

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Geoff Ayres – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Emma Nolan**

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Theatre-goer. Amateur dramatics; British theatre around the world; Shelagh Delaney; The Entertainer; European drama; John Gielgud; Harold Hobson; Inadmissible Evidence; Laben movement; Joan Littlewood; Wolf Mankowitz; NUS Drama Festival; the Old Vic; Laurence Olivier; John Osborne; Harold Pinter; Richard II; The Tempest; theatre going; Theatre Royal Stratford; Theatre Workshop; Theatre Workshop techniques and repertoire; Kenneth Tynan.

EN: OK, I'd just like to start off talking about Theatre Workshop. What first brought you to the theatre? Was there anything about the production itself? I know that's a bit of an open question.

GA: I think the first time I went to the... well, 'legit' theatre as it's called in the United States, was to see a very mainstream West End play called *Seagulls over Sorrento* in the early fifties, which was subsequently filmed with Gene Kelly, a great dancer of the period from *Singin' in the Rain*.

EN: I'm a fan of his.

GA: Yes, well, this was a dramatic performance, but that was several years earlier. I think it was my father who encouraged us to go to Theatre Workshop. It wasn't long after Joan Littlewood had taken over the running of the theatre, and they'd done a few political plays, one for example called *Uranium 235* which was written by Ewan McColl, whose daughter, Kirsty was a...

EN: A singer, yes.

GA: A folk singer wasn't she, until her death. And they'd been getting good reviews in the local paper. But it was obvious that they needed a lot of support, and my father suggested we go, and the production happened to be *Shaw's Arms and the Man*. Although I'd always been an avid devotee of the cinema - we started to go to the cinema in what we'd call now the golden age of cinema in the late forties and early fifties - I'd never really shown the same kind of interest in the theatre. Although I... from about the age of about thirteen I'd taken part as an actor in several productions at

school and elsewhere. So I think when I first went, I was a little bit wary... but I fell in love with the building as soon as I walked in to it.

EN: You do find that, you walk in, and it's just – wow!

GA: Have you ever been to the Theatre Royal in Stratford?

EN: No, not that...

GA: It's worth going to, just to walk into it and to see. They've refurbished a lot of it, for example, the bar area – the socialising areas. But the theatre itself must look as it did in 1884 - it's like a sort of miniature version of a West End theatre... like a dolls house version of a West End theatre. And I fell in love with the theatre. It was a Saturday night, I remember clearly, and it was a very good audience. It was pretty full - which wasn't always the case at Theatre Workshop - and it was such a good, such a sparkling production, that I think we decided that we would continue to go. It was during their sort of classical period when they were trying to do some of the classical repertoire of English Drama. So you can say really, it was almost an accident that I went, you know, my father wanted us to, and so...

EN: Yes, in support of the theatre and...

GA: Exactly, and from then on I became very interested in it and saw quite a lot of productions.

EN: Is there any production that stands out for you?

GA: There are several that stand out... That obviously was one, and another one was Harry H. Corbett, who became 'son' in Steptoe and Son.

EN: Steptoe and Son.

GA: As Richard II, which was not universally acclaimed - some people thought the performance was rather shrill, I know, and overwrought. I remember Volpone by Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare; Edward II by Marlowe, which was filmed about ten years ago, I think. Arden of Faversham, author unknown - some of it suggests that part of it might have been written by Shakespeare, but no one is absolutely certain. It's a kind of a thriller, a kind of murder story really, set in the seventeenth century... Those, I think were the earliest productions which really appealed to me, and then later, Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be which was kind of a forerunner of Oh What A Lovely War! I didn't see Oh! What a Lovely War at Stratford.

EN: Didn't you?

GA: No, because I was in... I think I must have been in Canada... and I didn't see it until it had transferred to Wyndhams in the West End. That obviously, was one that I particularly remember.

EN: Do you think it would have lost anything being performed out of Stratford?

GA: It's a good question... it certainly would have lost the intimacy that you had at Stratford. I remember I took my parents one Christmas I was home from Canada, and I recall sitting up in the balcony and the actors seeming a long way away, whereas in the Theatre Royal, they never are. There's always a lot of interchange between the actors and the audience. I think it may very well have lost something, although it was very successful in the West End...

EN: What do you think made Theatre Workshop so different? From the likes of Osborne and things...

