performances on. In fact we worked very closely with the Old Vic Theatre School. And Rudi Shelley was one of the instructors who - for those of us who were involved in drama - he used to come down, I think it was every Thursday, and we'd have a session with Rudi Shelley, either working on texts or doing movement, I think, in his particular case, because he was a movement specialist. And Duncan Ross, who was the principal then at the Old Vic Theatre School, also came and lectured on voice. He was very much into voice production - production and projection, and use of voice - which I think I found a little bit of a... I won't say difficulty exactly, but having grown up in this country - in England - and seen performances by Olivier and the greats, Michael Redgrave and John Gielgud and so on, the voice was the [main teaching aim for good] acting in those days. But then suddenly we had the Fulbright scholars coming in from America who were being developed in the tradition of the Method. And I found it difficult sometimes to, you know, fully come to terms with what they were trying to convey.

I mean, I think very often they thought I was a bit of a ham in the parts I was playing - and they were probably right too! Because about that time I did a few scenes from Hamlet, which Claude Jenkins who was one of the Fulbright scholars directed. Again we played those scenes in the old squash court, the Green Room. And I remember Claude played Benedict in a few scenes from Much Ado About Nothing. And Elizabeth - I think it was Elizabeth - Elizabeth Shepherd, who went on to do some wonderful things, and I believe ended up in Canada, she played Beatrice [Actually, she played it later at Dartington]. And we also did a few scenes from Julius Caesar. I played Hamlet in a number of scenes and I probably overacted terribly! [Laughs] Well I think I did. I certainly put a lot of emotion into it. And it was after one of those performances that I felt rather dejected after some comments from one of the Fulbright scholars. He said, 'My God, David!' he said, 'You are a ham!'. [Laughs] But I mean, in those days as a sensitive young man you took these things quite to heart. But I sort of laughed about it later.

JA: Did you get the sense they were coming over with an agenda then, to kind of wake up the British homologues to what was going on with method acting. Were they leading any workshops particularly around that, or was it just a sense of seeing their example that made you realise their approach?

DD: Well it's difficult to say really. I mean, I got into conversation with Claude quite often, and he was fine, you know, and he sort of seemed just about... and remember I was only 19 or 20, I was just a boy. But they were imbued with the Method as practised... I'm trying to think of the... in the Actors Studio... Elia Kazan, that's right. I'm not saying they'd been to the Actors Studio themselves, but that was all the rage at the time, the teachings of Stanislavski and digging deep into the psyche and finding all the underlying motivations for the character. And this tended to slow productions down, because you were doing so much soul searching all the time, particularly, you know, with you know, having watched people like Marlon Brando on the screen, and the other guy I just mentioned – I can't think of his name now.

JA: Dean was it?

DD: The great one I... the young fellow who killed himself in his racing car...

JA: James Dean.

DD: ... I've just mentioned him...

JA: Dean.

DD: Sorry?

JA: Dean. James Dean.

DD: Yes, yes, James Dean. He would take hours over... well minutes certainly over a reaction to a line. And there was much navel searching, and soul searching, and this was, you know, portrayed as good acting. But of course it... I think Elia Kazan ran a little bit foul of things when he brought a production of *The Cherry Orchard* over to England, and it was so dull and boring I think people just couldn't take it!

JA: So was this very different from the kinds of learning that was going on actually during lessons. Were you aware, and were you being made aware of contemporary movements in acting in theatre as part of the lessons, or were the lessons more traditional, looking at the canon?

DD: No, the lessons were more traditional. I mean, you know, we were having movement lessons and... Which were fine. I mean, they were great, we needed this – how to move properly on the stage, how to walk, how to breathe properly, and particularly with the voice lessons. I mean, you know, it was very important to be learning about projection, and learning about the putting this across, how to reach the

back of the theatre, which seemed to have nothing to do with the American Method as it was being expounded to us.

And it's funny, I went to see a production of *The Cherry Orchard* about three months ago at Theatre Clwyd in North Wales. And it was absolutely fantastic. All played on a bare stage, everything just white. And the characters were dressed in very light clothes. And there was one... two pieces of furniture on the stage throughout, and one was the bookcase. I don't know if you know *The Cherry Orchard* at all?

JA: Yes.

DD: One was the bookcase, and another was a wash stand at the back. And the performances in that were so strong. I have never seen Chekhov acted like... I mean, it was almost like doing Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* or you know one of the really big acting pieces. And the lead characters all had such strength and vitality, and such good strong voices. I mean, you could hear everything.

This was completely different to the original or... I won't say the original but certainly, probably Stanislavski's way into Chekhov, which from what we read tended to be very slow and pedantic, and as true to life as possible. This wasn't. This was really strong theatre. And it was a marvellous production. I think that's how far we've moved on from those early ideas. It was theatre... playing to the audience with Chekhov! Who would have dreamt it! [Laughs] Certainly not the Fulbright scholars.

JA: Yes, OK. That's interesting. And how about... that was more the practical side, but presumably there was a theoretical side as well in the classroom in terms of studying theatre and theatre history. Did that overlap with any of your practical studies, or again was that more looking at a canon kind of divorced from the acting potential of the plays?

DD: Well no, I mean at that time we were studying formally for the drama syllabus, medieval theatre and the miracle cycles and all the various offshoots.

JA: That was Glynne Wickham's interest...

DD: Yes that was Glynne Wickham's particular field. And the other side was Professor Kitto's Greek drama, which was equally fascinating. And I mean I loved it. I loved the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. In fact talking about *The Room*, Sophocles *Electra* I think was the first production I saw at the university. And if my memory serves me rightly it was... let me just think. Sorry for my hesitation, and pauses.

JA: No, no, take your time.

DD: Yes, it was Susan who played *Electra* in that particular production.

JA: Oh right, OK.

DD: And she was absolutely fantastic.

JA: And that was in your first year then, first year at uni?

DD: Sorry, that was my first year yes. It was... it was the year before actually, but...

JA: OK. So how did you get involved with the Green Room? Was it the result of seeing some of these productions made you want to go forward, or as soon as you arrived at Bristol were you always aware you wanted to find... do the drama society?

