

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Timothy West – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Catherine Jones**

**5 January 2004**

Actor, born 1934, on his recollections of theatre, 1945-68.

CJ: In your autobiography, *A Moment Towards the End of the Play*, you have noted that from a young age you viewed a play every week by the Rapier Players at The Little Theatre, Bristol. Can you tell me what plays you saw and your initial impressions of them?

TW: Well, it's very difficult to remember when I was very sort of...eight or nine at the time, but they were generally plays that had been done in the West End and were then...when they had finished their run in the West End, were available for production purposes by repertory. And, there were new plays by a lot of writers whose names we wouldn't remember now at all. But, there were of course Noel Coward and Terrence Rattigan and - probably not Terrence Rattigan at that time, I think that was a little later, - but they were mostly light comedies and a lot of thrillers, a great many thrillers, and a lot of adaptations of Agatha Christie and people, but mixed with the occasional classic. And they did plays by Shaw and the occasional Shakespeare, the occasional Chekhov, the occasional Ibsen, the occasional Moliere. There would be Irish plays, [such as] *O'Casey*. [It is a] pity they ever did *O'Neill* (a bit long), but it was a sort of general mix of stuff which you didn't see so much in the larger touring theatre, (the Hippodrome in Bristol), because that was given over mostly to opera, to ballet, musical theatre and the occasional big tour by the classical companies, (which in those days were the Old Vic Company or the Stratford upon Avon Company, which was not then called the Royal Shakespeare Company).

CJ: How do you think that these plays that you saw at The Little Theatre compared to some of the post - war plays of the period [1945 - 1968]?

TW: What? In terms of writing?

CJ: In terms of...In terms of the plays that you saw, how did they compare in terms of themes and things like that? How did this compare to plays of the post - war period?

TW: Oh, well, the development was a very gradual one, you know. People say: "Oh 1956 was a watershed with *Look Back in Anger*." It was much more gradual than that. People gradually became more in need of plays, which showed life as it actually was, rather than life, as you would like it to be, you know. A lot of the... loads of the plays up here [Gestures to a bookcase behind him full of theatre manuals and an assortment of plays] which were very popular before the war, and indeed after the war, among the certain public, where everybody wore a dinner jacket in the third act and it was in a house that you wished you'd owned [laughs] with people that you wish you knew and it was life seen through a very privileged way. It didn't mean that the audience who went to see those plays were essentially privileged or belonged to a particular class, because

the West End of course was very class divided. Everybody went, but if you went in through the front door you got a nice foyer and a nice place to have a drink and sit in a reasonably comfortable seat, whereas if you were the gallery patron you went round the corner up an endless flight of stone stairs and you never met the other people at all, and you didn't have the use of those foyers, which is why the foyers now look ridiculously small to us because not all that many people used them, the others went all round the back. So, it's a mistake to think that the theatre suddenly opened its doors to a whole new audience, it just, it bowed to a growing need. As Arthur Miller said: "the theatre seems to be hermetically sealed against life as it really is." And suddenly we saw that you could do plays about real life, and people had been doing them for some time but they weren't always getting to the audiences. They were performed in club theatres. They were performed in little, tiny, theatre groups.

Remember, there was no real fringe theatre in London, until way after the war, so either a play was done very, very secretly with a club licence or it was done openly and had to be assessed along with everything else. Public appreciation of plays that were not very conventionally done took a little time to warm up but it wasn't that suddenly everybody saw *Look Back in Anger* and went: "Wow! Now we can really take off." It was more gradual.

CJ: And what do you think it is about the 'idea plays' that... people started to suddenly appreciate them more? What sort of circumstances do you think caused this?

TW: I think it was a growing need to...not to be cocooned. I think probably film had a lot to do with it. We saw films that were not just, you know, cosy and honey - coloured, and we read books that exposed us much more to what was actually going on in the world, and so we thought: "Lets see it in the theatre as well."

