

INTERVIEW

Lors d'un entretien accordé les 2 et 3 mai 1985 en son domicile de Boston Spa (West Yorkshire), Trevor Griffiths fait part des valeurs fondamentales qui inspirent et structurent son œuvre.

N.B. Trevor, you are a Northerner and Manchester man. You are half-Welsh and half-Irish and you have been brought up as a Roman Catholic. Has this background shaped a particular outlook on life and on your work ?

T.G. Oh yes ! A whole sense of difference, like Lawrence. A sense of always being on borders of history, of cultures, of languages, borders of class. The Welshness, which is my father's, was chapel, non-conformist, tidy, frightened. The Irishness which is my mother's is imaginative, catholic, impulsive, linguistically much more exciting than the Welsh language. When I was five I spoke Welsh. I was evacuated to the country and returned a Welsh speaker. I must have been bilingual for a little period of time. Just understanding different national cultures at a very early age, or at least experiencing the Irishness of my grandma, a certain creative perverseness of articulation, subsistence, in contemporary terms wholly non-aspirant, with no desire to be other or elsewhere. Extraordinary sense of realness ! And these were people who had been uprooted. My grandmother came to Manchester from County Clare in the 1890s. She married an Irish miner in Manchester and had 6 children. Her husband got killed in the war, in France in 1916, the same day as his two eldest sons. She was left to raise these four kids on a widow's pension. She went upstairs and « keened » for three days. « Keen » is an Irish word which means a ritual mourning sound between singing and crying. She « keened » for three days dressed all in black. The children were looked after by the woman next door. Three days later, she came downstairs and took over her life until she died in 1954. She raised me for a while, and introduced me to poetry and the danger of language.

That was Irishness. Then there's Englishness as well which is something else. I developed a sense of self as English and Irish. I've recently written a play about this, in which I have discovered a bit of this early shaping. I mean as a kid I used to have to travel through Protestant areas to get home, and if you were caught you were beaten up. This was in Manchester. I was born in 1935 and I was going to school at the age of three. My grandmother was going blind so she went to see the priest who got me into school. So at three I was reading. She taught me to read out of necessity, because she was going blind and needed to have her horoscope read from the Sunday paper. And I was the only one who could do it. She was a wholly unschooled woman, the daughter of tinkers.

N.B. This was a warm background.

T.G. I'm reaching back a long way. I'm going back from 1935 to 1940. It toughened considerably after that, though materially things were better. I mean my father had a job, we were all reconstituted as a family, five of us plus my grandmother. We were able to live in a neighbourhood which contained a fair number of close family, cousins, uncles. I still remember the war. I can remember standing with my mother and my grandmother and watching my city burn. It was one of the bombing raids on

Manchester, and we were four miles away from the city centre. I had no understanding of what was going on but I knew it was serious. You took your sense of seriousness then from all kinds of unstated gestures, the way people held themselves. I remember discussions between my father and my mother and my mother crying. They were talking about carrier-ships that had been sunk. We had a cousin on a ship that was sunk in 1941 or 42. The most vibrant moment of the war for me was V.E. Day. I was ten and just beginning to be sexual. There were street and neighbourhood bonfires all over Manchester, all over Britain. I can recall going from bonfire to bonfire in that whole area. I remember dancing with girls who had breasts. I was absolutely seduced by the experience of community. The community of strangers. It was probably the first time I had felt warmth inside a community since I had left my grandmother's slum in Manchester in 1938.

N.B. *Your grandmother seems to have had a strong influence on your childhood. Did you identify with her values ?*

T.G. Yes, she was a deeply important person. Her values were in direct conflict with the values of my home. The dominant values of that house were the man's, my father, and my grandmother was totally opposed to his ways, largeley because he was not a catholic. She had extraordinary ways of making her point, even though she had no power inside the house objectively. She was very devious. She had an eye removed for cataract and never had it replaced with a glass piece. She used to wear a piece of coloured, pink it was, pink early plastic, it wasn't plastic, it was bakelite or something, a very substantial piece of eye-ring around her face, on a piece of knicker elastic, I imagine a piece of elastic she had taken out the leg of her drawers. It was a very crude and primitive prothesis. Nobody liked it very much because you had to look at it all the time. I remember once I drew something on it. But that's not the point of my story. When my father used to cross her, and that was frequently, she would choose a strategic moment, possibly at Sunday tea, to remove this thing, and to begin cleaning the eye-socket with her finger while my father was eating. This was delicately calculated to drive him into frenzy. I used to watch this and explore the dynamic. It was all incredibly unstated. It was beautiful !

N.B. *These seem to be happy memories. Did you feel happy at the time ?*

T.G. I began to feel increasingly unhappy from the age of nine. At nine, I passed the eleven plus to go to grammar-school. I was the first person in my whole extended family to have grammar-school secondary education. My brother, two and a half years older, had taken his eleven plus before the 1944 Education Act which had extended the access of grammar-school education to working-class people. He continued in elementary education till he was fifteen. I went to grammar-school and that, I think, that whole process of English grammar-school education began to alienate me from my working-class values and lifestyle and my parents. In a way, English grammar-school education is designed precisely to do that. Proletarianism, the whole idea of working-class culture and history, certainly at the time when I was being taught, and I think substantially still so today, was either ignored or condemned, in some way found minor, unimportant, rather contemptible. And this extends not just to valorized objects, art objects, it also extends to one's language, to how one actually speaks. There's a very fine Leeds poet called Tony Harrison, who writes very feelingly about being « branded on the tongue », that's Orwell's expression for

working-class speech. He's got a wonderful poem in which, he as a child is sitting in his grammar-school class, and they're reading poems by Keats aloud, going from boy to boy in the class, and the teacher asks Harrison to read, which he does and says, « me et eks » for « my heart aches », and the teacher stops him. That was my experience of being taught. It was always there. I could feel it. There was something wrong with the way I spoke, with the way I dressed, something not right about my manners, my habits, my gestures. Fifty per cent of the school was working-class. We're talking about that first influx of working-class kids into secondary grammar-school education. I was part of the first wave. But I guess we were all feeling that, that it was not our place, that we had to change in order to be acceptable. Then began for me a very long struggle to hold on to where I had come from and also to get hold of this new thing which, outside of its class aspects, dealt with intellect, with feeling, objectivity to some extent, standing outside one's own being and seeing things from another position. So I was living a massive contradiction which I couldn't, unaided anyway, resolve. And indeed it was not until many years later, in the late fifties and early sixties, that I began, through reading sociology, to see what that contradiction had been made of, and incidentally, to see how badly I had responded to it by becoming very elitist, very avant-garde, very detached from my own class, with very hostile feelings towards my parents, particularly my father, superior, arrogant, something of a social fascist in short. I don't mean that my politics were fascist in any way. But there was something quite brutal about what my education had produced in me. I was also a high-flier. I went to grammar-school when I was nine and to University when I was seventeen and that was quite rare in those days. I was a state scholar. I was like instinct with promise at one level.