GA: Well it was, it was very different I think. First of all, this concentration on the classics in its early days, and apparently, according to what I was reading in my Theatre Workshop book again this morning, Joan Littlewood always felt that it was her work on the classics - like Edward II, Richard II and Volpone - was the most rewarding part of what she did. She reworked, she didn't mangle them at all, she didn't tear them apart at all, but she obviously gave them her own, very personal slant. She'd also grown up with the theories of the dance expert Laben, and a lot of the movement in her early productions was a little bit disconcerting as a result. I remember my mother saying once -it's funny how this kind of thing sticks in your mind isn't it? - My mother, who appreciated the productions, saying 'they prance, don't they?' And I could see exactly what she meant. People didn't walk across stage; they tended to move very quickly, and this was the influence of Laben on the productions. When it came to the more modern plays, like Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be, A Taste of Honey - which I didn't see there, but which I saw filmed - The Hostage by Brendan Behan, which again I saw later when they revived it. From what I gather, any resemblance between the original printed text and the production was not exactly coincidental, but a lot of changes had been made. If she was presented with a play by a young, unknown author, like Frank Norman in the case of Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'be.

EN: And Shelagh Delaney with A Taste of Honey.

GA: Exactly, who had never written anything else prior to that; and Brendan Behan who wrote Borstal Boy.

EN: And The Quare Fellow.

GA: Right. She would take these texts and work on them in counsel with the actors and the author, and the production would evolve during rehearsals. Some people I suppose would say that this showed a disrespect to the writer. I'm not sure I would agree with that...

EN: I don't know, I suppose there are aspects of it... Because if that was my play, I'd be a bit annoyed that she's changed everything; but, I think with the final performance and production of it all, it would have made a lot of difference.

GA: That's what I was going to say. You might feel rather hurt at first, but if it became a box office and critical success, would you not perhaps feel that the experience was worth while? Although again, she's on record as saying interestingly she feared that... I think it was Brendan Behan she was referring to, whose problems, of course as you may know – I don't know whether you've heard of Behan?

EN: I've only done a bit about him.

GA: He had alcohol related problems. I remember seeing him once at the Theatre Royal, where he could hardly climb down the stairs. Joan Littlewood is on record of having said that she feared that without her influence, even with the experience that he had watching her working on one play, he would be lost with his next one, and I suppose you might say this was rather arrogant on her part.

EN: I don't know. She was a very influential sort of character.

GA: I mean, what was Shelagh Delaney's other play? Was it *The Lion in Love*, wasn't it?

EN: It might have been, I only know her from *A Taste of Honey*.

GA: So do most people, because it's the only one that is famous. It was filmed successfully. I think *The Lion in Love* was not as successful, and I think - although I'm not absolutely certain - that Joan Littlewood had less of a hand in it. I've got an idea that Shelagh Delaney felt that she probably had outgrown Joan Littlewood and could write something by herself. I'm not absolutely certain, to be frank; I'm not going to pretend to have a kind of expertise – I don't have, but I think that was the case. I can see the point of a young writer perhaps being a little bit concerned that his or her text was being worked on, but I think her attitude was that the words on the page were like a kind of blueprint, they were a kind of framework. The most well known, the most professional author who had this treatment, was a man called Wolf Mankowitz who had gone to Eastham Grammar School before I was there, and wrote a play called 'Make Me an Offer' which was shown at Theatre Workshop. And also, I think it was a novel called 'Kid for Two Farthings' which was filmed by Carol Reed in the 1950s. Apparently, Wolf Mankowitz did not react kindly at all to the Joan Littlewood treatment. *Expresso Bongo* another play he wrote - that was filmed with Cliff Richard, as a very young pop star. Apparently he tended to resent the treatment that she gave it. So it seems that he was

asked to justify why he had included certain things in the play. And if he could justify the things they remained in, but if he couldn't they were out. You see, I can understand why some people would see the treatment was rather brutal.

EN: But I suppose without that, Theatre Workshop and their productions wouldn't have been sort of... significant, maybe?

GA: I would think that is probably the case. They would certainly have been very different if she had treated the text with great reverence.

EN: We were looking in our class the other day at how Theatre Workshop did have this emphasis on the collective influence and rewriting the text and things, whereas other companies and things like the Royal Court were very much in support of the script itself, you know, everyone worked around the script, around the writers.