CJ: In your autobiography you claim that play writing came across more strongly in regional theatre productions that were stripped 'either of its West End glitter or South Bank Technical effects'. Does this sense of simplicity in terms of effects and stage properties lead you to favour kitchen sink dramas in post - war theatre, over the sitting room dramas of playwrights such as Terrence Rattigan?

TW: Well, now I think you've got two questions there really. I was talking about the actual physical production of plays compared to how they would be done either in the West End or in the subsidised big theatres, and when you haven't got those physical production facilities I've found that very often the actual clarity of the play, clarity of the writing, of the argument, is much more accessible. But, that applies just as much to kitchen sink drama as it does to Shakespeare, you know.

CJ: And did any specific post- war plays have a profound impact upon you?

TW: A great many. Yes. I've sort of made a list of some of the writers. [Taps a list held in his hand] I mean, almost anything by Pinter, anything by Arnold Wesker. There was of course Arthur Miller, of course Samuel Beckett, Osborne, a very good Welsh writer who was called Gwyn Thomas and is practically forgotten now. *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, made a great impression on me because it was a very, very ugly tale about the reality of soldiering at a time when we were being a bit sort of gung ho about the whole thing of war. [continues reading list] *Shelagh Delaney, A Taste of Honey*. What have I written here? Oh yes, well a number of foreign plays that were seen for the first time, by people like Ionesco and Genet. The rather sort of smarter more West End plays were also being more imaginative. I mean, there were plays by Peter Ustinov, Graeme Greene and Robert Bolt. I sense that from some of your questions you think that Terrence Rattigan's a bit naff?

CJ: I don't know. I think I actually quite like his play writing. It is just quite noticeable the stark difference between that and some of the more absurdist theatre.

TW: Yes, you actually have to look at his complete oeuvre really. There are a lot of his plays that are really quite savage if you dig into them and they are not all comfortable by any means. And you know he had a lot of difficulty, (but we'll come to that in a minute) with the Lord Chamberlain and with having to conceal his homosexuality. Though of course, you must remember that the whole post-war, smart theatre, particularly under the aegis of HM Tennent, who were the big producers, was a very, very gay outfit and so everybody was having to cloak their kind of homosexual attitudes. Which, you know, didn't necessarily mean that they were... that they had a destructive or oppressive effect, it kind of sharpened the awareness of it. If you had to put it into other words, as Oscar Wilde of course did, you actually improved on the subject and on the presentation. It is ridiculous now that people like Gielgud and Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness and people had to go on pretending to be straight people.

CJ: When you directed *Our Town* at the 'Sunday Times National Student Drama Festival,' the esteemed critic Harold Hobson praised your efforts. Can you tell me how important Harold Hobson was as a theatre critic during this time and how his comments affected you?

TW: Yes, he was very important and so one took what he said really quite seriously, whereas with your ordinary, run of the mill drama critic nowadays you just think: "Well, thanks very much. That is your opinion." But Hobson wielded an enormous amount of influence and part of that influence was because of the way he was treated and respected by his editors. He was given an enormous space for his reviews in comparison to what we see today, so that he could go into immense detail and could really educate the public and he had an enormous prescience. I mean, he was, as you know, the only person who ever wrote a good...[review of *The Birthday Party* ] You got the date slightly wrong about the whole Pinter's *Birthday Party*, it wasn't... the debut performance...was not by the RSC in 1964 but it was the Lyric Hammersmith in 1958.

CJ: Oh, right.

TW: No, we revived it at the RSC, but in 1958 Hobson was the only person who gave it a good notice, the rest said it was total rubbish and you know nobody should be insulted by having to sit through this play, and he never forgot crowing about it. [laughs] But he was right.

CJ: Did you used to read Hobson or Tynan's reviews of the plays?