N.B. *How did you see your future ?*

T.G. I had absolutely no sense of my future. I was negotiating so many new worlds so rapidly. There was absolutely nobody in the whole of my extended family, the whole of my neighbourhood or acquaintance, there was nobody who had any experience whatsoever to hand on about University. When I went to University, I didn't know what a University was for. When I told you I didn't know, as late as 1970, what the National Theatre was and you said, « I don't believe it », I mean you've got to understand that Britain has traditionally been « places ». It's not being a place, it's many different places. David Hare wrote a play set in 1941, *Licking Hitler*, in which a central female character didn't know how to boil water. I believed it. It is extraordinary what this society doesn't know about itself. That's the whole trick of wealth, because people don't know how other people live.

When I was sixteen, my English teacher at school, a Jesuit, said that I should take a Cambridge Open. I didn't know what he was talking about. I thought it was a golf match...He had arranged for me to go to Cambridge. I went home with this news and my father asked how much it was going to cost. I said it would cost £10 and that I would have to stay for two days. Ten pounds was just above one pound more than what my father earned for a week's work, which was at that time forty-eight hours a week. He said « we can't afford it ». So I didn't go. That's one of the things I have to thank my father for. He was at that time fairly bitter about me. We were angry with each other. So I think this assertion of authority was very important for him. Whatever his reasons were, objectively it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I suspect I would have ended up as some kind of appalling conservative fool.

N.B. *But isn't Oxbridge a hotbed of revolutionary activity ?*

T.G. No it isn't. It has a strong conservative Party. I chose Manchester to go to because at the time I was in love with a girl working in a travel agency in Manchester and I didn't want to spend any time away from her.

N.B. *Did you have an interesting and stimulating time at University ?*

T.G. It was very vivid. I was an alcoholic when I was eighteen. I used to drink a lot, three bottles of rum and thirty pints of beer a week. This is at eighteen, you know, and it's about defining yourself as a man, macho. So taking drink and getting angry and being in fights and so on, this was my street proletarian sense still working its way through, still insisting on being reckoned with. At the same time I was having deeply interior experiences to do with sensitivity, tenderness, caring, belief, which had no expression outside of poetry that I wrote. I mean there was no open discourse for that. I'm talking about 1952 to 1955. I'm talking about the cold war, the cold country, very cold politics, quiescence, quietism, victory of the right, Suez coming up. I was living these two extremely contradictory lives, one of which was intense, intellectual, poetic and largely interior, and the other was as a roaring boy, swaggering about, getting into fights, getting knifed, trown out of clubs, wrecking people's houses, extremely unpleasant from where I am now. It was a major crisis and it went on for a long time. Partly to do with the break down in the relationship with this girl. She came back from holiday camp with news of a new lover. It absolutely destroyed my world, my life and my integrity. It was very painful. Totally undiscoursed. I didn't reveal my state to anybody. I just went around taking it out on the world as it were.

N.B. *What did you want to do once you had your degree in English ?*

T.G. I didn't have to make any choices or even to consider the question, because after I had completed my degree I went straight into the army to do two years' National Service. Technically I could have presented myself as unfit for military duties. Any sensible working-class kid would've done exactly that. But my brother had been in the army and had fought Britain's imperial wars in Kenya and wherever, and there was no way I could allow myself to be excluded from military service on grounds of physical inadequacy. It was again part of the machismo of growing up male in Northern working-class society at that time. So when they said, « you've got flat feet », I said « yea, but I also played for England Schoolboys as a footballer, so what are you talking about ? » So they said « What do you want to join ? », I said « the infantry. » I ended up as an infantry man. I hated it. I didn't want to spend two bloody years in the army, but I didn't want to shirk, as it were, my male responsibilities. I was desperately trying to define myself as a member of my class, and I was making mistakes because a real member of the working-class would have said, « I've got flat feet, » or « I've got a job, » or « a girl-friend. » National Service was deeply unpopular. I was being very perverse in insisting on serving my sentence. It was a good choice because I got reimmersed into working-class culture as a private soldier in the army. I experienced a great deal and was able to analyse and understand.

I wrote a lot of poetry. I learnt to type with two fingers. I had a couple of very significant love affairs, sex affairs with women considerably older. I came out of the army with seven weeks' pay in the Summer of 1957. I was trained to do absolutely nothing. With no ideas of what I might do. Rather like a character in a Hemingway

short story. I came out and sat there. My mother said, « what are you going to do ? » I said « I don't know ». After some weeks she said, « look there's a post at this school ». A private school, six miles from where I was born. I wrote off for this job : £12 a week teaching English and games. I spent the next five years there. That's when I became intellectually alive. I met some extraordinary people on the staff of that place, anarchists, atheists, deeply unconventional people, many of them for sexual reasons. Extraordinary people. There was an old guy, called Albert Smith, who had been part of the mass-observation team that had gone around Britain interviewing everybody in the town, on a particular hour, on a particular day, producing a fat volume of « What Britain Thought ». Extraordinary work ! I began to develop a social awareness and learn to understand my own experiences of being working-class.