GA: That's an interesting distinction. I think the prevailing political ethos at Stratford was very left-wing. I remember, I never actually met her, but I remember a young girl who went very briefly to the Theatre Royal Stratford. Her mother – the story I'm going to tell sounds a bit like a soap opera – her mother ran a boarding house in Littlehampton on the south coast, and our neighbours went there on holiday several years running. And after my father was in hospital with an ulcer, he went down there for a holiday to the same place. The daughter, I suppose would have been about your age, she had auditioned for Theatre Workshop, and maybe sat in with them for some time and was very unhappy, I think apart from anything else at the rather liberal use of four letter words. I think she probably had led a very sheltered life, and was extremely worried.

EN: Too much of a shock all at once.

GA: Well, Joan Littlewood was not noted for her diplomatic language.

EN: I can imagine!

GA: Well, apparently the prevailing ethos – you talked about working in counsel, that's exactly what they did. I think everybody was invited to make a contribution; it was sort of a cooperative, a theatre cooperative. I mean the name 'workshop'...

EN: It does imply, you know, working together...

GA: I agree with you, it wouldn't have been the same Theatre Workshop if they had produced along West End lines. It's what made it quite unique I think.

EN: Did you prefer Theatre Workshop to the West End plays?

GA: Again, it's a good question... At the time; they made a great influence on me, because the theatre was very near to where I was living. In those days it was in the County Borough of West Ham, but it's in the London Borough of Newham now... I went to what was in those days Eastham Grammar School. It had a great influence on me because I always used to go, either with my parents or my friends from school. Either independently, just because they were friends and liked the theatre, or we had some school trips there. I remember a very amusing – for all the wrong reasons – production of Macbeth, which wasn't one of their biggest successes. I mean, you imagine a group of seventeen or eighteen year old sixth formers - if you've seen The History Boys, you know the sort of thing I'm talking about. You can imagine us can't you? Especially liberally laced with some beer over the interval. Everyone had a marvellous evening, but I'm not sure we appreciated the play! So my memories of Theatre Workshop, although they were based on admiration for the work they did, were also bound up with that very key period in my life, you know, when I was going with parents, I was going with friends, when I going with the school. Overall, I suppose I saw more of Theatre Workshop than I saw elsewhere. Partly because of it's geographical position, but I also saw some productions in the West End which impressed me tremendously.

EN: Are there any in particular?

GA: Yes, yes there are... I think as I had mentioned to you on the phone, I actually saw the original production of The Entertainer by Osborne. I didn't see Look Back in Anger until I was at university and saw the film version. We saw Lawrence Olivier...

EN: You know when you went to see The Entertainer, was it the big name - Lawrence Olivier that made you go, or was it 'I just want to see this play'?

GA: I think for two reasons; firstly it followed on the success of Look Back in Anger which I hadn't seen. It came a few years later, after Look Back in Anger...

EN: I suppose it followed all the hype and...

GA: Yes, exactly, so I was two years older, and as you know yourself, there's a lot of difference between a sixteen year old and an eighteen year old, it's more than just two years isn't it? You're almost a different person at that age. It was partly the hype as you say, and it was partly because this was Osborne's second major play, and partly the fact that we wanted to see Olivier, who was the big theatre star...

EN: Star, yes.

GA: Of the day, yes. I remember that one clearly as having made a great impression.

EN: So it lived up to its expectations?

GA: Yes, I think when you look at it now you probably question the structure of it... It may not seem quite as successful now as it was at the time, but I mean my experience in the theatre, it was one of the most entertaining evenings I think we had spent. Again, we went as a school group, and so we roared with laughter, possibly rather too raucously at some of the jokes. You must have seen *The Entertainer*?

EN: I haven't, no, I've only read it.

GA: You haven't seen the film version?

EN: No.

GA: It's not the same, obviously, but you do get a good idea of how Olivier's performance must have been in the theatre. And the other one that really sticks out was a production by Peter Brook of *The Tempest*, starring John Gielgud, the other big star of the day. I think, if anything, that probably impressed me more than any other production I saw during the fifties, quite honestly.

EN: It wasn't even a fifties play either!

