

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

<http://sounds.bl.uk>

Philip Bramley – interview transcript

Interviewer: Alison Louise Parry

10 November 2006

Theatre-goer. 1950s society; accents; American theatre; Antony and Cleopatra; Caesar and Cleopatra; John Gielgud; Hair; Henry V; The Homecoming; Liverpool theatres; Look Back In Anger; Oh! Calcutta; the Old Vic; Lawrence Olivier; Peter O'Toole; regional theatre, Saved; social issues; theatre stars; Waiting for Godot; Donald Wolfitt.

AP: I'd like to start by asking you about your theatre-going experiences and what are your first memories of theatre?

PB: My first memories of theatre were probably in the late forties or early fifties. I'm never quite sure what the first real experience was - I mean apart from school. By this time I was working: I left grammar school when I was fifteen and suddenly, I don't know why - we've no background in the family, my family were working class - I spent a lot of time at the cinema. Most people during the war did, though I was probably three nights into the cinema and of course most of the theatres, the theatre people in those days were on the screen - probably a secondary job. The cinema was probably secondary, rather than a primary job like it happens to be today, basically. As I say, I'm never quite sure... I saw... One of the first two incidences was either Henry V which was the Festival of Liverpool, basically run as part of the Festival of Britain-type thing, post-war. Henry V, which had Alec Clunes and Roger Livesey. Alec Clunes of course is the dad of... [AP nods in understanding] And Dorothy Tutin - it was one of her first major roles - as the French Princess, Clunes was Henry. Roger Livesey - who was well known on the stage, I mean, he starred in Life and Death [ed. The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp] which was a famous, landmark-type film - now, it was either that or Olivier and Vivien Leigh who were touring on their way to New York in Antony and Cleopatra and Caesar and Cleopatra, and I saw them both. In many ways, perhaps it was silly - not so much Henry V - but I enjoyed that. The stimulation for Henry V was Olivier's film of course, which to most people was so wonderful - I mean from a cinematic point of view. Of course, it's not as brilliant as Brannagh's, but of course it's an entirely different sort of film - it's a stage production filmed... obviously the Clunes performance was pretty good but obviously, wasn't to that sort of standard. Antony and Cleopatra and Caesar and Cleopatra, with Olivier, were just so outstanding, I mean, unbelievably outstanding in every sort of way. This time he was really in his prime - I mean, Vivien Leigh was in her prime too, but nobody could stand by Olivier, basically. It was fantastic! It was at the Royal Court in Liverpool - because living in Chester I used to travel to Liverpool. Everything about him, he was physically so dominating... He basically... obviously came on in Roman armour at one time and another time in Caesar and Cleopatra, he wore a leopard skin, basically, and physically from a body point-of-view, from a voice point of view, from an everything point of view he was so

outstanding, and the performance of course was so outstanding because there were people in that play that today you would sort of say, 'Oh my God!' you know, 'he carried the spear!'. You know, they're old men and women now, but still extraordinary...

AP: So a great presence on stage then?

PB: Yes, and that really, I suppose, set it off. I went on my own, there was no encouragement from parents - I never had any background in that sort of way - and I then started going very regularly... I can't say if it was once a week or twice every fortnight - it generally depended on who was performing. And in those days, in the early fifties and through the fifties certainly, great names performed you know. I looked through my old programmes - because I kept most of my old programmes - just to remind me, you know. We saw... I saw people like Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester. Charles Laughton was English of course, he had been in America and made films and so on and so forth with his wife Elsa Lanchester. But they came over to England and they did a play - but you couldn't hardly miss them. I saw Katharine Hepburn in *The Millionairess* with Robert Helpmann - that was before the famous Peter Sellers offering of the Loren film [*The Millionairess*, 1960]. Katharine Hepburn was of course a household name type thing and what was she doing in Liverpool or Sheffield or Newcastle?! In those days that's what they did. Helpmann was of course a ballet star, Australian by birth but English... appeared in Covent Garden and things like that. He was one of those people who did a bit of everything type thing...