In 1957-58 I began to be interested in the peace movement. I joined my first Aldermaston march in 1959-60. I became involved in Manchester left politics. I suddenly got exposed to some of the best minds of the period who were all involved in New left politics : Edward Thompson, Peter Worsley, Stuart Hall, Perry Anderson. All came to the Manchester left club to talk politics. I went to the New left summer-school in Yorkshire, they were all there, fierce disputes going on all the time. Very bitter arguments between Thompson and Anderson. I joined the Labour Party in 1964 and left in 1965. I didn't leave so much as not rejoin. In 1965 I was writing articles in *Labour's Northern Voice* arguing that the sale of arms to South Africa was simply impossible under a socialist government, and Wilson was going ahead selling planes to South Africa. I've seen their military inventories and those planes are still on them. I was married in 1960.

N.B. *Did you feel that things were happening in you in the sixties ?*

T.G. Yes. I was growing up. I left the private school in 1961 and took a job as a Liberal Studies teacher in a technical college in Stockport. For a time I was thought of as a candidate for Parliament in Stockport. That's when I joined the Labour Party and learnt how it operates. I used it in *Bill Brand* ten years later.

N.B. *Did you like party politics ?*

T.G. I liked the drama of the caucus. It seemed to me like games.

N.B. *When did you start thinking about writing for the theatre ?*

T.G. There had been reports from the battlefronts as it were, as far as the state of the theatre was concerned. They lifted my spirit and touched my curiosity, because it did sound as if something was happening. The most important influence on me was television. From the late fifties onwards, Independent Television and then the BBC began to commission and produce new plays. Some of the best writing of the post-war period occurred at that time. Writers like Alun Owen, Clive Exton, Henry Livings, John McGrath. Quite extraordinary material ! It was *my* drama. It was about me. I saw myself on the stage, in a way that I never expected to with drama. I had never seen myself centre stage in Shakespeare or Ben Jonson or Dryden. Then when Tony Garnett and Ken Loach began to get working in the early sixties, seasons of Wednesday plays that took your head off, five great plays in ten weeks ! Amazing ! Just great ! Authenticity, passion, that was exciting ! So that's a long strand of influence. I had

written poetry, short stories in the fifties, and bizarrely enough I had always thought of myself as the one who writes. Not as a writer, that is a social ascription to do with earning a living, status, but as somebody creating texts. When I was thirteen, I wrote two novellas as it were. Even in French translation, I would always seek to be linguistically creative. I remember doing a French essay when I was in the sixth form, which was a stream of consciousness that I'd learnt from reading *Ulysses*. I wrote this piece in French. It was about this madman setting fire to the forest and he was in the middle of it. I was the madman. The fire in his brain and the fire outside became collapsed in the language. It was a very resourceful piece but grammatically not very good. The teacher was very responsive to it and recognised it as inspirational writing rather than conventional. So I'd always had that feeling about what I did that my hidden agenda was always that I wrote. Not for publication, not to be seen and dealt with. And I was always aware in personal crisis that I wrote for therapy as well, that it was a very important discourse I was engaged in when I sat down to write. And sometimes the therapy would be to tell lies to the page. The particular lie I'm talking about is when you write a diary as if it were a letter to the person who has rejected you or makes you feel unhappy and you say : « I'm having a wonderful time, I'm extraordinarily successful in all my personal relationships, I'm highly regarded by everyone », and you lay out every lie under the sun, because you don't want to disclose what a miserable shit you feel !... That's whistling in the dark. A different kind of therapy, not a particularly valuable one, but as far as I can remember, I always felt better each time I wrote this wonderful account of my life. But that's a slender strand of my work at that time. The point to make is that there was not much sign of a playwright then. I wrote my first dramatic text in 1962 or 63. That was a television play. When I wrote my first pieces, television was the only place where I wanted to see them made. They were written to be shot in television studios rather than to be done on the stage. I'd only been to the theatre about half a dozen time in my life until 1962-63. The theatre was completely outside my social frame of reference. Nobody I knew went to the theatre. I can tell you some of the things that I actually saw in the theatre between 1957 and 1965 : one of them was *The Kitchen*, I saw Claire Bloom and Burton in *Hamlet* at the Opera House in Manchester, two plays by John Osborne at the Royal Court, *Plays for England*, *Under Plain Cover* I thought was wonderful. *The Blood of the Bambergs* I thought shit. I saw *Eh !* by Henry Livings. I saw a play by Alun Owen in Blackpool called *Progress to the Park*. I saw a student production of *Macbeth* and I did a tape version at University of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. I've run out of experiences now. I'm sure I saw more, but very little.

N.B. *Did you think the future lay in television drama ?*

T.G. I didn't think at the time. I was still in a wholly unreflective state. I was writing dialogues. I wanted to deal with my life, my experiences, my feelings. The first play I wrote was called *The Mob at the Door*, it was a play about university students. The second play was about the army : *The Bastard Child*. That wasn't very good either. As soon as I wrote the first play, I knew that it was what I should be doing. This was my voice. The poems I wrote were fiercely abstract. When I wrote these very indifferent naturalist plays in the early sixties, working through the night because I was working full time as a teacher, it was very clear that that was my voice. Since then I lost my capacity to write any other way except plays. I don't like it any other way. I mean it's blood from stone to get me to write a two page essay as an introduction to a play. Straightforward prose is agony to me.

N.B. Did you intend to develop a distinctive style or were you quite happy with the naturalistic form of your early plays ?

T.G. I was thrilled by the naturalistic form and the whole way in which you could get quotidian living into frame. The other thing is although I'd done an English degree and had studied drama, I had not really spent much time on form. I hadn't done a drama degree where the hot debate would be : « Is realism dead ? » There was none of that in my studies and consciousness. When I saw plays by Livings, Synge, yes they were stylish, but they also had this ability to cover the terrain of normal things in my life, sociologically : pubs, kitchens, bathrooms, bowling greens. Places I knew. Working men's clubs. No country houses, no long lawns, avenues of poplars, no trips to the Far East and talks about « Daddy ». The key thing I learnt about why it was my voice to write drama, to write plays rather than anything else, was because there's something univalent about poetry, like me addressing you, whereas it is the sheer multivalency of drama which is exciting, the fact that you have to fully occupy so many spaces. It seems to me the best way afforded to us to explore contradictions and dialectic. Valetta and Kabak in *Occupations*, it is hard to imagine how you would get those two positions together in any other way. A dramatic way. Voices, positions, ideology, people, all cohere in the one image or the one concept called character.