GA: No... but you see one of the points that I'm making is that I agree wholeheartedly with the title of the conference being 'Not Just Osborne.' I was really impressed by this performance. I can still remember John Gielgud's final speech as Prospero, just as I can remember Lawrence Olivier, and it became a very famous production. Peter Brook himself went to Paris, where I think he still is. Another production of Peter Brook's I saw was *Hamlet* - about the same time I saw Lawrence Olivier's film version - starring Paul Scofield, arguably the third... or fourth or fifth, depending where you put Ralph Richardson or Michael Redgrave, but certainly up there within the big half dozen. He hasn't acted for a long time now, you probably wouldn't know of him would you?

EN: The name doesn't really ring a bell.

GA: Have you ever seen a film of *A Man for all Seasons*?

EN: No, sorry!

GA: No, I'm not a bit surprised, he's not a name you would remember, but he was a very fine actor in his day. Other than that, we used to go quite a lot to the Old Vic... In those days you could get into the Old Vic very cheaply - I'm talking about three old shillings which is about fifteen pence...

EN: I wish it was like that today!

GA: Well, provided you were willing to sit upstairs on the gallery on not particularly comfortable benches, you could see productions very cheaply. I remember seeing Frankie Howerd as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* there... The first time I ever saw *King Lear*... cold, that's without knowing anything at all about it, was at the Old Vic. That was another strand of our theatre going. Although I suppose overall the Theatre Workshop experience had more of an impact on me than any other. It's interesting isn't it, the two productions that possibly impressed me most, being *The Entertainer* and *The Tempest*, were not Theatre Workshop productions.

EN: Strange that... You mentioned that you did amateur dramatics...

GA: Yes, at school...

EN: How did what you had seen influence you later on? Did it?

GA: I'm not sure, I don't think it did at the time... I always liked to think... At the risk of sounding arrogant, I always liked to think that I had a rather professional attitude to amateur drama, because the teacher that used to direct the school's productions was instrumental in organising some of these school trips. He really should have been a director I think, rather than a teacher. He wasn't particularly interested in teaching – I don't think he even lowered himself to prepare a lesson, if he could avoid it, because he never had the energy – he was always directing at least one, or possibly even two productions at a time. I think in his own way he was a bit of a perfectionist, although he lost a sense of proportion when he was directing. I could see his insistence that an amateur production didn't have to be amateurish, and I think he taught me the difference between amateur and amateurish. You can still have a professional attitude even if you are amateur; amateur means you don't get paid for it. That had a great influence on me; I don't know whether seeing so much professional theatre had so much at this stage, no.

EN: You mentioned as well something about going to an NUS drama festival.

GA: Well that came later when I was at university, yes. I can talk about that if you like?

EN: Yes... you said that John Osborne spoke?

GA: Yes, that's right. I went to... As I told you on the phone, I went to the University of Hull, and the first year I was there - the first term I was there - I joined the Hull University Dramatics Society, in the second year rising to the heady heights of Secretary of the society – once the existing secretary had resigned I might add! I was very quickly introduced to Brecht... because the President and the Secretary of the society in the first year decided to enter *The Good Woman of Setzuan* for the NUS drama festival. Now to

be honest, it was the first time I had ever heard of Bertolt Brecht. The director said we were going to do *The Good Woman of Setzuan* by Bertolt Brecht, I almost said 'Bertolt who?' which was my ignorance - I know, I'm not proud of it! But the point was, it had only been two years since the famous production with Peggy Ashcroft in the West End... which I was not aware of at the time. Again, I stress there was a big difference between a sixteen year old and an eighteen year old and it was a period, as again I have suggested to you, when European theatre was becoming quite popular in this country. There were plays like *L'Invitation au Château* by Anouilh which was translated as *Ring Around the Moon* by Christopher Fry. There were productions of *Colombe*, which is a girl's name in English. I remember seeing one on the television when I was at university. Jean Giraudoux was another French playwright that was very popular; one of his plays was translated as *Tiger at the Gates*, which became big West End successes. *Waiting For Godot* - which was originally written in French I think, I've got a French version of it at home; because Beckett had lectured in French at the University of Dublin - had, only a couple of years beforehand, been premiered in the West End. So, that was my first introduction to Brecht, although not my first introduction to theatre in translation. This was one of the aspects of that period which was mentioned at the conference, although no one actually went into it. There was a lot of interest shown in productions of translations, particularly of French plays.

EN: We've been looking at this, actually, on our course, how Beckett and Brecht had influenced subsequent British dramatists.

GA: Yes, exactly. Which ones particularly?