DD: Well no. I mean, I was doing drama, and I'd... you know, I'd done quite a bit of acting before I went up there in children's theatre in Todmorden where I went to the local grammar school. And also I was in school plays as well. So it was just a natural transition to do drama, and to do plays outside the main curriculum, because somebody would be saying 'Oh, I want to produce this', or 'I want to direct this play. I know! We'll go and ask David Davies if he'll play this particular role'. So people would come up to you from all over the place, and, you know, asking if you'd be in a play. And that's how it worked.

I mean, it wasn't always in the Green Room; sometimes we played in the Victoria Rooms on that massive stage there. We put productions on there. In fact my first production was playing Morris Townsend in *The Heiress* – the adaptation of Henry James novel *Washington Square*. And Auriol Smith played my older sister in... and she was wonderful. I wasn't. [Laughs] My problem was my trousers were too small for me. [Laughs]

JA: Oh no. It's the smallest things, isn't it, that...

DD: Which caused a lot of hilarity. I didn't realise it at the time, but you've got to get those things absolutely right. You know, if you're doing a period piece, and it's a serious piece, you can't have anything that's... particularly with a student audience.

JA: Yes. So from Greek tragedy period pieces, and then Tennessee Williams it seems like it was quite an eclectic mix of plays that were put on.

DD: Oh it was. It very much was so. Yes, I mean, you know, I was a first year student, and the mixture of Greek tragedy and medieval theatre, which I loved, you know, we worked on that in drama sessions. That was altogether absolutely fascinating. But these things like the scenes I played from *Hamlet* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, they were outside the main curriculum. But, nevertheless, they were important for self development and so on. The unfortunate thing is that they did take time. And I think they took time from other subjects that I should have been giving more time to.

JA: Oh right. It's a familiar story, I'm sure. But it's interesting, how much official encouragement from people like Glynne Wickham was there for you, a student, to pursue these interests?

DD: Well, we saw very little of them really outside... I mean, I did have a so-called moral tutor, and I think I saw him once in the whole time that I was there. But I think life is so fast at university, and there are so many students, and so many people. I mean, in fairness they did come along and watch productions that we were in.

JA: I was going to ask, OK.

DD: Yes, oh they came along whenever they could. And I think behind the scenes they were assessing and making up their minds, you know, what your potential was and so on. And I think when I left, I think, you know, there was a degree of – I won't say shock exactly – but surprise among some of the senior staff, because I was told that it had been expected that I'd go on to the Old Vic Theatre School after I finished my degree course, which I was only told about after I left. [Laughs]

JA: It's too late. You left early then?

DD: Yes I did. I didn't take my degree you see, I left before taking my degree. In fact I finished in the term following *The Room*. I just sort of disappeared off the screen.

JA: I'm interested in this, so was getting the degree first an absolute prerequisite for going to the theatre school? Presumably there were others in...

DD: Well I don't think so. I mean there were other people at the theatre school at the time. Well, I think he was Alan Dobie was one of them, and names that elude me now, but I've seen them frequently on television. And occasionally they would come and do their productions down in the Green Room. And they were wonderful. I mean, I saw a production of *Oedipus at Colonus* there that was absolutely staggering, riveting stuff. And they also did a production of *Othello*. And I think these were first and second year students that were doing them. But the acting was wonderful, it really was. And you know, all credit to Duncan Ross and his crew who... you know, producing these young people. They were really good.

JA: One more thing I'd like to pick up about the facility. People have mentioned of course Glynne Wickham, but also George Brandt who I think was slightly younger than Glynne – the younger generation of the faculty. Did you have...?

DD: Well, I never had any dealings with George Brandt.

JA: Oh.

DD: No, I think French was one of... was French one of his subjects?

JA: Yes, yes, or certainly... French and German.

DD: Well I wasn't doing a foreign subject. I wasn't doing French and German. But he was a fine actor. He was in a performance of Gammer Gurton's Needle which was played with Sophocles' Electra, as a double bill. And George Brandt played one of the roles in that, and he was absolutely fantastic.

JA: Was it usual for members of the faculty to join in the acting?

DD: I think they did occasionally. I think Glynne Wickham played Angelo in Measure for Measure, and he was superb. They were fine actors in their own right, these people. I mean, apart from being university professors they knew what they were about and they knew what acting was about, and Glynne Wickham was splendid. George Brandt was too, in that particular production.

JA: That's interesting.

DD: I have a feeling too that he was in a production of Dryden's Amphitryon that we did later, and actually took to Switzerland, to Geneva, and played in an open air theatre, an open air amphitheatre.

JA: The students took the production...?

DD: Yes, the students. This was in August and they decided to [take] Dryden's Amphitryon over there. And it was a wonderful experience, playing in the open air, and this wonderful amphitheatre.

JA: Was this a link up with a university over there? Had contacts...?

DD: Yes, it was a student festival. And the number of... there were people from Germany and France, and Switzerland, and you know most of the European countries, and sent teams down to perform and take place in this... take part in the festival. And there were some wonderful performances. Michael Graham Cox. I played Amphit... I think... did I play Amphitryon in that? No I didn't, Michael Graham Cox played Amphitryon and I played his servant I think. But it was a wonderful experience standing in this open air theatre. And [all] you had to do [was] whisper and your voice could be heard on the back row of this back row of this amphitheatre – acoustics were wonderful.

JA: It's an incredible opportunity. I mean, do you remember at the time, did this seem like such a wonderful opportunity, or was it just almost taken...?

DD: Well, I mean, it was all part and parcel of, you know, what we did in the drama department. I mean, most years in... well every year we went down to Dartington Hall and put performances on there in their little theatre. And in fact I played Orestes by John Paul Sartre, as one of the productions that Rudi Shelley directed in the August of the previous year. And it was, you know, a wonderful experience. I mean, apart from doing the actual play, being in these surroundings, in this wonderful part of Devon. It was superb. And being among these people and talking theatre, and talking drama, and talking art. And you know listening to wonderful music, it was superb.

JA: I've heard a little in other interviews about Dartington Hall, but can you just briefly explain how that fitted in, why the connection that every year the department would...?

DD: Well it was like a summer school. I think it was a university summer school that Bristol University used to run. Every year they had a two or three week session down at Dartington Hall. And they'd put a play on - you know, a Shakespeare play, or perhaps a Greek play or whatever. And different years went down. I was in the first year so first year students went down. And we put on Les Mouches it was called - Les Mouches, The Flies. Satre's The Flies. And it... as I say, it was a wonderful experience.

JA: Would that be performed amongst yourselves, or would it be performed to the local community?