I used these two plays I wrote (*The Mob at the Door* and *The Bastard Child*) in my teaching. I used them sociologically. I wanted to validate my sense of life against theirs. It was very illuminating. In 1966 I wrote my first « brother play ». It's been a strange relationship you know. I've known him for fifty years now. it's a strange relationship. I've gone from wild admiration, respect to distant dislike and back again. I have a great deal of regard for him. It is not an easy relationship to describe. If it were, I would not have written about it. But I was not exactly writing about him and me, or at least it was not the object to say « this is how my brother and I lived ». It was to say something about people from the same stand who've gone in different directions, what problems confront them in their lives. The play was called *The Daft'un*. This was a play that I showed, that I tried to get made when I was still teaching.

I stopped teaching in 65 and became an Education Officer for the BBC. Inside the BBC I tried to get the *Daft'un* made. First of all I sent it to Granada and they wrote me a letter back with four misspellings. It was only a producer who was writing !... It was a very encouraging letter. But when I got to the BBC I tried to have it done there, but that was not possible. I did meet Tony Garnett, and that's really when I started thinking about writing full time. I got to love Tony. Admiration preceded my meeting him. He had put on the most extraordinary seasons of new drama on television. I felt it an enormous honour and privilege to actually meet the guy, to get to know him. I told him I wanted to write a play about a strike. Tony Garnett said, « Did you ever work in a factory ? » I said « no », he asked « did you ever work anywhere ? » I said I taught and he said, « Why don't you write a play about it ? » So I wrote a play about teaching, which I thought was pretty good advice. The play was called *The Love Maniac*. Tony bought it. It never got made but it did get me an agent. Tony introduced me to his literary agent, a man called Clive Goodwin. A good friend, a genuine person. He spent a lot of time in Paris in 1968. He liked the play very much, this was in 1968. In 1969 he rang me up and said, « Do you want to write a stage play ? » What had happened was I had written a play for voices called *The Wages of Thin*. We were talking one night about the way he worked and the way I worked. He said he could only

write from his own direct experience and I said it seemed to me both a glorious strength and a terrible limitation, because I think I could write about anything. He said, « I bet you couldn't write about three blokes in a lavatory. » In two weeks I had a play written about three blokes in a lavatory in Albert Square in Manchester called *The Wages of Thin*. It was a piece infected with its own self-admiring language. « Very catholic piece » somebody called it. Anyway that was picked up through my agent by a new avant-garde theatre company being run by Granada T.V. : the Stables Theatre in Manchester. It had ninety seats and was totally committed to a new plays' policy. They did it for three nights, late night. That was my first experience of working with actors. I was invited to some of the rehearsals and runthroughs and I talked to the producer. I learnt so much from those three nights. That director Gordon McDougall asked me if there was a full-length play that I wanted to write for the theatre. With that experience of having work produced I said yes. I had just been reading nine essays by Gramsci that had been published by *The New Left Review* in 1969 from *Ordine Nuovo*, which went from March 1920 to November 1920. I knew nothing about Gramsci's positioning or his history or about his life at the time. I don't think there was anything in English to help me. I said yes I want to write about the occupations of the factories in Turin in 1920. I did a lot of research, with little or no Italian. I went to Fiat Centre in Turin, told them I was a journalist doing an article on the historical Fiat. They took me all round the factory, they showed me their files. Most of that sequence at the end of the play where Valletta lays out the trajectory of how Fiat and the Italian capital will develop, workers' houses, hostels, sanatoriums, all that absorption of the proletariat inside capital, all of that was laid out in a file. It was historically accurate. That's where I got it from. That was my first stage play : *Occupations*. I started another play in 1968 and finished it in 1971, another brother play : *Sam Sam*.

N.B. *You obviously enjoyed working on Gramsci. How did you manage to dramatize the research and transcend the documentary basis ?*

T.G. *Occupations* was a researched project. I really started from scratch. Few knew about Gramsci, but everybody knew about the occupation of the shipyards on the Clyde. And since the late 60s, « occupation » had become a major tactic. I was excited about the project. I thought it was an accurate historical correlative for what was happening now, and maybe we could learn something from it. Finding the correct relationship between the research material and the text that you create is always very difficult. You have to leave space for the material to shape the text, but that means that you have to deal with the material first hand yourself. People write to me and say, « Do you have any use for a researcher ? » Well, in the sense that I am talking of research, no. You have to process everything yourself because you don't know what's the use of it. Nobody knows what what would be usable. Nobody else would know. Scenes just leap out of the page because of one detail. I remember a detail when I was reading about John Reed's return to Russia in 1919. He got stuck outside Petrograd, and he finds a kid who's fallen down in the ice. he picks the kid up and looks for the parents and finally gets to this house. The Russian peasant woman is grateful and she gives him a boiled potato in thanks. He looks around the room and the wall is plastered with cow dung and what he thinks may well even be human excrement. Just that detail made me want to write that scene. It said so much about the privations that were visited on the Russian people by the counter-revolutionary wars that were promoted and fought by the West against the revolution. The scene

was never shot in *Reds*. There are thousands of examples where, had you not done the research yourself, there would have been stuff missing.

A few years ago, I thought that I'd like to pick up with Gramsci again, and cover the period in prison from 1926 to 1937. But I'd never seen any particular reason for writing it until last year. Suddenly this whole idea of the revolution in chains, the revolution in prison, that image was a very convincing one. A very compelling one now in the mid-eighties, with Thatcherism and Reaganomics, and intensification of the dangers of war and nuclear annihilation. The Italian Communist Party called those days the Days of Iron and Fire and that's going to be the title of the play. It will be episodic. I'll cover those eleven years from being put inside to dying. It is an extraordinary life. The fact that he produces the prison note-books, four thousand pages of closely-argued theory. He runs a communist cell inside every jail, conducts seminars, learns languages, writes treatises on culture, history, language. And this is a man who is progressively dying. He had everything, he was a wreck.