EN: I think there was a bit with Osborne and Brecht. I think Osborne was meant to go and do something within Brecht's company or something. It might not have been that, but there has been links with Joan Littlewood as well because she played *Mother Courage* in one of the productions.

GA: Very much. In Osborne's case, in *The Entertainer*, he uses the Brechtian technique of having some of the characters step out of the proscenium arch frame and talk directly to the audience. I mean, Archie Rice, - the failed comedian - for example, uses the audience in the theatre watching John Osborne's *The Entertainer* as if we're the audience in the theatre watching Archie Rice, you know, and you have titles. You've seen or you've read at least *Oh! What A Lovely War!*, you get titles.

EN: There's the photographs and the images and things.

GA: Exactly, that's very Brechtian. The idea of music and songs linking scenes, the ideas of songs commenting on the action - they're not songs in the classic Hollywood sense where you have a musical number because you have a major star who can sing or dance. In Brecht, the songs are an integral part of the action. So, this is true I think that he had an influence. Harold Pinter? That's another one you might have...

EN: I saw a performance of *The Caretaker* last night.

GA: Yes, he's... I think he's supposed to have been influenced by Beckett.

EN: Maybe more so. I don't know, this is only my opinion on *The Caretaker*, it seemed a bit cyclical as well as... like *Waiting for Godot* is. There's a lot of waiting around and... I mean, *The Caretaker* has only got three characters in, *Waiting for Godot* is four... it's a small-scale sort of thing.

GA: I think it's a fairly common critical view now that Pinter was very much influenced by Beckett. I mean, Beckett can be regarded as an Irish dramatist writing in French, or an Irish dramatist writing in English. Obviously, I suppose in Pinter's case... Well, it was the English version that was shown over here... So we took *The Good Woman of Setzuan* then to the NUS drama festival. We were very well adjudicated by the local adjudicator who came. We ended up as one of the four university drama groups to come to London and perform. When I look back on it now, I think we were probably rather generously treated. I played one of the Chinese Gods by the way, a sort of medium sized part. Having been a big star at Eastham Grammar School, I quickly came down to earth when I got to university! During the four or five days, I think, that it lasted we had various speakers, and I remember particularly John Osborne because it wasn't long after I'd seen *The Entertainer*. I must have seen Richard Burton as Jimmy Porter in the film version of *Look Back In Anger* about the same time. I remember John Osborne - who was very young at the time of course - coming to talk to us, dressed immaculately in a beautifully cut suit and a black cashmere sweater, and talking to us about the American theatre - that was the interesting thing about it, and talking about the way the critics had this enormous power in New York, to an extent which not even Kenneth Tynan or Harold Hobson had in Britain. Do you know these names?

EN: Yes, we've touched briefly on them.

GA: It was Kenneth Tynan's championing... of Osborne for example, of Theatre Workshop, which took West End audiences down to Stratford East. Tynan wrote with great enthusiasm about Joan Littlewood's productions, so did Harold Hobson too, to a certain extent. Harold Hobson was adjudicating the NUS drama festival... Osborne concentrated on what he considered the inordinate amount of power that the American critics had, and he spoke - I can still remember this - he spoke about how, when the notices were due to come out, everyone would congregate at a restaurant called Sardi's in New York. When I was in Canada a few years later I spent some time in New York and I actually went to Sardi's. He seemed to concentrate on the American theatre, with just one or two parallels with the British theatre, because I think he'd just come back from the United States and he was obviously very struck by the amount of power that seemed to be wielded. Apparently, a couple of bad reviews on the opening night in New York and the show would fold!

EN: Sounds quite scary!

GA: Well it is, exactly, I don't think it was ever quite like that here, because here you have the Sunday papers, which I suppose had rather more of an influence. A play could survive in London for some time, even if it got cool notices on opening night on the Monday or Tuesday, provided it got a good review from Harold Hobson and or Kenneth Tynan in the Observer or the Sunday Times. And they had arguably more influence than any critic has had since, I think... Arguably, I'm not absolutely sure. Provided it got a good review from either or both of them, it possibly would survive, because it would pick up an audience. But apparently in New York if it opened to a scathing review it didn't stand a chance at all, and this was something that obviously quite concerned Osborne. I don't remember him saying a great deal about the British theatre at the time. When Harold Hobson came to review our production of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* he was quite scathing. Except that he said the actress that played Shen Teh and Shui Ta reminded him of Peggy Ashcroft, and he thought she was the best thing in the festival.