DD: No, no it was actually... I think the public could come and see it too. It was in the Dartington Hall Theatre. I mean, I don't know whether you know the theatre there, but...

JA: No.

DD: So they call it The Barn Theatre.

JA: Oh yes, I've heard of that.

DD: I don't know whether it's still up. But I stayed on afterwards and there was a production of Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing, in which Elizabeth Shepherd played Beatrice. And they didn't know I was staying on and... but I did get a part in... I got the part of the messenger - various messengers who came in and out. [Laughs] I thoroughly enjoyed it.

JA: It is striking how... what a fertile environment for acting Bristol was at the time. Did you choose Bristol very much aware that it was the first drama department in the UK?

DD: Yes, I mean that was part and parcel of it. I was fortunate to get in too, I think. But as I say I had done quite a bit of acting back home in my home town in Todmorden in Yorkshire, where I grew up and went to school. And so I was... you know, from that point of view I was fairly well equipped. And...

DD: You were talking about the background theatre that was prevalent at the time. Of course, you know about the state of English Theatre, and I had come from that background tradition of Terence Rattigan's plays, and Christopher Fry and the 'well-made play'. I mean, I had been brought up through my youth, up to going to university, in appearing in those kind of plays in the Todmorden Players. So it was a bit of a culture shock to me to come to Bristol and then find that there were all kinds of other plays that sort of didn't fit that particular bill.

And it was a period of course when we - young people in England - certainly didn't know anything about the Theatre of the Absurd as it developed into. I mean, there was a whole tradition of European theatre that had been going on since the late 1800s, and the twenties... that we were completely - well I certainly was completely ignorant of. You know, going back to Strindberg and *The Dream Play*. And Jarry with *Ubu Roi* and people like Adamov and Ionesco who had been putting on plays, and Samuel Beckett too had begun back in the late forties and early fifties.

And I know we've not come onto *The Room* yet, but I think it's as well for... to put that in some kind of context, because for those of us who were - what, 19/20? and at university - I think it was a culture shock when Pinter eventually did arrive on the scene. I mean, I don't know how much Pinter himself had known about the European influence, about the developing Theatre of the Absurd - things like pataphysics and that sort of thing. But I certainly didn't. And I rather suspect that people like Susan and the rest of us hadn't really been exposed to it either.

JA: That's interesting, because let's say Beckett was first done in London in '55, Ionesco from I think '52 onwards...

DD: Right.

JA: Once you got to Bristol did you become more aware of what was happening with some of these new plays that were in London, especially I guess given the Bristol Old Vic, which would have staged some of these kind of more avant-garde plays.

DD: Well certainly not while I was there. I mean, all right, we had '56 and the original *Angry Young Man*, John Osborne and the beginning of kitchen sink drama and all the rest of it, which is history now. But the European tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd was not something that we were exposed to in Bristol. I mean, even at the Bristol Old Vic they didn't touch it, as far as I was aware - certainly not in the time that I was there. I mean, I think... and *Rhinoceros* didn't appear on the scene I don't think until about '57/58 or '59, I can't remember. I think it was after *The Room*.

JA: I'm not sure.

DD: I mean, The Bald Prima Donna had been what? 1950/1951?

JA: Yes, and The Lesson was fairly early as well.

DD: And The Lesson was about '52 as well, about that time. So it could well have been that Harold Pinter was... had been exposed to... particularly as he lived in London. I mean he may have seen some of these productions, and that may have been some kind of an influence upon him. Even Beckett's...

JA: Godot was...

DD: Godot yes. I mean, that had already been on hadn't it?

JA: That was '55 in London.

DD: And there was another play, was it End Game? I think End Game was possibly...

JA: That was afterwards.

DD: Was it after that, yes.

JA: After yes, yes. So was there any way... A lot of people talk about reading the... well Look Back in Anger that it's mentioned this reading of the Sundays, the two serious Sundays to find out what was happening in the capital and the wider theatre world. Do you remember as a matter of course reading the reading the reviews in the Sunday papers or otherwise?

DD: Oh yes, oh yes. I mean, we always read the reviews. I mean, Ken Tynan was the... and Harold Hobson, were the reviewers. You never let a Sunday go without having a good laugh at Ken Tynan. And he was a... he was cruel. [Laughs]

JA: Do you think that's why you read it, for the language and the... as much as anything else?

DD: The man... absolutely cruel. Harold Hobson was a delight. I mean he... his comments were always very sober and considerate. But Tynan was all fireworks and, you know, with his language and his criticisms and what have you. But he was delightful to read. And of course yes, I mean, we did get some information about, you know... about the plays themselves. And I always remember this, you know, reading the reviews at the time of Look Back in Anger and just had to go and see this play – 'what is it all about?'

And I think, if my memory serves me correctly that Peter O'Toole played Jimmy Porter at the Old Vic – the Bristol Old Vic. I think.

JA: I think he may have done.

DD: Yes... After 50 years your memory does begin to play you false, but I think he did a production of it, and I think I went to see it there. And I mean, he was marvellous. Peter O'Toole in his younger years was a wonderful actor. I mean, he always has been his whole life, but he really was a complete breath of fresh air upon the stage, and was so funny too. I mean, he really had you rolling in the aisle all the time. I remember he did a performance of Mr Doolittle in Pygmalion. He was only 23 or 24 I think at the time, playing a man who was in his fifties, but he was absolutely superb – wonderful.

JA: You said that when you came to Bristol you'd been playing in Rattigan, well-made plays etc, so your experience certainly in terms of what you'd seen or acted in was relatively insular. Can you remember what you felt when you saw Look Back in Anger? Was it this great revolutionary step forward in terms of how you experienced theatre or...?

DD: Well I think it was, but I think at the same time I was disappointed in the character of Jimmy. I felt he was a bit of a whinger and, you know, I came out thinking, 'well you know, what's he got to be angry about, why is he so angry, what's he got to be so angry about?' You know, 'he should get on with his life and get out and do something'. [Laughs]

JA: Interesting, OK.

DD: And it left me with that kind of feeling. We had these great long orations and speeches where he was... he had this woman at the ironing table completely under his thumb. And everybody adored this angry young man, but I got a bit impatient with him.

JA: So did you see productions at the Old Vic? We've talked about the Green Room...

DD: The Bristol Old Vic, yes.

JA: Yes, the Bristol... was it as a matter of course?