N.B. *Did you like the 7:84 production of Occupations ?*

T.G. I was glad to have had the 7:84 production. It was a very effective but not a very happy production. We miscast Kabak. The man who played Gramsci was a very gifted actor who subsequently founded Belt and Braces (Gavin Richards). That production was successful on its own terms. It was agit-prop, very anti-realist, very bold, spare. It was a production that ignored the spirit of the text in favour of its own political purposes as a production. That play cannot work that way. I don't think that any of my plays can work that way. My plays are suasive documents, they are not slogans. To answer your question, no, I didn't like the 7:84 production. But I admired it immensely.

N.B. *Your way of writing has changed a lot since Occupations. Is your next stage play, The Days of Iron and Fire, going to be in a totally different style from Occupations ? How will you tackle the Gramsci background ?*

T.G. The challenge is whether it is going to be possible to write a play of this substance and scale in the somewhat imagist forms that I have developed. Impressionist and imagist forms that I have been developing in films and T.V. in the last four or five years, and whether that will affect the way in which I approach the research is clearly unsolved. I took few liberties with the history in *Occupations*. Every physical attribute and gesture that I attributed to Gramsci I had somehow researched. Now I'm already considering *The Days of Iron and Fire*, I have an idea that there may well be a scene in prison where Gramsci rehearses a play that they've been writing about the world outside. There's no evidence at all that Gramsci did dramatic practice, but he could have done. If I can get something said that way, why not, why bother when you've got such a wealth of events and incident which you can research. Kabak is a wholly constructed character, it was my character Christo Kabak. The answer is I don't know. I'm excited to find out how it is going to work, whether I can undertake still that kind of research journey, intellectually *Occupations* and *The Party* were big projects - hundreds of books and essays and articles a lot of travelling, of talking to people, a lot of photograph study, photographs of the period. I unlocked the Pietro Gobetti photo library. I found photographs of the actual occupations. All this research is necessary to master material, in part historical, in part political, social, psychological, so that I can move in that situation as if I were there. So many boring things you have to know : what was the state of telegraphy at that time, decor. Part of the craft is to know what you're doing, not telling lies. Doing

work like this is very demanding. You've got to do it properly. It's possible to write about the past with no understanding or knowledge of it at all, and to write very persuasively and convincingly, but that is not my project. Everything that is imaginative in my work is imagination informed ; it is not that vast cavern of imagination Coleridge described. It's not some dark unconscious space that you enter into and then meditate the meaning through images and ideas. In that sense sociology is very important for me. Psychology, I suppose, is not so important. Politics, ideology and the relationship between these fields. It's a necessity in this sort of work. I don't want in any way to be self-referring or self-congratulatory, there are great plays that have nothing to do with research. In any case, it feeds something in me. In spite of what I said about my university years, they were important and fruitful years. If I stopped learning, I would be dead. I can't imagine a life without significant gains in understanding.

N.B. *Should Occupations and The Party be considered as a sequence ?*

T.G. Yes. It is a trilogy with one play missing and the one play missing is quite interesting. I knew that when I wrote *The Party* not only did it relate to *Occupations* but it related to another play as yet unwritten. The other play unwritten is the play I wrote *The Party* instead of. But I had concretely begun researching and designing in my head and on paper another two plays.

Tynan wrote to the Stables Theatre where *Occupations* was reviewed. He asked for a copy. I thought he was a very important guy. I knew that he was some sort of literary manager of the Old Vic which they'd then begun to call the National Theatre. We met in London and he said he thought *Occupations* was a very good play. He could not get anybody at the National Theatre to do it but he was very interested to commission a play if there was one I wanted to write. There was one. It was about the Kronstadt mutiny of 1921. He was very excited about it. About a month later, the R.S.C. phoned to say that they'd read *Occupations* and that they wanted to do it in London, in a new experimental season of new plays at the Place. They went ahead. Trevor Nunn asked if I had a stage play. I couldn't say yes ! So I told him about this other stage play I wanted to write about the Putney Debates in the English Civil war in 1646. So I was writing my next play, the Putney Debates, for the R.S.C., and my next play, Kronstadt, for the National Theatre. I carried this contradiction around with me for quite a while while I was doing T.V. plays. When I eventually found the time to write a play, the play that I wrote was *The Party*. I met neither demand. I just wrote. This play just came off. I wrote it while I was researching a screen play about Strindberg's life. I wrote about eighty pages in two weeks. I'd done some preparation for it because I'd made up my mind months and months before, that I was going to write a play about Paris and London.

N.B. *You enjoy writing about troubled periods. Did you find May 68 in Paris a stimulating starting-point for a play ?*

T.G. Absolutely. It had been a starting point for *Occupations*. I needed to say more, to look at it again. Six months later I rewrote it and showed it to Tynan. I had a telegram somewhere from Ceylon saying, « we're going to do it ». A couple of weeks later, I was called to see Olivier. It had never been my desire to work in a cellar talking to twenty seven people about things you believed in. I'd always thought in terms of broad communication across the classes. That's why I have always been strategically attracted to television. The idea of working in very small constricted spaces with people who are