EN: Wow!

GA: But he did slate the production...

EN: Oh right!

GA: ... I must stress! So that was my only experience of the NUS drama festival, because the next year I didn't take part in the festival production for various reasons.

EN: Were you aware that John Osborne was quite a big figure at that time?

GA: Oh yes. Yes, I'd known that since... I'd heard about *Look Back in Anger* without ever being involved with it, and as soon as I saw *The Entertainer* I realised that John Osborne was going to be a major figure, yes.

EN: OK. You mentioned as well about living in Canada and being around New York. Did you see productions of British theatre over there? How did it differ?

GA: Yes, a few. I went to Canada at the end of my university career – two years at Hull and a year in Bordeaux as an English assistant in [Lise?], then went back to university. I saw a few French productions when I was in Bordeaux. When I went to Canada, the first couple of years I was teaching French in an independent boy's school; which was a kind of cross between an American and an English school – it has some of the features of both. It was said - rather unkindly - that the Canadian private schools had all the weaknesses of the English and none of the virtues. There was little or no drama in the school, there was some but it tended to be rather mainstream. I saw *Luther* with Albert Finney, who was a big actor of the day and who still is around, still appearing in films occasionally. That was another John Osborne play in New York, I don't remember a great deal about it...

EN: No? I was going to say would you have noticed a difference between audience reactions or the atmosphere to the play that would have been different to the ones the British audiences would have had?

GA: I honestly couldn't answer that. It's a good question - I wish I could, but after forty years...! I'm not sure I was aware of it. I know the production was well received - had been well received - over here and I think it was well received by the audiences. I think it had a respectable run. It was a bit of a cult of things British at that time, because I remember another production called Dylan - based on the life of Dylan Thomas - with Alec Guinness, which I didn't see... The reason I didn't see it was because when I tried to see it, it was standing room only - I suppose partly on Alec Guinness's name, and I wasn't going to stand for two and a half hours! The price was very high anyway. Those I think were the only two I could remember seeing in New York at that time, although I saw *Beyond the Fringe*, which you may know about?

EN: Sorry, again...

GA: Well, a revue created by... I think it was originally four Cambridge undergraduates, of which Alan Bennett was one. Alan Bennett, Jonathan Miller, Dudley Moore and Peter Cook. A satirical revue, and that had a very big success on Broadway, which is where I saw that. There were very appreciative audiences, so I think when I look back on it now; there was quite a vogue for things British, in the movies as well as in the theatre.

EN: You know when you came back from Canada to Britain, did you continue going to the theatre?

GA: Yes I did, I used to come back... because I was teaching in a boarding school first of all, we had very long holidays - whereas you may have two weeks in the state schools, we had three at Christmas, and so on. Several years I came back via cheap charter flights to spend Christmas over here, and I always tried to see a production if I could. It was on my first visit back that I at last saw *Oh! What A Lovely War!* during that Christmas and New Year. Others that I made a note of were another Osborne play called *Inadmissible Evidence* starring an actor called Nicol Williamson, who possibly promised more than he ever delivered. He did make quite a lot of films mind you, but he was thought of at the time - in *Inadmissible Evidence* - as being a stage actor to follow in the footsteps of people like Michael Redgrave, Alec Guinness, Ralph Richardson, if not Olivier and Gielgud. Then I think he tended to gravitate towards the films and away from the theatre. I also saw what I think was Alan Bennett's first play, *Forty Years On*, one Christmas when I came home. So I tried to keep in touch with what was going on, but *Inadmissible Evidence* was the only John Osborne play I saw during that period. He tended to hit rather a trough then, there were plays like *A Patriot for Me* I think, and various others which were not very well received. It seemed as though the promise of his early years was not being fulfilled. I also remember seeing a couple of interesting amateur productions when I went on holiday in Bermuda. This will show you how the British theatre influenced what was going on in Bermuda. The first production I ever saw of *The Birthday Party* by Pinter was by the Bermuda Music and Dramatic Society.

EN: It's not what you expect, is it?

GA: What do you expect?

EN: Well I don't know, I just didn't realise that British theatre could have that sort of big an impact worldwide!

GA: Well, I mean Bermuda then - I don't know what it's like now, but Bermuda then was very British in some ways.