TW: Yes, yes. Always, because they were always worth reading. They were sometimes very savage and sometimes they were very partial (particularly Tynan), but Tynan of course, also, was a great dramaturg. He was a great finder of plays for the National Theatre, so you ought to know...that he knew what he was talking about.

CJ: Do you think it was significant that one of the only plays that he [Harold Hobson] and Kenneth Tynan agreed on was Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*?

TW: Well, yeah, I think they both hit the mark there, yes. I think they were both on the lookout for something that hit a new note theatrically, and particularly for something which...which made a purely theatrical impact, and they were both, Hobson particularly, would point to a moment in a play which meant something extraordinary and unusual to him. It could just be a piece of business, it could be a line, it could be something that happened in a scene, it could be somebody's performance, but very often it was something so tiny that you might actually have missed it, if it hadn't been so remarkable

in establishing a theatrical image, an enduring theatrical image, that he said: "Yes. This is what I go to the theatre for. This is the magic that theatre means to me."

CJ: Do you personally...do you believe that Beckett's play was very important? What is your personal opinion of it?

TW: Well, what's to say what's important? I think it surprised a lot of people. It was much enjoyed. It was a tiny production of course initially, at the Arts Theatre. Peter Hall did it. Not many people saw it but the fact that it's still done all over the world by different people, and actors are falling over themselves to do it is...it means it's important.

CJ: Kenneth Tynan and Harold Hobson both claimed that John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was the turning point in post-war British theatre. Is this your opinion?

TW: Yes, well, as I think I've said I don't believe in right angled turning points. It was prepared to a certain extent. I mean, don't forget that George Devine who ran the Royal Court and ran the English Stage Company, that put the play on had been working with what he called the Young Vic Company, for Oh I think at least ten years trying to... trying to find new theatrical forms, trying to find new playwrights, but above all trying to introduce young people into coming to the theatre, which was only partly successful. He was successful in as much as theatre-going families encouraged their children to go, but getting new kids off the housing estates really eluded him on the whole. But he was trying, and he was introducing new plays and new ways of doing things, and plays that were about people that the audiences who did come would recognise. That was the important thing.

Joan Littlewood in her Theatre Workshop was trying to do the same thing and she'd been going since 1945, and there were other people that probably I've forgotten about now. It was a gradual move, and Osborne was one of a number of writers, who would pick up, like Arnold Wesker of course. Also David Mercer, a little later I suppose, Willis Hall and Keith Waterhouse, who sort of hit the button and I suppose *Look Back in Anger* was [a turning point]. I went to it in its first week and I suppose I was quite shocked by it. I was quite shocked by Jimmy Porter's behaviour on the stage, his not actually being immediately condemned by the writer. He didn't get his comeuppance whereas theatrical law up to that time always meant that somebody who behaved as bad as that, particularly to their wives or loved ones or anyone that the audience was supposed to be sympathetic to, would mean that they were heading for a fall. Osborne is just saying: "This is how it is and this is a problem, and this is.... what this man is complaining about is a situation and an ambience that we are all living in, and it's time that somebody spoke out about it."

CJ: I know that a lot of theatre historians say that one of the things that made audiences sit up and pay attention was the fact that the opening scene is a lady ironing. Did that have an impact on you or do you think that's a myth?

TW: No, I think. The people who were shocked by that perhaps had not seen enough plays where there wasn't just a drinks table and French windows. I don't think that was a sudden thing. I got very cross with the term a 'kitchen sink'. It just meant that you used...well, you invaded different kinds of houses, where it was very difficult to avoid kitchen sink. I mean, the novels of DH Lawrence which had been dramatised in some way or another for a long, long time, are all about kitchen sinks and kitchen stoves and things and they're about poverty, and they're about strife and difficulties, but so are some of Galsworthy's plays. You know, when you're writing about people that are not very well off, you seem to see the kitchen sink. So it was a bit of a sort of cosy phrase that got used a bit too much I think.