already converted to your point of view never interested me. At that time I was not interested in the argument about rich and poor theatre. I was much more interested in platforms. It was about this time that I made my first visit to the British Museum in London to do some research on Kronstadt. The way they treat people there is unbelievable. The idea that this belongs to the people is crap. I was developing a political notion of appropriating these so-called national spaces for a viewpoint and a politics quite different from the ones that habitually get expressed there. And so, talking to a National Theatre audience about things that interested me seemed to me quite a good ruse. I wrote a play that was very austere, though I think it's an immensely comic play. Terribly painful but funny irony throughout the play. It was received as a sermon. The *New Statesman* described it as « Sunday pulpit sermon. » The play was wiped out by the critics. Forty-seven critics said, « terrible. » Three said : « somewhere between good and masterpiece. » Michael Billington wrote three times about it and declared it « a modern masterpiece. » *The Evening Standard* found it riveting. Everybody else said, « crap. » It was a very misjudged production. That was partly to do with the institution. It's such a vast stage to fill with decor that when you actually fill it, you are left with a room of such sumptuousness that you've actually missed the sociological point : whom this Joe Shawcross is and how a television producer lives. And then because you cast stars, Laurence Olivier, you derealize it. You make it a vehicle rather than a felt experience. It looked as if I was, in a very instrumental way, using the equipment to broadcast a socialist or Marxist message. But the style, the texture of the play absolutely denies it. It's impossible that that play could be read as a sermon because there are so many voices in it, and there are the heaviest contradictions. The thing that is very clear about the play, and I get this from this new production, years later, is the passion of the piece. There is blood all over the set. I don't mean physical blood, but there is pain, hurt, damage. It's an extraordinarily passionate piece. That was washed in the original production. It was so perfect in staging, placements were so sculpted, and yet the play itself, while it's highly styled and structured, has a certain amount of flaw and messiness in it. The indirection of that meeting is part of the direction of the play. That was not realized in that first production, and it's been well realized in this one. There are one or two very fine performances in this new production too, a relatively young man playing Tagg, quite brilliant, and a very interesting Malcolm Sloman.

N.B. *Is a reflection on leftism something provocative in Thatcher's England ?*

T.G. It comes trailing clouds of something from the sixties. I'm not sure that it has any provocation at all in this particular historical conjunction. I wonder what *Macbeth* looked like in 1616, ten or eleven years after it was first played, I don't know if that's even analogous because I don't know whether *Macbeth* was well received or not. Plays drop out of their time, and then assert themselves as transtemporal. There's no doubt that the first production of *The Party* and its reception made it very difficult for that play to be done again. There are very few directors in British theatre who would be attracted by a play like that, or would have the political understanding, experience and background to tackle it. Even Howard Davies, who is one of the most political directors, felt the need to take on David Edgar to help him with the political inflection of the play. And I think he was very brave to do it. Outside of London, we have a repertory system which is in almost total disrepair, starved of money and ideas, taking most of its output from London or, even worse, from the West End. In that structure, it's just unimaginable that plays like *Occupations* and *The Party* could

be done. *Occupations* has never been done by a repertory company. *The Party* hasn't been done. *Comedians* has been done half a dozen times. I've had more productions of *Comedians* in Canada than I've had in this country. These plays are much too heavy for British theatre, broadly speaking, too dense, too complex, too arcane. In their time, everybody had some Marxism in them, in their portmanteau of ideas they carried around. They had themselves witnessed Marxist discourse on T.V., in the papers, just generally in their lives. They'd seen the events in Paris. They'd listened to the news of an occupation or strike. Politics was the currency of communication quite often between 67 and 73 or 74. And then, almost overnight, it had gone. It's like an echo for people going to the theatre now, some of them are too young anyway. I did a play, my first stage play for ten years, last year in America, in Williamstown. It is set in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1969 and is about a group of young S.D.S. students, on a Summer programme in Cleveland, middle-class, white, hopeless, but passionate, daring and silly. It's a nice play. But Jesus, that WASP audience, they all knew about the sixties but they had no fucking idea of how it connected to them. This is not the fallibility of human memory, because we're only talking about ten years, this is the way in which cultures like ours evacuate the past. Like shitting. They actually get rid of it. This is how John Reed was got rid of in America. When I started writing *Comrades* which became *Reds*, of every thousand Americans you spoke to, nine hundred and ninety-nine would never have heard of John Reed, and about nine of them would not have known that there was a socialist past in America, that there was socialism, that it was born and grew and fed off America. It's been erased, rubbed out. So it is a complicated thing to lay down a play like *The Party* in 1985. We've got to say something about 1985 as well in Britain. We hardly talk about the depths to which we have sunk as a people and as a society, out of fear, out of lethargy, out of despair, out of self-interest in the narrowest and most petit-bourgeois sense, out of mystification and out of blatant mendacity. We're not a happy people. Intellectually we are very frightened. That's not a time in which to set down a play like *The Party*. It's so outside the field where we are now and who we are now. I've got to tell you I cried on the first night. I was hugely moved by the play, the production that was at Stratford in August. I had just come back from the States that day. It was extraordinary. The more I saw it with different sorts of audience, the more ambiguous I became about it. I think it's a good production and I'm happy that it's been done, but I don't think that it has anything particularly powerful to say, or anything that could be heard at the moment. Rather than anything to say, I think it can't be heard, but I think it will speak in the end. I hope so because I like it. It's a good play. It can take care of itself, very much like *Occupations*. I worried about *Occupations* for ten years because there were so many dramaturgical problems in it. It was my first full-length play, I couldn't write it properly. I spent ten years working on new productions in different languages just trying to learn about the play, to find out what was wrong with it. It's a play I know very well.

N.B. *Would you say that from a dramaturgical viewpoint Comedians is your most accomplished stage play ?*

T.G. It does some interesting things in shifting relationship between audience and the events on the stage. The second act is very interesting. It was in many ways so decisive for me, in terms of how I was received. I think for that reason it's hard to separate what the play is from the effect it has had. It's also a play that I've seen so many times and thought about so often, over such a long period and talked about. It's a play that

in a sense I very much want to leave behind. I have this perverse puritanism about things that there are plays that look after themselves and plays that don't. *Comedians* always looked good. Very few bad things have been said about the play, it tends to be praised. With my history of launching plays that the world was not ready for [laughter], I really did become very suspicious of *Comedians*. I wondered whether I had not sold myself. I'm thrilled that the play started in Nottingham and not in London, at the Playhouse and not at the National Theatre. It didn't have a single star in it, it didn't have a star director, we had £ 150 for publicity. From there the play became what it became in terms of internationalization and all the rest of it. And that's strong because it was not already in a space capsule ready to go into space. It was not a small-scale production but it was a regional city production and a very fine one. Full of danger. A woman stopped the show in the middle of the second act. She wanted to argue. When Gethin Price says, « I made the buggers laugh », she said, « oh no, you didn't ! » At the second interval the lights went up and I looked at this woman and she was sitting next to Peter Hall. Hall walked up the aisle and saw me and said, « You bugger, where did you get that woman from ? » He thought I had written her into the play ! I said, « Peter, you wouldn't recognise a real event in the theatre if it were sitting next to you ! »

N.B. *Comedians* is a wonderful play but isn't it aggressively class-conscious ? It is an angry play that treads on people's toes. Did you intend to tread on people's toes ?