EN: Oh, was it?

GA: I think it is still officially a crown colony, although internally it's self-governing. I think it is still administered by the crown, I mean I don't think it can have its own foreign policy for example; I'm not sure about that. And there were a lot of ex-patriate British over there, hence the Music and Dramatics society. What do they say... 'Get two English people together and they form a club, half a dozen and there's a dramatic society, eleven and there's a cricket team or a football team'... I spent these long summers in Bermuda, a couple of years in fact, and I got to know quite a lot of the members of the Bermuda Music and Dramatic Society. I think almost everyone was British, a lot of them schoolteachers out on two or three year contracts, tax free.

EN: Excellent!

GA: And the other production I saw - and again this takes us back to the idea of European drama - was Brecht's Galileo, I don't know whether you've heard of that?

EN: I have heard of it, I haven't read it or seen it but I know a bit about it.

GA: A very ambitious production for Bermuda Music and Dramatic Society, and not, if I recall, a very good one either. They hired a professional actor called Earl Cameron who was Bermudian himself - black Bermudian - who had appeared in some British films of the forties and fifties; the one I remember particularly was called Port O' London, but I wouldn't expect anyone to remember his name. He was never famous, but he was known at the time. He was induced back to perform in Galileo. It wasn't particularly successful. It was very large cast, a rather unwieldy cast, amongst which was the grandfather of one of my students from Toronto, whose mother was from Bermuda. So her father played quite a good role in fact in Galileo. I remember discussing it with him afterwards and saying that Earl Cameron never quite integrated into the amateur set up. But it's an example of how an organization like the Bermuda Music and Dramatics Society, stuck out there in the middle of the Atlantic would still be subject to...

EN: To these... British theatre.

GA: Yes, exactly. Other than that, I think the first time I ever encountered *The Dumb Waiter* by Pinter was when I decided to do a reading of it in a class I was teaching in Toronto.

EN: Was there anything that made you do that?

GA: I'm trying to think why I would... Was it one of those end of term things? Or did I just decide to give the class some enrichment? I know it was a class I had a really good relationship with - it was something you wouldn't dare do with a class you had an edgy relationship with, and I didn't. I remember that class even now, one of the most pleasant I taught, and they were willing to go along with everything I tried, because they were so cooperative I think I tried various things. I might have just decided to do something a little bit different, and I can remember the boys playing the parts became so confused over the stage directions, unwittingly they changed roles during the stage directions. Suddenly there was a roar of laughter from the rest of the class, they were so confused... you were talking earlier on weren't you about the detailed stage directions of Pinter...

EN: Yeah, you get a lot more... as you said, you know, Shakespeare - 'enter three witches' kind of thing, whereas Pinter is very 'they enter from this way, they're wearing this, they're doing this' and going on like that.

GA: It was a phase, I mean, I was a relatively young teacher in those days; I was going through a phase where I was trying things that I probably wouldn't have dared to have tried later. I mean, I used to play Bob Dylan songs in class for example, I know Bob Dylan has recently made some kind of comeback, but I mean, as you can imagine, he was a very, very big star in those days. I remember one class buying me *Blonde on Blonde* by Bob Dylan as a leaving present at the end of the year. I wasn't leaving, they were, you know, one of those end of term things. So I was very receptive to new writing, to new music, to new drama in those days, and that must have been the reason why I did *The Dumb Waiter*. Of course you can imagine the English idiom sounding rather strange on Canadian lips.

EN: Did you feel that the British drama and the idioms... did it translate properly into the...

GA: Not entirely, no. Not entirely, but the kids in the class, well they weren't kids, they were seventeen and eighteen year olds, the students did seem to appreciate it yes, I know there was a lot of laughter...

[Interruption]

GA: There's not very much of an indigenous Canadian literature, someone's still out there waiting to write the Great Canadian Novel. I suppose Margaret Atwood has come closer to it, have you ever read any? Handmaid's Tale?

EN: Blind Assassin.

GA: That's right, yes, that's set in Toronto isn't it? But at the time, they were still waiting for that Great Canadian Novelist, in English or French. It tended to feel these twin pools of the enormity of the United States next door to them and Britain from which so many of them came. So they were probably more receptive to British drama than you might otherwise have thought, because of a relative lack of their own.

EN: Is it all right to leave it there?

GA: Yes, of course.

EN: Thank you.