AP: So would you say it was the big names that drew you to the theatre then?

PB: Oh yes, and I have to say - whether mea culpa or good on me - that has remained. There is no question about that. I mean, you don't have to be an international star, don't get me wrong, but I do think that experience is... my wife and I, we knew each other when we were seventeen and I started taking her to the theatre and it developed from there, but... there was a difference. In general people were trained in the theatre and became stars in the cinema - I mean, people like Olivier did whatever they wanted to do of course, they floated in and out from theatre to production to films to direction and so on. Often the people who carried the spears went to Hollywood and became stars there, but on the English stage they only carried the spears. Basically at the end of the day, they were the great stars in that sort of sense. I think primarily there was a thing about 'to appear in the theatre'. I think to some extent it has been resurrected, particularly by the Americans. I mean, the Americans love to come over to London - whether they can act or not act obviously depends on the individuals! So yes, I would say generally that both of us would go for the 'who's appearing'. The play also matters of course, sometimes I would go for the play of course. I mean, *Waiting for Godot* is on in town at the moment and I wanted to go and see it when I was down a couple of weeks ago, but we were already booked to see two plays anyway and I was only down two days anyway - one day and a night - I went to see *Waiting for Godot* because I think *Waiting for Godot* is one of the most brilliant things that anyone's ever written. I do have to say that there's a couple of very competent actors in it, but yeah, in those days you looked at the programme, whether you were at the Lyceum in Sheffield or the Opera House in Manchester or wherever - apart from London of course - you saw what was coming next and you sort of said, 'That's for me, I must see that!'. And of course

most of these theatres were small. I'd go over to the Lyceum, and it is not a large theatre by any means, most of the theatres in the sense of performing places were never big. I mean, the vaudeville theatres and music hall theatres were often very big. In Liverpool the Empire Theatre is a huge theatre with a very large stage, where the Royal Court was, you know, very much a small stage really, just about enough for the actors to get round. Whereas the Empire you tend to get lost on it! I experienced that when... there's a very famous – notorious! - Macbeth with Peter O'Toole, which is considered to be the last word or first word in Macbeth! [Laughter] It was performed at the Empire, which was a crazy thing to do because it is basically like the Barbican, it is really probably a double or a triple stage by anybody's standards. If you've seen Lawrence of Arabia on film, Peter O'Toole tends to stride, and when you start striding on a stage of that size you have a bit of a problem with other people because they're running to catch you up! I mean, it was extremely bad! It was so bad it was funny, which to say for Macbeth was terrible... But generally I went for the stars.

AP: Were there any other actors in particular that stand out?

PB: Oh yeah, I mean, how meaningful it is today, I don't know. When I did my army service - two years' National Service was compulsory for men or boys in those days - I happened to be posted to just outside Farnborough, so I used to come up to London for the weekend and I was very fortunate to see Robert Donat in Murder in the Cathedral at the Old Vic, - one and six I think it was, which is equivalent to whatever it is, eight or nine pence today – on a matinée, on a Saturday.

AP: What year was that?

PB: That'd be 1953. By about '53... Yes, '52 or '53. So I saw that in the afternoon and at night I went to see a play called Waters of the Moon, which is by N.C. Hunter and that was Dame Edith Evans and Dame Sybil Thorndike, that was at the Haymarket in London. And they were very different theatres: the Old Vic was spit and sawdust - wooden seats type thing. I think to see it - I know it's silly today! - I had to pay some extraordinary sum of money for the time, but certainly figures like seven or eight times what I paid to see in the Old Vic. The problem was of course, in those days people dressed for the theatre often, and certainly in the front stalls or the front dress circle, and there I was as a sort of scruffy eighteen year old, like most eighteen year olds – boys, not girls of course! – I had to get a seat in the stalls and there I was sitting amongst this lot with dinner jackets and long dresses, the women were in long dresses...

AP: That is interesting, because that's one of the things the project is focussing on as well, the actual experience of going to the theatre as well, so...