CJ: Do you believe that the censorship imposed by the Lord Chamberlain upon plays until 1968 had a negative effect upon theatre?

TW: It had an oppressive effect, yes. There's an interesting book you should read actually which I've just got out because I wanted to look myself [points to book on table] it is by Nicholas De Jongh curiously enough and I had to give it a prize but it's called 'Politics, Prudery and Perversions' and...and it's really a history of the Lord Chamberlain's effect on the theatre in the Twentieth Century. The Lord Chamberlain's readers or controllers, which were a handful of people working directly to him, were a very assorted group of people and some of them, I think, indeed most of them, tried very hard to be as liberal as they could, and very often if there was an argument, if there was a dispute about granting a licence, it was on silly things like actual words rather than the content of the play. I mean if you look at a play like Terrence Rattigan's *Adventure Story*, (I don't know if you know the play?) which was about Alexander the Great, it is quite clearly a homosexual play, about homosexual characters, but nothing that the Lord Chamberlain did... made... produced any [difference]... (I mean I don't know what the original text that was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain was like), but I mean it emerges quite clearly for what it is.

But, I know lots of other plays where tiny scenes or tiny references or more often individual words, were excised and the Lord Chamberlain felt that having done that it was ok to go on. You know, certain things were deemed to be offensive. It was usually language, you know, bad language [laughs]. Charles Marowitz did a lovely scene in his *Theatre of Cruelty* programme which he did in the LAMDA Theatre, (which of course was then a club theatre, of which you had to pay a subscription so that you weren't subject to the Lord Chamberlain's aegis,) and the first thing that he did was a man reading out a letter from the Lord Chamberlain. [Timothy West reads from his sheet]: "Please remove the following words [from] page 2, 'bum' 'fuck' 'buggery' twice, 'shit,' 'bum,' 'arsehole,'" [laughs again] and having removed those things the play went on.

But, towards the end of the Lord Chamberlain's era when people began to feel that his hold was being loosened and the Lord Chamberlain himself felt that he was in a somewhat archaic institution, private prosecutions began to happen [such as] Edward Bond's *Saved at the Royal Court*. A private action was brought which turned out to be by a member of staff at the Royal Court, oddly and strangely enough, to stop the play, and the police were brought in and the play was stopped. And there was a court case and finally they won the court case and the play was subsequently revived. But, it cost a tremendous amount of money and was a dreadful inconvenience. It was a disgraceful thing to happen, but that only happened after the Lord Chamberlain had lost his power. The law had been changed. So, in a way he was a protection against people doing that irresponsibly, and I mean that can still happen now. Anybody can decide if they have got the money to fight a case if they don't like a particular thing and they complain to the watch committee, you know, local council or whatever.

CJ; Although you say that many of the readers were quite liberal, do you think there were circumstances when the reader's reports displayed personal prejudices?

TW: Oh yes, they were bound to have done...bound to have done. Yes, and they were mostly...they were mostly drawn from a particular section of society, a lot of them were service men and they were...they tended to be especially nervous about references to the British Empire or to the Royal family, or anything like that...but they were quite hot on those things so it would have been better had they been drawn from a rather larger group of society.

CJ: As an audience member were you aware of this censorship when you watched a play, and did knowledge of censorship make you more aware of implicit references such as Rattigan's references to homosexuality?

TW: No, I think not, because when you saw the play you sort of paid for what it was or what it had been presented as. I think sometimes perhaps if one had read... (it was very unusual to get a manuscript copy of a play or a play that had been copied from the manuscript before it went into its staged edition)... but had you been able to do so, of course you would have found certain things that had been changed. It was more often, if something was a literary adaptation, you'd think: "hmm, it's a pity they didn't really go into that." But, no, one didn't sit there thinking: "Oh shit, I wish the Lord Chamberlain hadn't interfered with that because that would have been a much more punchy, or violent, or you know better exposition of the scene." You didn't know.