DD: Yes it did...it was. I mean, there were some very fine perform... I saw Miles Malleon there in a production of Sganarelle, and he was absolutely wonderful. I mean he was very well known at that time, Miles Malleon, a wonderful actor – getting on in years and I don't think it was all that much later that he died. And there were other people too. As I say my memory for names is drifting away now. But I saw productions of... oh Joseph O'Connor I think it was who played Othello. That was a fine production.

And being exposed to professional theatre at Bristol Old Vic so readily was absolutely wonderful. So we had the best of everything really you know.

JA: Yes, it sounds it.

DD: People like... some of the best actors coming out of RADA, like Peter O'Toole. And being able to see them, and actually you know going to parties – they'd turn up at parties that students were throwing, student parties on Saturday nights.

JA: So socially the theatre school people and the universities would mix?

DD: Absolutely, oh yes.

JA: No sense of a barrier between...?

DD: No, no, there wasn't, no. In fact the professional actors from the Bristol Old Vic used to go into the next door pub. And once we'd been in and watched the production we'd go in there and talk to them. And well, you know, they enjoyed it too. They enjoyed people coming up and saying 'Oh you were wonderful', you know, 'An absolutely marvellous performance'. And they lapped it up, they enjoyed it. I mean, theatre people have always been great drinkers anyway. [Laughs]

JA: That's true. Any good Peter O'Toole stories from any of these parties then?

DD: Well the thing I remember about Peter O'Toole, one day I was walking up [Park] Street I think it was, and up this steep hill towards the university. And it was early in the evening, on a summers evening. And there was Peter sitting in this doorway. And he was looking at a hole in his sock. [Laughs] And that image has always stuck with me of Peter O'Toole... and I think he was actually crying over this hole in his sock. You know I don't want to say anything disparaging, it wasn't disparaging. But it may well have been that he was studying a part; you know, studying for a part.

JA: I was going to say, getting preparation for a Godot part or something.

DD: Well absolutely, who knows! But he, you know, he was living in this world of his own, and probably finding the spirit or whatever to play this particular role.

JA: OK. Actually one more thing about the Old Vic – the Bristol Old Vic – the mechanics of it, it was obviously professional theatre, you were subsisting on a student budget, were there reductions for students? Was it something that was felt that was affordable as part of your normal student lifestyle?

DD: Do you know I can't... I honestly can't remember. I cannot remember the details of getting in or not. They probably were. They probably... but you know it would be wrong of me to try and be assertive on that. No, I cannot remember. I just used to know if I could go I would.

JA: You would, yes, yes. OK. So we said that your first role in the second year... your first acting role with the Green Room was in Streetcar, we've said that you'd done work at Dartington the previous summer, can you remember any other productions that you acted in leading up to The Room?

DD: Well I'd mentioned Hamlet of course.

JA: And Hamlet yes.

DD: I'd played Hamlet and I'd thoroughly enjoyed that. I mean, the variety of emotions one has to bring to this character. You know, I was reading something in The Guardian I think only last week about the various Hamlets that have been played down the year. And every actor brings something different to Hamlet; every actor plays his own Hamlet, because the man is, you know, so variable. He is indefinable. We know what he does, we know what happens to him in the course of the play, but as you speak each of these lines you find something different, you find something fresh.

I mean, I only played it for two or three nights I think, but each night there was something different. I hadn't had long enough to settle down into the performance, which you need to with a play like that. But even in the few short scenes that I played, the magic of this part taking hold of you as an actor was very, very exciting – and emotionally draining. And even in the short scene that we did, you go through the cycle of this man who is virtually demented at the outset, and then gradually calms down as he comes back, and faces death quite stoically at the end. You know this... what's the line? There's some... you know it, 'there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow'.

JA: Oh right.

DD: I mean, that's a wonderful line – 'there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow'. And it really sums up Hamlet that, you know the common touch, the bird, his love of nature, and yet the providence, the intellectual aspect behind it, and the sort of religious overtones of the whole thing – wonderful part.

JA: So...

DD: Oh, I was also in Venus Observed by Christopher Fry. We did that in university, and I played the son. And he had some very good lines too. Fry was a strange writer really. I like Venus Observed as a play; I think there's some wonderful speeches in it. All very middle class of course.

JA: Yes, he was almost out of fashion already by then wasn't he I suppose, 57.

DD: Well he was, he was moving out of fashion. But even now his plays are playable in the provinces, if not in London.

JA: Well obviously this is focused around *The Room* so let's move to that. Can you remember the first mention of this play *The Room*?

DD: Very well. [Laughs] Because I was outside the university, and Henry of course who I knew very well came up to me in early May and said, 'Oh David!' he said, 'I'm glad I've bumped into you.' he said, 'I want to ask you something.'. I said, 'Well, please do.'. He said, 'Will you be in a play?'. I said, 'Well it's a bit late in the year' I said, 'we've got exams coming up soon Henry. What is it?'. He said, 'Well I don't know yet, it's not yet been written.' [Laughs]

JA: It's not very encouraging is it?

DD: And so I said, 'Well, how do you know that I'm right for it?' He said, 'Oh don't worry' he said, 'you'll be all right for it. Don't worry' he said, 'you'll be fine.'. So I said, 'Well, when's it going to be ready?'. He said, 'Oh it'll be written in a week' he said, 'it'll be ready next week.' I said, 'Well what is it, a three Act or a one...'. He said, 'Well I think it'll be a one Act.' He said, 'This friend of mine's writing it.' And he said, 'I'd like you to be in it if you will.' So I said, 'Well I tell you what Henry' I said, 'you know, when you've got the play, you know let me read it and I'll let you know what I think.'.

So he duly produced this play at the end of the week. And he said, 'Here's the play.' We were sitting in the Cardoma Café opposite the university. And he produced this play and said, 'This is it.' And I said... I said, 'I don't believe it.' He said, 'Well' he said, 'he's written it in four days actually.' And I said, 'Oh that's quite incredible.' And he said, 'Well there's a part for you which I think you'll like' he said, 'it's called Mr Sands, the character.' So I went away and read it, and we agreed to meet again in the bar I think, or somewhere, and discuss it.