PB: Yeah, I mean, going to the theatre was an event, there is no question about that, and in a way there was a certain élitism about it, I can't deny that. I never felt it at the time but I am sure there was. As I say, nobody in my family ever said anything to me, like, 'What the hell are you doing?' type thing, or anything like that, nobody said anything. The big thing of course... as you know, that period of theatre was changing and that was the major thing. So basically, you generally saw Shakespeare, I mean,

there would be the serious side, there would be some murder things, very much like An Inspector Calls, which has very much been revived and brought back again over the last five or six years, I think everywhere seems to have done An Inspector Calls – Priestley, a good Yorkshire lad! So I know Sheffield and Leeds are very keen on it! So that was one side, you had the detective type story - the murder type, the Christies. And of course you had the Cowards - Noel Coward type stuff and the Jolly Englishman and blah, blah, blah... I'm not quite sure that... I know revisionists have views about Coward now and all that sort of thing, I'm not so sure, my attitude was it was light hearted good fun... I saw Gielgud in one of his called Nude with Violin, which seems to have got lost. It was typical Gielgud, this would be in the fifties. Gielgud was not the man, in many ways, that he was later in life. He became almost a father figure in the theatre - and films of course - in those days he was fairly light... I know his Hamlet before the war and so forth, but he was never in essence a great presence on the stage. His diction was always perfect, but he never had the charisma, that presence that somebody like Olivier had... And then of course there were other people, very much other people in the background. I said to you on the telephone I saw Donald Wolfitt. He had his own company and Wolfitt was like seeing one of the world's greatest orators, because you were sort of awe-struck, almost, by his presence. He had this booming voice – he obviously was, as you know, a theatre manager as well, almost the last of the theatre actor-managers – he had a wonderful voice. His diction was absolutely fantastic and he boomed, there was no question about that, but of course that's the way people were brought up.

To make a comparison with modern theatre, the big difference is undoubtedly voice. Most people in the theatre... We go to a lot of productions and so often - at the National recently - you could hardly hear a word that they said, they have to be microphoned, and certainly, it's not about age, it's not about, 'oh dear the poor old bugger!', 'the poor old devil!': it's about diction, it's about the fact that somebody like Wolfitt could have his back to the audience and you could hear every word perfectly because that's how they were trained. They spent hours and hours on diction and voice, where today of course it's not practised because television and film does not require it in many ways... And of course the fifties saw two things. First of all it started to see a newer generation of actor. People like Alec Guinness were starting to appear and more importantly of course you started to see the new plays... That was the shock I suppose. I was at the first night of Look Back in Anger and The Homecoming - Saved - and I mean, the audience were either so thunderstruck that they didn't know what to do, or they walked out or they shouted rude comments, it was so bad!

AP: What were your impressions of Look Back in Anger?

PB: I was totally fascinated. It was real life. I don't mean in terms of my own family, but certainly in terms of families in the area that I lived. Going back to those days, whichever town that you lived in there were really only the rich and the poor. I know there were degrees of, you might say, 'lower middle class' but there wasn't much in between. I was born in Chester and Chester was obviously a wealthy town (as it is today) compared to Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester and so on, but still we were a working class family - we might have been a bit better off than some other families, but basically these things happened, women were reviled, women were beaten, men were masters - and truly masters in that sense of the word. Women were not allowed to – or some women, I should be fair because this was not my family – but people like my mother chose not to do it, because keeping the home was important, but if women did try to 'step out of line' and try to be something that they weren't, then there was often