CJ: The debut performance of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* wasn't received well by critics and was superseded by the success of *The Caretaker*. However, *The Birthday Party* has now become very popular. Why do you think audiences originally preferred *The Caretaker* ?

TW: Well, *The Caretaker* was a little later and I think people, although they didn't like *The Birthday Party*, (and that comes back to your Harold Hobson question because people did tend to take notice of Harold Hobson even if they didn't read the *Sunday Times*, and more people did read theatre criticisms in those days certainly)... I think they thought perhaps: "We have been wrong. Perhaps we'll give him [Pinter] another go."

But, I think there's another reason, which is that the character of Davies in *The Caretaker* was somebody that the audience immediately felt: "Ooh, I don't really want to know about this man. He's an invader, he's a squatter, he's somebody who worries us, and yet we want to see what happens to him. You know, whereas *The Birthday Party*, as you say later in your question, is much more obscure, it makes you feel quite uneasy as we don't really know what's happening, we don't really know who these people are. We have to do a lot more thinking with *The Birthday Party*. [In *The Caretaker*, everybody's actions really, Micks, and Aston's and Davies's, although they are peculiar and wonderfully convoluted in a Pinteresque way, you actually know what they're on about, and I think people related to that a lot more immediately.

CJ: As an actor who has appeared in *The Birthday Party*, what do you think it is that makes the play so innovative and fresh?

TW: I think it caused people to examine their traditional ways of looking at things. It opens in a way which is immediately recognisable. You don't see the kitchen sink. You see the front room of a recognisable boarding house in a recognisable South Coast resort, and there's a recognisable, if fairly batty, landlady, and a recognisable and kind husband, and then you see Stanley, who is somebody who has obviously had some kind of an emotional breakdown and has been befriended by this motherly person. You don't quite know the extent of the relationship but it is intriguing, and then these two men come in and intimidate him, and destroy him, and cart him off. Why? And why... although they seem to be drawn deliberately from people who are traditionally regarded as persecuted sections of the community, the Jews and the Irish, you know, people who are always talking about how they're victimised. They victimise Stanley. And, I think it... well, it's a very exciting, it's a very dramatic play of course but its...its this thing of people feeling that their kind of moral... traditional moral values have all been turned upside down and questioned and that's what Pinter does all the time doesn't he? As I tried to explain in my book, a conventional playwright tries to tell you more about the characters than they know about themselves. Pinter wants you to know less about them, because you are an eavesdropper on something that you don't understand, in the way

that we are as human beings if we suddenly eavesdrop on a conversation between two people that we don't know, we don't know what they're talking about. But, it is still quite intriguing.

CJ: The purpose of Goldberg and McCann's visit in *The Birthday Party* is somewhat ambiguous. In your opinion what did you believe their purpose in seeking out Stanley to be?

TW: Well, I think that's the thing that really worries people. He is somebody, Stanley is somebody, who has abdicated from 'the game,' whatever the game is. He is a member of a criminal society maybe, or somebody who has allied himself to these two unlikely...unlikely paired people, Goldberg and McCann. Pinter's deliberately unspecific but he clearly has been somebody who is important to them as part of the structure of whatever it is that they do, and he's abdicated, and that's not allowed. You're not allowed, Pinter is saying, to step out of whatever the convention or whatever the rules are, politically, or socially or whatever, and they'll get you for it, they'll hunt you down, they'll get you for it. That's the really frightening thing.

CJ: The theatre movement shifted away from depicting the lives of high society living to the realist theatre of the working class. How important do you think it was to audiences [for the playwrights] to depict working class lives?