And he said, 'Well what do you think?' I said, 'Well...'. I said, 'I can't make head nor tail of it Henry.' I said, 'I've no idea what it's about.'! [Laughs] He said, 'Don't worry about that,' he said, 'do you think there's any theatre in it?'. I said, 'Oh yes.' I said, 'you know, there's bags of theatre in it,' I said, 'it's very funny in parts.' And I said, 'Obviously this ending is so strong and so dramatic,' I said, 'but really' I said, 'you know, what's it about?' I said, 'You know, characters don't go anywhere, they come into this room and they talk a bit, and they go out and...'. He said, 'Well do you feel any tensions?'. I said, 'Oh yes, there's bags of tension in the play,' I said, 'there's no question about that.' He said, 'Well will you do it?'. I said, 'Yes, I'll do it if you want me to do it. Fortunately the part that I have isn't all that big', and I think... I can't remember, but I think we got a couple of weeks in which to do it – if that.

JA: Well, if you said that was taking place, that first conversation took place in early May, I think the production itself was mid-May. I haven't got the date in front of me, but...

DD: Yes, I can't be, you know, precise about the first meeting was.

JA: Yes, but we're talking weeks not...

DD: But it was a very short period of time. And, I mean, I read the play, and then he told me who the people were who... in fact I don't think he'd got them together at that stage, because he told me that I was the only one he'd asked in advance of the play arriving whether I'd be in it. [Laughs] Anyway I duly read the play, and I started learning lines, which one does.

JA: Did you... I asked you before, you said that you were friends with Henry, had he mentioned this other friend of his Harold Pinter/David Baron beforehand, or was this the first mention of Henry's actor friend?

DD: Oh I think it was the first mention of... I didn't know this... because I mean he wasn't in Bristol.

JA: No, no.

DD: Harold Pinter wasn't in Bristol, he was in rep I think somewhere down in... on the south coast wasn't he?

JA: Yes, yes.

DD: But he did say he was a friend. I think he said he was in weekly rep or something. And so we... I duly got together with... no, I remember what I... I went and saw a first rehearsal of it, and Claude Jenkins was in it. And it was a rehearsal doing the first scene between Sue Engel and Claude, who are the Mr & Mrs Hudd. And you know, I was so impressed with what they were doing. I mean, it was so riveting. I thought 'this is tremendous stuff'. I can remember Claude sitting there at this table, and he was a big guy you know. I mean, I'm not small, I'm six foot, but I think he towered over me by three or four inches – or he seemed to. And he was very dark and very handsome guy. And very dark, and big, and broad, and when he walked he'd got this... like a sort of a John Wayne walk, you know?

And he sat at this table, and I remember Sue Engel doing all the talking. But you couldn't help looking at Claude. He wasn't upstaging her; it was just by the very nature of the process of the drama itself, that she'd ask questions, which of course were unanswered. And he just carried on having his breakfast, and she was cosseting him, and, you know, saying how... what a wonderful driver he was and all the rest of it. And you'd get these periodic pauses when she'd gone on about how warm the room was, and how lovely it was, and how cold it was outside, and that he'd got to wrap up well before he went out. And you've got this sort of... But there was this unease running, right in the first scene,

because there was no response from this guy who was sitting there. And there was somehow a... it was uncomfortable, which it was meant to be.

JA: Yes. So you were watching this first rehearsal before you'd agreed to take part, or you'd signed up for the play?

DD: No, I think I'd agreed to take part at that stage. But I was impressed, I think, as to how far they'd actually got in a very short space of time into finding the mood of that particular scene of that play. And we moved on with it and rehearsed. I can remember very little about the rehearsal period. We didn't... in fact... we didn't talk about the play...

JA: I was going to ask...

DD: ...we didn't have time to talk about the play!

JA: Right, yes.

DD: Or at least... I hope I'm not doing Henry a disservice by saying that. I just cannot recall ever discussing the play. Once we got into rehearsal I think our position as actors - you know our natural attributes as actors - were wholly given over to what we were doing, and trying to find some interaction between these characters - trying to find the characters in the very process of acting itself.

What I can remember is that I didn't understand the pauses. [Laughs] The play was littered with pauses, and yet I couldn't understand them. But gradually it began to evolve. In fact I'm not even sure in the early stages whether I just didn't run over... whether I ran over some of the pauses, instead of pausing just carried on, which of course... they're so important. You know, now looking back and having directed Chekhov and various other dramatists, where you are looking into the moment of the pause - because what's gone before up to that very moment, when there is a pause, particularly with Pinter, is absolutely [vital] psychologically. You know, whatever a character said before the pause creates the pause, because of the reaction probably on the character that the line's been directed to. I mean, there are quite a few that Rose has where she asks questions. And Mr Kidd is so evasive with all his answers about when he'd lived in the bedroom, and, you know, what... where he was living now, and how long he'd lived there. He was completely evasive about all this. But when he actually does give a direct answer she's taken aback. And that's when you get the pause. And you're watching her, and her reaction to it. And it creates this feeling of unease and uncomfortableness, which of course is the heart of Pinter's work.

JA: Well it sounds as if you were working this out unconsciously as you were going along then. It wasn't... you said originally that your first question to Henry was 'what's it all about?'. Did he... he never took these questions head on, he just let you work it through?

DD: No, no he didn't. No, I think Henry himself was as unsure as we were in those early stages. I mean, I know he was a good friend of Harold Pinter's, and probably had more knowledge of, you know what was going on in the Theatre of the Absurd. Because there were parallels, unquestionably, and there are parallels. But no, I think... I mean he was a wonderful director in that, you know, he was letting us find it for ourselves, and I think that was important.

And of course he was playing Mr Kidd, so he had his own problems to think about as well. You know, when you direct a play and you act in it, it's a big job. I mean Gielgud found this out. He was never at his best as an actor when he was directing a play, because he was thinking more time about what other actors were doing than his own performance. And so Henry had a lot of time to spend on his own part too. And I think he said 'well, I've chosen people who are capable and I'll let them get on with it to' a large extent. He had to, because the rehearsal time was so short.

JA: It sounds it. So your Mrs Sands was Auriol Smith...

DD: Yes.

JA: ...you worked closely with her on kind of working through the couple, and what their role was in this household?

DD: Yes, I think we did. I think I sat down with Auriol and you know, we chatted about what we were doing. But a lot of the time, you know, as actors you get into doing the text, and you were reading the text, and you were going through it. And you were saying 'well, you know, what do you feel about this?', or 'well, you know...' And she would do the same with me. And that was part of the learning process.