a man around to bring them back again. Drinking in pubs and so forth was very different than it is today - most working class pubs had a little snug or a ladies' room and that was where the ladies drank, and the men drank in the bar and the lounge wasn't used... It wasn't a shock... At your age you're not shocked, you're probably enlightened and of course you're amused by people saying things, shouting things out and so on. People who would never buzz in the theatre would sit there normally and at every little laugh, at every little joke they would giggle a little and at the end of the performance they would clap, or if Noel Coward came on the stage they would clap anyway. It was a bit of a shock to hear people saying the things that they did say - they didn't swear but... When I saw *The Homecoming* - you know, Pinter's play - that again was pretty badly received by a lot of people. People were shouting out, 'Animals!' and that was really to do with class... I wasn't particularly surprised by it, because I knew families that acted like that - where people argued and fought for a position in the family, the pecking order, the old man was in charge and the boys - and as you know in the play one of the boys goes to America and brings his wife back. And she's an American and the attitude is, 'What the hell have you brought back here? And why do you want to better yourself?'. Today we are in a society where parents have always pushed for their children to do better - and I'm not saying that they didn't in those days, but there was a position... You didn't go off and rocket to the top - you may want to - but families didn't generally like it, your being something that you aren't. To move up one little bit was enough, that was sufficient. In my case, my father worked in a flour mill and his attitude was (even though I had been to grammar school) was - as it was with my brother - basically, that I would be an apprentice and I would get a trade, that was the next stage. In fact, I didn't, I went off - I'd had enough of school, it was the end of the term and I didn't see any point in going any further - and I went off and got a job with the Local Authority. From that point in time, my parents and I moved apart... Even in banking and local government and things like that... University wasn't really on, university in general in my day - even though I went to a good grammar school - but university was really for people who wanted to be scientists and for people who wanted to be teachers. In general if you wanted to do anything else then you left. If you wanted to study architecture, yes you could go to university and study architecture but you would be a damn site better if you went to get articled to a good architect - or a good accountant or what have you. So there was that change, and I suppose that people of my age, of that time, just hit that period. Later on in the sixties we then started to see the liberation, and that was another shock to a lot of people. I mean, *Hair* with its nudity, and I think I mentioned *Oh! Calcutta* on the phone to you and that was a terrible shock to the world. *Oh! Calcutta* was never supposed to run... it was at the Roundhouse in London, which was more or less an exclusive club for arty people who had fairly broad opinions and very broad views - and you had to have - but it ended up in the West End and of course it ended up in the States. But subject matters - *Oh! Calcutta* is a number of scenes - Lennon produced some and Ken Tynan and various people like that produced little sketches - and it touched on subjects which really had not been openly touched on: sex, masturbation etc were all part of the scene... and it wasn't shocking, in the sense that you already went there and had a good idea of what it was about. I was working for Unilever at that time, and I managed to get a ticket for the first night of *Oh! Calcutta* and I remember that Anthony Booth - Cherie Blair's father - was in it. And that night Rex Harrison and Rachel Roberts who was his wife - who was an actress of some note - were in the audience in the front row... and basically everyone is prancing around naked: men, women, the lot! And the language is pretty rough, and at the end of it the punch line from Tony Booth was basically - which was fairly shocking to the people who were there - but he looked at the front rows of the audience and he said, 'Just think, you've spent...' - whatever it was, thirty five shillings - 'to spend the

night looking up my arse!'. [Laughter] Now, that's what it was supposed to do, it was supposed to do that...! It was surprising that it went on to the West End, but then of course it became a bit kinky, and in a sense people went to see it because they effed and talked about masturbation and so on and so forth... So it became a cliché type thing. Hair was just so wonderful... I don't know what it would be like today, but I saw it twice, once in Liverpool and once in London and it was so thrilling...

AP: Was it '68, Hair?

PB: It would be late sixties... The emancipation, if you like, of young people - young, not by today's standards but young by those days' standards. And it was so wonderful: people throwing off their clothes of course, and the smoking hash and pot, the hairstyles, the whole movement... This was the period when Woodstock - the real Woodstock, not the Hollywood Woodstock that it eventually became where film stars started to turn up and all that - it was really in the wild and it was great to see. And all of that period as I say, you had Saved coming up, Edward Bond and people like this and you've got to be fairly hardened to consider the stoning of a baby...

AP: I wanted to ask you about that actually, like whether or not you thought the outrage the play caused was actually justified, and what your reaction was to Saved?