T.G. No. I wanted to say something about what it's like to be working-class, what it's like to have low ceilings in the real and the metaphorical sense. I wanted to say something about the uses of comedy in our society, the way it is used to vilify minorities. They had developed the most hideous series of programmes on television called *The Comedians*. A television production which ran for several years. It was a wholly new concept of stand up comedy where six or eight comedians would simply stand one to a camera and simply shoot their jokes out, one after another, to a fake studio audience. Then it would be tightly edited and it was like machine-gun fire. The jokes were about Pakistanis, about Irishmen, about women. All the targets were there. I wanted to say something about a saner and more human and more socially-based comedy Eddie Waters represented and which was itself radical, and to show that the commercial position as represented by Challenor was no different in comedy from motor-cars or soap. But it was not until I started writing the play that this third position began to develop itself, Gethin Price, which in a sense has a dialectical relationship both to Challenor's and to Waters' positions and which ultimately transcends them both and posits a new thesis about comedy as hate. It may seem aggressively class-conscious, but I was just writing about my class. I spent time as a teacher and as a student. I know that world very well. I know the world of the snooker hall and of working men clubs. I know the world of local comedians. I'd actually seen comedians and singers and dancers auditioning at lunch time in the clubs that I used to drink in. I just wrote about those lives as I understood them. I inhabited those lives for two and a quarter hours or however long the play lasts. I was so at one with that material. I did no book research, or very little. I read some psychoanalytical pieces on the meaning of humour. I read some joke books. I drew from my own lived experience. It was painless, it was such a wonderful period the writing of *Comedians*. I didn't have to think style, I was so much the master of the materials I was using. I knew the feel of the door knobs, I knew the colour of the bloody walls, I knew that caretaker who ambles through the play. I knew that Indian who comes in. *Comedians* is written out of my own experience.

N.B. *There seems to be no victory in Comedians. Nobody wins. Or perhaps the only victory is the increased awareness conveyed by the integrity of Gethin Price. Is this the ultimate meaning of the play ?*

T.G. I think there's a bigger victory than that and certainly a broader terrain of victory in the play, and that is the commercialism as represented by Challenor. He is morally rejected by everybody in that class. Everyone of them, in some way or another, respects Waters' project and Waters himself. So the integrity of those people is under threat, no question. But it is not broken totally, even though people go with Challenor, do what's necessary in order to make a few bob and live a minimally better life, a materially better life. And I think that's a victory. There's a victory for a human project, definitely.

N.B. *Comedians is also a very passionate play. Love and hate seem to be the driving forces of all your plays.*

T.G. It is absolutely true that for one who professes such profound mistrust for psychoanalysis, love and hate do run dialectically through the plays and extensively. But then those have always seemed to me to be the only important polar necessities of any revolutionary impulse, finding the correct synthesis. As between the haters and the lovers, as it were, there's always been this argument about utopianism, that you have to believe in a future that will be better than the past. And then there's the reverse, the pain, poverty, degradation which fuels the anger to turn it into hate. I have always been coping at one level or another in the plays with that dialectic, because I haven't discovered, in my own life, how these things combine most effectively and properly. I haven't got the answer to the riddle of revolutionary history. I know that Lenin was very anti-utopian and a lot of my Marxist friends are anti-utopian and I'm distrustful of utopias. At the same time, part of my project is utopian. It's about love, about what we can actually do, what is there, potent inside the human project, if we can only get at it and use it.

N.B. *Is writing for television very different from writing for the stage ?*

T.G. No, I don't feel so. I think of it all as drama. It's the way I deal with it, whether it's a film, or a television piece for a studio or outside broadcast or a piece for the stage or a piece for radio. It seems to me that basically what we're dealing with is drama. When I'm asked this question in Britain, there is an implication that writing for television has to be different from writing for the theatre because your audience is less well educated, less capable of abstracting and conceptualising. I don't want to argue about this. I just want to say that from the writer's point of view it would be absolutely fatal to assume an unequal communication between himself and the audience.

N.B. *You've got great respect for the audience.*

T.G. Yes but I think it's a realistic respect, based on my actual experience of the people who constitute the audience of television drama. It has always been the elitist presumption of those who control culture in society that working-class people will not be able to understand what you're talking about, not only will not understand but will have no interest either. Working with students in a Technical College, I found a lot of imagination, a lot of interesting language. Basically, I don't consider audience

when I write. I just want to make the most serious and the most intense contact with whomever turns the T.V. on at that time. That's the mystery of television and it's a marvellous mystery. You can predict your audience at the National Theatre or the Hampstead Theatre Club whereas it's the sheer unpredictability of television audience that is so exciting. I've got a raft of letters now for my last piece *The Last Place on Earth*, one letter from Surrey, from a retired lieutenant-commander of the Royal Navy, incensed by my depiction of the British Empire, a great Empire hero like Scott, absolutely outraged. And then I get letters from people who write very humbly, they are not part of the tradition of letter-writing, it's on a piece of jotter-paper torn out, occasionally it's in a scrawl that suggests that writing is a very difficult form, asking me if they heard correctly when Kathleen says to Scott this, that or the other, « Could you just let me know what she actually says, because it made me think a bit about the wedding service. I wondered whether you took those words from the wedding service or whether you had them in your mind. » This is some joiner in Gateshead.