I mean, I look back at the character now, Mr Sands – and can see it, I think, far more clearly than I could in those days, you know as a 19 or 20 year old boy – well, 20 I think I was. You know, it was all new to me. And I really didn't know how to analyse, sit down and analyse a play or analyse a character, as I do now, you know 50 years later. But it was instinctive. It was instinctive acting, and I think it was from both of us. But you know whereas now I could pick up a passage and say 'well, this is sheer music hall this, and it's got to be taken at a cracking pace, because there's a lot of fun in it. And that page of dialogue there has got to contrast with the slower passage that comes overleaf, or a little later on'. And you do this as a director. You know, you say where are the slow passages, where are the quick passages, where are the loud passages, where are the quieter ones? And you look for all those things, because it's the variety that keeps the audience in their seats.

JA: OK. At the same time there was... this was a one act-er, it was part of a double bill with a play called The Rehearsal by J.G. Severns. Did you have any contact with the group who were preparing that play?

DD: No, no.

JA: That was done separately.

DD: Didn't even know that was on! [Laughs]

JA: Oh right, yes. No it was...

DD: No.

JA: ...The Rehearsal with Jim Severns. He was another American. I don't know if he was a Fulbright per se, but he was an American student.

DD: What was his name?

JA: Jim Severns. He's credited in the programme as J.G. Severns, but James or Jim Severns his name is.

DD: Oh I don't know. Do you know, that's slipped my memory completely? I don't think I ever worked with him. I'd certainly worked with Claude on quite a few things. And I think there were three male Fulbright students there. There was one who... and I can't remember his name, but he was a very, very fine actor. And he was actually in mime as well. I think he'd studied mime, and he did an evening of mime in the Green Room, in the old squash court. And it was very revealing to me, it was wonderfully... I can still see him now playing this tree growing from an acorn, growing into this great oak tree – and completely fascinating. And I saw him once or twice in later years in American films, playing small roles. [Phil Bruns]

JA: OK. Well I think Jim Severns was friends with Claude, I believe, but I'm not...

DD: I'm sure he was. He may have been the big, burly guy. There was one that was a bit bigger and older, and burlier. And he may have been the one that was in... that played in In Camera – Sartre's In Camera.

JA: Oh, I think that rings a bell.

DD: Perhaps he did.

JA: I think he did. He was a Korean War veteran, so he would have been slightly older than your 20 year olds.

DD: He was. I'm sure he was much older than we were. And he was very good in that. I remember that production of In Camera.

JA: Yes, I think he played Garcin actually, which of course was the role that Pinter played on telly later on as well. So there's parallels everywhere. So Claude, actually interesting you talk about the Fulbrights and their immersion in method acting, did he try and bring any of that to this, from what you remember?

DD: Claude?

JA: Yes. To The Room.

DD: No. I mean I just remember this dark, overpowering presence of Claude Jenkins. Mind you, he could be like that in other plays too, because he really did have a very powerful aura about him when he played a role. And I mean I never saw what he did in America. And he didn't really show off his best I think in productions that we put on. But I mean, I could well imagine him playing Shakespearian tragedy quite well, playing some of the great roles. I don't know whether he did. I never heard anything further about his career afterwards.

JA: I haven't been able to track down much about him, so I assume probably not.

DD: No, have you not? No, no, there is that photograph of him there that you...

JA: Yes, yes.

DD: ...yes, on the front.

JA: So your initial reaction was 'what's this all about'. Do you remember worrying during the rehearsal period as to how the audience would take this?

DD: Well I was puzzled, no, but the thing about when you become... you know, when as an actor you take on a role, whatever it is you become totally immersed in it. You know, whether it's Brecht, or [Shakespeare], or Chekhov, or what it is, as an actor you become totally concentrated on what you're doing. And given such a short time that we had before the play went on, I mean, it was learning lines as well, and making sure you got the right lines out in the right order. [Laughs]

JA: Yes, that was the priority. OK.

DD: I mean, there's that wonderful line by David Niven when he was asked how he acted, he said, 'Well, I stand in the wings, I make sure my flies are fastened and I go on.' [Laughs]

JA: Yes, the bare essentials.

DD: Yes.

JA: So did Pinter... do you remember if Pinter had any involvement with this very, very short and concentrated rehearsal process, or if through Henry he was sending any advice or guidance through?

DD: I cannot honestly remember any of that. In fact I was only thinking this morning coming down on the train, 'did I ever meet him'. And I'm not sure whether I did. If we did I think it was probably the shortest of greetings on the night of the play, because he did come down. And it may have either been in the wings that Henry introduced him to us, or perhaps before the curtain went up. But I can't honestly say he had much influence on what we were doing. Certainly on my role. I had worked with Auriol quite a lot on the play rehearsing our scenes. And then we got together with Susan, who of course was the third party in our scenes. And we had about two or three rehearsals I think – I don't think we had any more than that – before we actually went on. So it was a bit of a nervous experience actually going on on the night, because certainly from my own point of view I like to have a lot of rehearsal, and feel secure - very secure - in what I'm doing, you know before I go through onto the stage. And my memory... if my memory serves me right I still felt that you know, we'd still a bit of rehearsal to do on that play before we got... we were exposed to an audience.

JA: OK. Well looking at that first... well the first night – there were only two nights – can you remember anything about the production, both how it went as far as you who knew the play by that point, how you took it, and how the audience reacted?

DD: Yes. Well my memory of it is one of being received by gales of laughter at so much of what Auriol and I were doing. I mean, I thought it was funny before I'd you know, learnt the lines. But of course as an actor, once you start doing the play you are, you know, more or less absorbed with what you're doing. And there's always the danger of playing for laughs. There is always the danger... for laughs. You've got to know the play you're in that's what, you know, John Gielgud said. But nevertheless, I mean, within the play itself there is farce, there is tragedy, there is drama. And you've got to know at which point in the play Harold Pinter is saying 'I want the audience to laugh here, because this is funny'. I mean, I saw him being interviewed a few months ago on television, and he made that comment, he said 'This is funny' – he said, you know there is a lot of humour in these plays. And you know, it was like Chekhov himself said the same about his plays: 'My plays are funny'. And if you play them too slow and too serious, you know they cease to be funny. And certainly in the scenes reading them on the train as I came down, between Mr and Mrs... the two... Mr and Mrs Sands, there was great humour there, there was great fun. And I've no doubt Harold Pinter intended the audience to have a good laugh at them.