PB: I was certainly shocked, but not shocked in the way of, 'That sort of thing doesn't happen', I was just surprised - perhaps surprised is a better word - because it was on the stage. That sort of thing did happen, one of the outcomes of the freeing of young people - the bad side - was the gang criminality. To me, Bond was personifying very much what Burgess personified in Clockwork Orange, the thuggery... But it was for kicks all the time, it wasn't in the sense of doing it just... You beat somebody up to pinch their telephone, it isn't that sort of... it was the sort of, 'Gee man, we gotta show 'em!'... So yes, I was surprised and I suppose shocked, but certainly not as shocked as lots of other people, who were pretty horrified because 'that sort of thing...' The theatre was developing, obviously, but there were certain things that people were getting used to - nudity, fairly mild bad language, there wasn't so much in that sense... Themes of course, themes being developed, but really it appeared to go that bit too far, but then it was happening, that was the problem really, in a sense that people find it very difficult to accept that it's happening. I think particularly - more so in London probably than in the provinces, because the provinces are in that sense much smaller... you could live in Hampstead in London and never know that the rest of the world existed, and certainly in those days you could have done... If you had lived in South London of course, you would have an entirely different attitude.

AP: That was one thing that I wanted to ask you actually, was when we talk about this period of theatre, whether there is too much emphasis on the London stage? Do you think that maybe we need to look more at what is happening outside London as well in the regional theatres at that time?

PB: No, not particularly... Other things were developing - not immediately. I don't come from Liverpool, but the Liverpool playwrights were starting to develop and so

forth. If I may digress, I would argue today that there is too much regional theatre. I think that governments and what have you... Whether it's in Liverpool or Manchester or Leeds in particular - I can't speak so much for Sheffield - where they are almost forced to put on local plays by minority groups, whether they are any good or not. No, things were going on - Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, films like that... For a Londoner, 'What the hell's that?' - they probably didn't even know Nottingham existed...! The Manchester scene, the same sort of thing, based on Salford... no, it was working. I think what was happening in the provinces was that of course people understood it much more than they necessarily did in London - I'm talking about the West End, I always talk about the West End in that sense - because some people could not believe that it was real. It was much easier for provincials to understand that it was real, that those things were happening in the world. And of course the theatre in many ways made things happen and brought them to the fore - plays like Hair and Saved and so on, they were real life but obviously whichever end... the gangs in the sort of Saved-type plays, the louts were real, it was important... In that sense it was probably more important in parts of South London: the young men were smarter, they were smarter dressed. It was almost if you came down to London in the fifties and sixties, you did literally count the fingers on your hand, because these were very smart guys. To see young men dressed in very lightweight suits with nice hair and so on was not what we expected to see. And the gang syndrome - and I don't mean know the boys running down the streets playing like the girls in a sort of 'my gang' and all that - but I mean the organisation was much more apparent in London. I mean, I experienced it in the late fifties when I worked for IBM, because I worked in London and a couple of my friends in IBM... I was older, as I left local government I was twenty four, twenty five, and they had mainly just left university. One of my very good friends went to Jesus College, and you would think that he was well educated, a mathematician, worked for IBM, brilliant, but as I got to know him and became friends with him... because I was working down here [London] at that time - for six months - by this time I was married and we were expecting our first child when I was twenty five... It was a new world because again, his pals wore crisp suits and very tightly knotted little thin ties and they were part of a gang. Some of the things they did in the evening were not the sort of thing that you would expect from students who had got a first in maths at Oxford or Cambridge... but that's what they did, he came from South Norwood in London, and that's what he was at the end of the day. He could be a brilliant mathematician on one hand and on the other hand, when he went home he was 'sharp', he was 'cute'. One of the things they used to do - and these are twenty year old boys - they used to come up to London with pots of glue and pour it on the hair of the prostitutes in Soho...! Now, you know all that Bond was doing was showing this, if you want to hide away from that, then you can hide away from it. It wasn't happening so much in the provinces because there wasn't the money and parents were much more... controlled I suppose, in that sort of sense of the word, but in London the parents were smarter - they were all very Terry Venables-ey: they didn't go to the barbers round the corner, they went to hairdressers, and going up west to the West End on a Friday or Saturday night was the big thing, and you had your fun, and one of their fun things was taking some glue and pouring it over prostitutes and running away... So yes, as I say surprised, but not really shocked in that sense of the word. So you are having this balance and in many ways what was happening was that - you've got to remember there were loads of theatres in London, so there was only a few that were doing the... there was still the Noel Coward-ey, Priestley type things going on in the background, but of course the musicals were changing you know, much in the sense of the American musicals, the Carousels and so forth which were great for entertainment but then you started to get Hair and Oh! Calcutta and then of course later on with Jesus Christ Superstar etc...so no, it wasn't a