TW: I'm reluctant to use the word 'class' so much, because I think what was happening was opening people's eyes to seeing how all sorts of people lived, rather than as I said at the beginning just looking at the people that you wished you were...and that's the real thing that happened. But again, it wasn't a sudden thing. I mean, it's been happening...it's been happening for centuries and you know, the classical writers in Georgian and Restoration...playwrights, Victorian playwrights a bit, although not so much, and before them, I mean Jacobean, Elizabethan playwrights, all actually showed areas of all classes and how they live and painted them pretty authentically too. So, this thing of: "Oh, now the working class can see themselves in the theatre," isn't new. There'd been a kind of hiccup when all those West End Comedies didn't show entire sections of the community...and that went on far too long, and it...it was really I suppose because the actual theatre structure was very, very confined after the war, immediately after the war, and not so much before the war, but during the war and immediately after the war.

Remember that there was no Royal Shakespeare Company. Stratford Upon Avon did the Shakespeare canon in Stratford Upon Avon, and didn't do any modern plays at all. There was no National Theatre. Until 1953, there was no Royal Court and there was certainly no Hampstead or Almeida Theatre.... or any of those places. There were just West End commercial theatres, and no fringe theatres. West End commercial theatres did what brought in the most money, and that was charging people the most they could from people who had disposable incomes, but as I said at the beginning, that didn't keep out the less affluent public because they [working classes] got treated like slaves, but they could still come to the theatre. I had no money at all when I was a student in the early '50s but I could get into a gallery at the Old Vic for one [shilling] and sixpence I think, which is... I can't work it out in new currency... but it is kind of nothing. So, it wasn't that we felt we were a working class that were being kept out, we just felt that, that's what plays were about. You know, smart people who did murders, or inherited lots of money or had love affairs or divorces or whatever.

CJ: Which plays have you seen performed by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop?

TW: Oh, well, obviously, *Oh What a Lovely War!*, which was her great, great success, and her last one. *Fings Aint What They Used To Be* ...Oh I can't remember...that

Brendan Behan play, *The Hostage*, another Shelagh Delaney play, I can't remember which, but she [Littlewood] had a kind of freshness of approach, it was almost back to the music hall really, you know you were very much aware that you were being played to as an audience. You weren't... you weren't eavesdroppers, you were there and they were telling you about it. And it worked for most of the time very well and did indeed bring in a new audience.

CJ: Did it have a more improvisatory feel in comparison to other plays?

TW: Oh, yes. Yes. Very much so. Yes. I never worked for her, but people who did would sign on to do the play and they'd never know what words they were speaking, or even what kind of part they would be playing, or even if the part had been taken away from them and given to somebody else. But, it was an exciting process.

CJ: I understand that you feel passionate about regional theatre and touring theatre. Can you tell me how Arts council funding between 1945 and 1968 affected theatre of this kind?

TW: Yes. Why did you pick on 1968?

CJ: Just because that's the post war period that this [interview] is related to. That's why really.

TW: Yes, well it does have a meaning for touring theatre because in 1968 the Arts Council managed to get a grant from the treasury to buy up a lot of derelict touring theatres, or semi - derelict touring theatres, put them back in order and put them in the hands of the local authorities which meant that instead of touring being a rather tatty occupation, between the dates that you're talking about, touring was really divided into... well three categories really, and they were sometimes called 'number one,' 'number two,' and 'number three tours.' Number one tours, when they weren't doing opera or dance would be the Old Vic company or Tennants, or a company like Tennants doing prior to London, tours, you know getting the show into shape before it opened on the West End and they would have big starts in them, and there would be new plays, by Bolt or Rattigan or NC Hunter, or R C Sherriff or one of those people. They'd be smart. They'd tour to a smart audience.