I mean, just to... if I may, you know, just to sort of give you an example. This is intentional humour, Mr Sands say, 'Yes, there was a bloke down there all right.' And Mrs Sands says... and the instruction is 'He perches on the table'. And Mrs Sands says, 'You're sitting down.' - Mr Sands jumping up - 'Who is?' 'You were.' 'Don't be silly, I perched.' Now, that word perched...

JA: It's the language, yes.

DD: It's the language isn't it? Harold is saying 'this is a laugh here; the audience have got to laugh at this'. 'I saw you sit down' she says. 'You did not see me sit down, because I did not sit bloody well down, I perched.' 'Do you think I can't perceive when somebody's sitting down?' 'Perceive, that's all you do, perceive.' You know, unusual words.

JA: Yes, it's the repetition as well that takes the...

DD: I mean it's... and the repetition. And it's no wonder audiences fall about when they hear and see that sort of thing.

JA: But that's interesting, because this would have been very strange to this first night audience as well.

DD: Oh yes.

JA: But your recollection is that the humour didn't get lost, and...

DD: Oh no, not at all, no. I mean, they loved it, they laughed. In fact I remember in the bar afterwards a friend of mine, a Welshman, came up and he said, [Welsh accent] 'David,' he said, 'I never knew you could play comedy.'. [Laughs] I said, 'Neither did I.' He said, 'I haven't laughed so much in all my life.'

JA: That's a fantastic summation of Pinter's first play. So any sense of who was in the audience? Was it mainly friends and students from the drama department, or was this open to local community as well?

DD: I really don't know. I think quite a lot of people came from the drama department. Whether Glynne Wickham was there, and George Brandt and co, I really don't know. I presume they probably were because... my memory's very hazy about this, but I do seem to recollect that, you know, a lot of the top brass was actually there. And I knew Harold Pinter was in the audience too. I must have known because he must... probably we were introduced to him at the outset. But of course I didn't know him from Adam. I mean, you know, he was an unknown name in those days.

JA: You must have been curious though, having done this play by this unknown person who suddenly...

DD: Well what struck me so much... what I was curious about was the attention that it was given at the end, you know in the discussion afterwards. We went back to the bar and drank, and as I say this friend of mine was very amused by it. He said you know it was really very funny. And he said 'What a strange play', he said, 'I can't understand what it's about'. I said, 'Well, you know, that's two of us!'. [Laughs]

But I think during the rehearsal period, as we got closer to the play, and I was watching the others, because when I was in the wings waiting to go on, I didn't know how the play was being received – not during the quiet scene. But when I saw the play in rehearsal I knew – I think we all knew – that we were in the presence of something that was new, and exciting, and strange. We couldn't put our finger on it, but we knew it was... it had something, this play. And although it was only a one act-er, and you know, it was delving into melodrama towards the end. I think the play takes a downward turn once it loses the evasions and the... you know, the failure to answer questions. Once Mr Kidd starts giving direct answers to Rose about Mr Riley in the basement, it ceases to be the play that it was in the first part of the play.

JA: Especially once he's literalised it gets more difficult doesn't it?

DD: Yes it does. Yes, he's got to wind up the play; he's got to do something with it.

JA: Yes.

DD: God forbid, I mean, if he wrote it in four days... [Laughs]

JA: Yes. No, we shouldn't forget that.

DD: Absolutely remarkable. But...

JA: But it sounds like from what you're saying that post show discussion, informal discussion, people... the audience shared your sense of freshness.

DD: I think so yes. I think they did. I think there was a sense of excitement about this new writing. And you know, even to take... you know the play very well now, and this silent character in the background, Bert, who doesn't say a word, yet who dominates the play. He's always the threat in the background. We know he's coming back.

There are time shifts as well. We're all thrown off balance. And this is the definition, I think, of the Theatre of the Absurd, it's out of harmony. It doesn't mean it's silly, it just means absurd in the sense of Theatre of the Absurd means it's out of harmony – disjointed.

But you've got this threat of Bert in the background all the time. And it does remind me of *The Lesson*, of Ionesco's *The Lesson*, where you've got this power thing going on. You've got this strong sexual thing underneath, you know, between Bert and Rose. And even though they're getting on in years, nevertheless it's still there. He is the dominant character. He never says a word, it's the reverse almost of *The Lesson*, you know, where the professor browbeats the girl down. But it's almost the reverse. And then you've got that scene right at the end where he comes back. And he's got those few short sentences that are so strident, you know.

JA: The driving...

DD: They sum up this man. 'I caned her along, she was good and I got back. I could see the road all right. There was no cars. One there was, he wouldn't move. I bumped him, I got my road. I had all my way!' There again... they shoved out of it, you know it wasn't a case of I pushed them off the road, 'they shoved out of it'. And you think that's strange, what strange terminology. 'I kept on the straight. There was no mixing it. Not with her.' [Laughs] And so on. 'I got my road, I had all my way.' And you know you listen to that sentence and you think well you know it's... that's not colloquial, that's something strange. And of course they're all very short, staccato sentences with lots of hard consonants in them that give the actor playing Mr Hudd this frightening... and of course as I say, [Claude] Jenkins when he stood up and knocked the chair over, he was very terrifying.

JA: I was going to ask, you talked about the laughter, but that final climactic moment where Riley is pulverised really...

DD: Absolutely.

JA: ...that must have had an effect on the audience very...

DD: Well I think it did. I mean, you know, they went into... with them all very quiet and very silent obviously. And I mean there were overtones of racism and everything in that... you know, the worst aspect of the job, all summed up in that final scene – his hatred of... you know his racist attitudes coming out. And of course a little bit of [that] comes out in her as well in that scene with Riley when he comes into the room and she... I mean she doesn't actually directly refer to his colour, but nevertheless you feel it's there in the background, in her talking about him, and the way it's all...

But of course her problem is that she's frightened of losing this room. She's frightened of it with Sands, you know when she says 'Come in and sit down', and they do come in and sit down. And they say, 'Oh this is a nice room, yes, we were told...' and she says, 'What number room was it?' and he says 'Seven'. And Pinter has a pause there. 'That's the number of this room.' she says, you know. And that's how he creates his theatre – wonderful.