shock but I think that's an age thing, I think that was just... almost in the sense that my generation was in the right place at the right time, in a sense.

AP: That has reminded me what I wanted to ask, I know you have seen a number of productions overseas, New York and Dublin...

PB: Yeah, Dublin, on the continent.

AP: ...what would you say are the differences between British and International theatres, if there are any?

PB: Well generally yes...the intelligence of the audience – I don't mean intelligence in the academic sense, I mean the ability of the Brits in general to think deeper... I think our approach to cynicism – I am talking now as nationals, I am not talking about just theatre – our love of cynicism, our love of sarcasm, it's shown in our comedians. The Americans... The later American theatre I have got a lot of time for, I happen to think that that man Meht [?] is one of the greatest playwrights there is... I sort of think that Eugene O'Neill is, but you don't put Eugene O'Neill in that sort of class... but generally no... Obviously I have got quite a lot of friends in the States, and I have done a doctorate in US Political Science and I have met a lot of Americans of various sorts and no... unusually flat - it is not the same.

I think the other thing is of course that we have to remember that we are a very, very tiny country in terms of distance and yet you know, I live in Chester, you are in Sheffield at university and I know you live near me, but you know that for me, within twenty-odd minutes I can be in Liverpool, within thirty minutes I can be in Manchester, within an hour and a half I can be in Leeds, in an hour and three quarters I can be in Stratford and in two hours I can be in London! And also in thirty five minutes I can be in Dublin... I think the Irish theatre-goers are in many ways of course perhaps even better than the Brits, but of course in general their culture is much more contained. You are going to see - usually - Irish playwrights and Irish actors doing the plays. Obviously, that is what they specialise in and that is what they are good at - I mean, Sean O'Casey and people like that – Yeats and so forth... are particular - Behan of course, it goes without saying, you know, that - but the other countries, no. Wherever we have been in the States we always try to go to the theatre if there is anything on, and we normally find the same sort of flatness, particularly if it's a British play... I am trying to think of one... Oh yes, I know! The Sheffield play *The Full Monty* - sorry the film - you know, it was staged and we went to see it in Phoenix, Arizona with our American friends. Well, first of all they didn't understand a bloody word that they were talking about! It was an English production, and they were pretty good Yorkshire men to say the least, and we explained to them that it was very difficult for us, the fact that when we live eighty miles away... they didn't understand that it was a problem. But of course the jokes, they couldn't get the humour, whether it was... well, they got the open humour, we find in many ways that they are cruder - and I am talking about nice people - but their attitude to sexual innuendo, you miss out the innuendo and they are there... you don't get the same appreciation and of course the language is so different. And as we know, the problem, we explained to them, is that sometimes it is very difficult – I'm sure you are the same, although you are in Sheffield – you would find it very difficult to understand *The Full Monty* in the same way that somebody from Sheffield would... both in the language

and what is happening there - you can understand the unemployment and the frustration and what have you... when we said to our Americans, 'You do realise that this is serious?', they didn't see it at all. They thought it was a comedy and you sort of said, 'Yes, some comedy, that a guy goes out everyday so that his wife doesn't know that he has lost his job!'. But of course, they saw the other side... We live in a country where dialects and vocabulary are very different between London and Sheffield and Liverpool - and Liverpool in particular - Newcastle you're way up. I know we have met many people who never really understood the Liverpool players...

AP: Did you notice that at the time then, with all of the New Wave stuff coming through, that there was a change in the more regional accents being brought on stage, was that a big development for you?