Then you had the number two tours that were those plays that had been on in London but were going out onto the road to show other audiences. Perhaps they hadn't been to those theatres. They wouldn't have the same cast. They'd have a substitute cast. But it would be basically the same set and the same production. And then they'd also do some, a bit of touring opera, or ballet on a slightly smaller scale. Then you had your 'number three' tours which were just like productions which had been got together just for touring and they would be not on the whole frightfully good. But they'd be for actors who just on the whole toured. The sets would be just about all right and they'd be for popular plays, thrillers or farcical comedies, or whatever, and they'd tour for quite a long time, and they'd just keep the theatre open. But, with the 1968 doing up of the theatres there was a kind of reliable well - resourced ring of theatres in the major cities: Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Bristol, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Leicester. And there were a number of touring companies, like the Prospect Theatre Company that I write about in my book, who were financed just to tour but with usually doing classical plays, big classical plays with big companies with some star people in them. And, suddenly, touring became respectable and it meant that people didn't feel that they had to travel 250 miles up to London to see a good play.

Banking on that feeling, the newly decorated theatres produced ancillary things like car parks and restaurants and things, so you could have a good night out, quite cheaply without all that bother of having to go somewhere else. Touring suddenly came back

into reasonable being but it was still fighting a sort of battle for the available audience with the producing theatres, the reps, in the same town. You'd have a playhouse in one town, which was producing the classical repertoire or new plays or very often brand new plays written by local authors, and you would have the touring theatre that was doing something on a much grander scale. Whereas, before the war you would have that situation and people would say: "Well, we're going to The Playhouse on Tuesday, and we'll go to the Theatre Royal on the Friday," now they were making decisions about which to go to. But, that probably hastened, along with Television and the growth of the motor car use, the demise of many, many of the producing theatres, the reps. So what you were left with was a handful of really good reps that operated on a four - weekly turn - round, and the touring theatres in the same towns seen as being in competition.

The further (sorry this is getting quite complicated)... there is a further influence, which was the growth of the musical. By the time that you're talking about, 1968, we were already seeing more musicals in the West End than straight plays, and a lot of those musicals went on tour so that you would find your big touring houses, take a theatre like the Hippodrome, Bristol, with 2300 seats, you'd... a lot of that time would be spent by doing six weeks of Annie or eight weeks of Jesus Christ Superstar, and then you'd get a few weeks of Welsh National Opera and a few weeks of the Royal Ballet and maybe you'd squeeze in a week of the National Theatre or a week of Prospect or whatever. But it became principally, a thing for music, for lyric theatre, and... but there is still on a slightly smaller scale things like the Oxford Playhouse, the Cambridge Arts Theatre, Southampton Nuffield (600 - 700 seater theatres) have now got a very, very healthy amount of touring going on and that really has sort of re-established the balance in a good way. The difficulty still is getting actors to do it, which makes me very cross.

CJ: Ok, finally, do you think that post - war plays can elicit the same response in modern audiences as they did in the original performances?

TW: Oh yes. Certainly. I mean, no producer should revive a play unless they have a very good reason for it. You know, it's no good saying: "Oh God! We've got to do As You Like It again. We did that three years ago. What the hell are we going to do with it this time?" You shouldn't do that, and in most cases you don't but I think that there's quite enough about a good play to make it available to new audiences that haven't seen it before. And things change in the world... you know... things have a new relevance, not just politically or socially but attitudes. For instance, I did King Lear in 1971 I think, and remember at that time the feeling in the audience [who] felt: "Well, poor old bugger, you know you should have a measure of filial responsibility towards him and respect, and love and care and things, you know. These terrible daughters." By 2003, when I did it this last year at the Old Vic, you sense that the audience... their attitude had changed a lot... it was: "Come on he's behaving like a perfect prat really, and why should we give him his hundred knights? I mean, what does he know? I can't even get someone to do my garden." And the attitude had changed very much that... you know... "we've got our lives to lead as well, couldn't we put him in a home somewhere and just forget about him?" And so it's worth doing the play again just in order to explore people's feelings that have been changed by perhaps their own, and by, global circumstances.

CJ: Ok. Well thank you very much for your time and help with this interview. It has been very interesting.

TW: It's a pleasure. Anything else you want to ask me?

CJ: No, that's fine. Thank you very much.

TW: Ok. Well, thank you for coming.