JA: It's interesting, I mean George Odum has passed away a while ago so we haven't obviously been able to talk to him.

DD: I didn't know that. I never knew George really.

JA: I was going to... did you have any contact with him or...?

DD: I didn't. I didn't have any contact with him. I didn't know George at all. Well, I mean, I knew he was in the production, but we didn't come into contact with each other in the play, and we had no... And of course he only had that small role at the end, so I don't think he attended many rehearsals that I was at.

JA: Oh OK. Well I believe he was in law, so I think he was actually... he wasn't part of the drama department, so that would make sense.

DD: No, no he wasn't. No, I didn't know him.

JA: Yes, OK. Well this was reviewed the next day in the two local papers: The Evening World, and The Post.

DD: Yes.

JA: Was that... do you remember being made aware that the play had been reviewed, and was that unusual for one of your Green Room productions?

DD: I can't recall the reviews of it. Have you got them there?

JA: Do you remember of any of your other plays were reviewed? It strikes me that...

DD: Well they did actually. The Bristol Evening Post did come up and see our productions. Not so much at the Green Room, but more at the Victoria Rooms, on the big stage, they would come up there and give reviews. And generally they were very kind. You know they were quite kind to us too. I may have read these reviews at the time but can't recall them. Anyway there's obviously not time for me to read them now.

JA: But it wasn't unprecedented for a reviewer to come and...?

DD: No, it wasn't.

JA: OK.

DD: No they did come. And it was quite encouraging. I remember we had a review for Venus Observed in the Victoria Rooms, and they were... it was a nice review. I remember it because they said some nice things about me. [Laughs]

JA: Those are the kind of reviews you remember aren't they?!

DD: I know actors say they never read the papers, but they do you know. It's a lie.

JA: Well both these reviews were very, very positive, and I think one of them goes on to say that 'Mr Pinter may well have a future in writing', which is...

DD: Well obviously they knew didn't they? They knew their stuff.

JA: So given that this was positively reviewed, it seemed that you were picking up a reaction from the audience members that was perhaps slightly different from other plays you had done. That there was this awareness of something fresh and new had happened. Did you have any hopes for any afterlife of the play after your two performances?

DD: I didn't. I really didn't. I didn't know what was... I mean, you know, the play was over as far as we were concerned. It was another performance and life moves on. And I had other things to do as a student. I'd got to get stuck into preparing for exams and what have you. And it was only afterwards, because I'd left shortly after that and then went into the forces, into the RAF and did my National Service. And it was while I was there that I sort of got out of the stream. And although I continued to do plays, even during my National Service, but I used to keep abreast of what was going on, and read in the papers. And I mean I was interested to see that it had actually gone up to London, the play. And I think it was a couple of years later, and Harold Pinter himself had directed it at... where was it?

JA: It went to the Hampstead Theatre in 1960.

DD: The Hampstead Theatre Club first, yes.

JA: The Theatre Club, and then to the Court.

DD: And I was more interested to read that some of the original cast were still in it – people like Susan Engel's and... I don't know whether... did she go up to Hampstead?

JA: No because Vivian Merchant was in it by that point.

DD: Oh was she?

JA: I think it was only actually...

DD: Auriol Smith was in it though. I remember reading about Auriol being in it, and I thought 'oh yes, that's great'. And then later I saw this character who was playing my role... [Laughs]

JA: I was going to ask if you'd ever seen it, yes. What did you make of him?

DD: Well, I mean you know, he's a natural cockney isn't he? I mean, he should be have been ideal for the role I would have thought. Henry said something nice to me in his letter to me a couple of years ago, but I'm not going to repeat it. [Laughs]

JA: Did you stay in contact...? Obviously you went off to do your National Service, very much removed from Bristol. You said earlier when we were talking that you didn't really return to Bristol much after you left, but did you keep in contact with any of the... with Auriol or Claude, your friend?

DD: No I didn't. I mean, they went on to make their... you know into the profession. Had I stayed at Bristol and continued with my degree, I don't know, perhaps I may have stayed in the theatre. But when I came out having done National Service I think I wanted to settle down and you know, have a pay cheque at the end of the month. So I was pulled two ways, but I did... I managed to get a job in the civil service, and you know it was a good one. And once I got into that I thoroughly enjoyed that. I mean I enjoyed my career. But at the same time, after the first three or four years... I mean, I got married when I was 27. And it was my wife's mother actually who used to be in women's Towns', Womens Guild Theatre, and she encouraged me to get back into theatre. And I went along to a reading of Much Ado About Nothing that they were doing in Lytham St Anne's, where we lived at the time. And they gave me the part of Benedick, they asked me to play Benedick, which I did. And I loved it. And that sort of got me back into theatre in an amateur capacity.

JA: But you never... did you act in any Pinter since?

DD: No, no I've never acted in Pinter since. But we did a weekend's school a couple of years ago in our own theatre, working on The Betrayal, which is a wonderful play. Thoroughly enjoyed it. But it was just a weekend school – and I directed a few scenes from that, for the purpose of the school – you know making use of the pauses and finding out what the pauses were all about. I mean this is half the fun of doing theatre, what's going on in this play, you know what is it all about, what is this dramatist about, what is he trying to say? And there's as much life in the pauses as there is... well very often more than in the actual dialogue.

JA: And did you tell people at that point about your original involvement with the original Pinter?

DD: Oh I think so. I think so. I think, you know, that any opportunity down the years...!  
[Laughs]

JA: Quite right. Well that's fantastic. I think we've kind of come to the close of that story.

DD: Right.

JA: But thank you very much, it's very interesting.

DD: Not at all. And thank you Jamie for asking me. I hope it's been OK.

[Interview resumes]

JA: ...that you ever had any contact with Pinter afterwards?

DD: Well yes I did actually, because a few... well I suppose it was within a couple of weeks I had a letter from him thanking me for being in the production. And he was most generous in his comments, except that he said he had to go out halfway through the performance. He said 'I'm sorry I had to get out,' he said, 'I'd had a few drinks beforehand, and had to rush off to the loo!'. [Laughs] So whether he managed to get back to see the rest of it or not I don't know, but... And the annoying thing is I had that letter for years, and then I got married and I left it in a drawer at home, and I think my mother threw it out. [Laughs]

JA: Oh no! Oh dear.

DD: Anyway, that just sort of finishes it off.

JA: Absolutely, that's great.

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