PB: No, I suppose in many ways it snuck in type thing, in a sense. It shouldn't have been a surprise, because there were quite a few regional plays, but I mean, they were usually fairly old. People were still playing... Norfolk Farm Yox and Somerset what-have-you in some of the old plays, it was basically of course their bringing it to life. Just as in *The Full Monty*, one of them wears a Sheffield Wednesday shirt, obviously with Liverpool it's pretty obvious what they are going to do! And the language again... Liverpool was a wonderful place, I worked there from 1959 to 65 and it was a fantastic place to be...

AP: I think we are running out of time, is there anything else you would like to add?

PB: We have seen the change in theatre, I certainly don't think - it may be getting older - you can speak on this better than I can, there is not the sharpness in the theatre now. Social problems are perhaps too obvious with television and God knows what, or in a sense perhaps they were always obvious in my day - poverty is not new in many ways, but there were certain parts of the class and the country who didn't know about those sorts of things... people didn't talk about women having children without a marriage... I am sure your grandmother and my mother, the word 'pregnant' was not used in the house unless you happened to be a Welsh Methodist, so it's not unusual... so her and my paternal grandmother talked in sign language, they had a language of their own: 'she's that way again' or 'she's in the club', but never - and I remember when I was fourteen or fifteen and I used the word 'pregnant' and my mother went absolutely berserk - she didn't hit me or anything because she wasn't that sort of woman, but I mean basically people didn't talk...! So yes, you get back to *Look Back in Anger* and you don't have to do the effing bit - it didn't because that was later - and in many ways of course it is used to effect now... I find it dreadful in the sense that - I have explained to people that when I was at university, like you doing my BA in English Literature, and particularly young ladies - I used to say 'you do realise that it is an adjective?'. I know you are doing English Literature but sometimes people don't know what adjectives are, so sometimes you are a bit lost! No, sorry it's not an adjective, it is a verb in the sense that... But as you know, people do use it and other words, in the wrong sense... What we were seeing was people using it in the right sense - and people did use them, there is no question about that but they didn't use them in the sense of... You heard them at football matches, you heard them with the men, but very, very few men would swear in front of their wives or their children, or certainly not their parents, it wasn't the way, but it was always there. But of course if you are well looked after and well brought up in

those days then you didn't even know that people would use fairly mild slang. So that social realism that the theatre brought out was fascinating, it wasn't make believe, it was there. I think it moved it on and there is always the argument whether it moved it on too much or not is difficult. But then again today... you know, it is still surprising to me that Clockwork Orange is banned, and you sort of think that it was pretty nasty at the time, but then things were being produced on the stage and the screen which were pretty nasty. I think bad language, nudity, sex are often being used now not in reality, but they are being used as a sort of, 'Oh look, she takes her clothes off and she is fully naked and he is fully naked', where in the sixties it was very different, it was basically 'this is what is happening' - Woodstock comes to London, and in many ways I think it is fair to say that the Brits embraced it, surprisingly for a nation where we don't do those sort of things. We embraced it a lot earlier than certainly the Europeans did. It is amazing when you think that in the fifties women were going topless on the beaches in France and so on and the Germans would sunbathe nude, but in the theatre that was not what they did, and in the British theatre that is what was happening. I think we are at a watershed at the moment, there are some playwrights around - or good playwrights around - but I think from the social point of view... I tend to end up at places like the Tricycle here [ed. London] which is brilliant at social commentary. There have been some wonderful performances on Guantanamo, there has been a wonderful performance on the Northern Irish situation, but they have never really progressed. Whereas in the sixties they would have been in the West End, they would have been quite openly spoken about. Politics and the social situation seem almost to be mealy mouthed about it, nobody seems to be happy about the war in Iraq, nobody seems to be happy about the government, nobody seems to be happy about education and the National Health but there doesn't really seem to be anybody - and there probably is, I know - but generally, there isn't anybody that's a John Osborne or a Bond, or a Pinter that is actually saying those things so openly.