N.B. *Do you answer all these letters ?*

T.G. All of them. In the theatre, there isn't that stunning surprise factor. A few years ago, I chaired a thirty minute programme called *Arena*. They've got a different person each week to do it. The week I came in we did it on Alternative Theatre, it was in 1975. This piece went out on BBC II to an audience that probably was not much more than a million, a very small narrow cast audience as they call it. People all over the country interested in the arts. An arts programme on BBC II is like speaking in Finnish ! At that time I was in Manchester doing *Bill Brand*, and we were shooting in a Labour club. Part of the atmosphere was gained by having members of the club, sixty or seventy of them, playing billiards, darts, drinking, just doing what they would. One of the people at the bar looked at me and said, « I saw you on telly the other night, bloody good ! You really made a difference to that programme ! » This is a man who watches every week. Absolutely astonishing !

N.B. *Television does make people think, if you give the audience some serious material.*

T.G. What we always have to bear in mind is that television has to be protected from the market-place as much as possible, because the inherent tendency of television is to give people what they want. And what they want will be defined by what they wanted last year or the year before, by audience size always. Now it has been the belief of some of us for a long time that none of us really knows what they want. Did anybody know they wanted Godard before Godard became Godard ? The only virtue of the market-place is to make available the product of creative minds to those people who would like to make contact with it. The range of products has to be very wide indeed. This means that there's got to be social control over television. I just received this morning the American Public Broadcasting Services schedule for the Autumn and Winter which includes my series *The Last Place on Earth*. There isn't a single American origination for six months on that channel. They're all English. That's very painful and quite pathetic. And it's not surprising that that society is so feudal-minded, and that the electorate is so inept as to elect a third-rate movie star. It's a society which has been reduced to intellectual rubble by the people who sell cultural goods and television is the medium to sell that. I insist on the uniqueness of British society and British television. I don't think I could operate as a television

dramatist inside America. In a sense theatre work was always an accident for me. I stumbled into theatre. I had always imagined my writing being television writing.

N.B. *You have developed a very distinctive style in television writing, haven't you ?*

T.G. We have to ask questions about plays or drama within the television output. There are many different sorts of dramas inside television and many of them, the most popular ones, are very badly written, very badly acted and very badly produced. Two or three a week. Nobody knows their lines and the lines aren't very good. That's one level of drama, the serial. At the top of the tree, in terms of prestige, is the single play because it most resembles drama in the world of theatre. So the single play is the prestige play, the prestige product inside drama and television. I didn't start there, I had already had a politics about where I wanted to locate myself in television, because by the late sixties and early seventies, the single play had become, in its own way, elitist. What I wanted to do was to explore the possibility of writing seriously in much more popular forms than the single play. So my first experience of television work in the late sixties, very early seventies, was writing a series of half hour plays in a series called *Adam Smith* for Granada. It went out on Sunday night between 6.30 and 7 o'clock and was then called *The God Slot*. It's a very interesting place for a young Marxist playwright to fetch up in. There were two series of thirteen episodes, I wrote seventeen of them. The audience was several million people a week. And I travelled to South Africa, on my own device to do illegal filming in proscribed areas, with an actor, a producer, no permit to film, and we lashed out together for the next series. Having started there, it was not surprising that I wanted to go on with that work, to write series, and to talk to a very large number of people at the same time. And since then I've done an episode in a series called *Fall of Eagles*. My episode was called *Absolute Beginners*. Basically, the series is costume drama. My play happens to deal with the split that occurred inside the Russian social-democratic federation in 1903, in Brussels and then in London, which resulted in the formation of the Bolshevik / Menshevik split.

In 1974-75 I began to devise a series for television which became *Bill Brand*. Then I did a television version of *Sons and Lovers*. And then I've done another series : *The Last Place on Earth*. I've been involved in five series, three I have been single-handedly responsible for. I've tried to carry through what I set out to do, which is to shift serious work from the single play to the series. The fact is you don't get a lot of status as a dramatist by writing for television anyway, and if you write below the level of the single play, you get none at all. People don't understand why you would want to do that, an intelligent and sensitive person, why you would want to deal with all these problems, because the further you get away from the single play in television, the more crippling the problems of production and control become. Producers and directors inside the serial and series format are quite brutal people who are only dealing with the width, they are not dealing with the quality. And they resent the presence of the author. There are still no agreed provisions made between the Broadcasting Authorities for the presence of the writer in the production process. In theatre, they ask you to be present for rehearsals, you negotiate what you do with the director. It is automatically assumed that you would be involved in the process. In television that is not the case even in the single play. In the series and serial areas it's very difficult to force your way. I was banned by Granada Television during *Adam Smith* because I had such terrible rows. This was my first production, I had the most terrible ups and downs with these directors and producers, and actors to some extent. They put my photograph

up on the door and sought to prevent my entry to the building. That was a long time ago, before I had any name, so they got away with it. But I learnt a great deal from that first experience. My advice to writers in television is : fight like hell all the time and never assume that because you got access the last time, you've got to get it this time ! I got a terrible reputation in the early seventies for being a very difficult person to work with. It was totally unfair in my view, because I don't believe I'm a difficult person to work with. I'm a very rational person and I'm very objective about my own text, and I go in to rehearsal with a very firm need to prove everything, for the text to prove itself, and if it doesn't, if it's found wanting, then we have to do something about it. I'm looking for the best idea, and if I haven't found it in the writing, then I'm open to director or actors, or technicians or craftsmen or anybody around ; who ever can come with a better idea will catch my vote. It's not an ego trip for me. Getting it right is what's important. So working with me isn't easy, but work shouldn't be easy. But it's open and collaborative, and cooperative. And I don't assert the supremacy of the text I've written over all the other processes at all. I have enormous respect for the work fellow-artists and collaborators do, for the extraordinary courage of actors. I love actors. People don't work in my plays in order to get good reviews, because rarely does an actor get major notices in my plays. The plays get the notices, not the performances, or even the production, it's the plays that become the issue of contention, and still those best actors that I love to work with come back for more because, as with me, it's the work that is important for them and not what people say about it later. Which is why I'm trying to talk with Jack Shepard about leaving the National Theatre to do this Gramsci with me at the R.S.C. I just call it a raid ! We just marauded. We don't belong with any of these people.

N.B. *You spoke about your shift in style, from a naturalistic one to a more imagistic one.*

T.G. Yes, in some senses it's only responding to what I think the culture and the society require at different times. When you say ten years it seems nothing, but in fact it is a very long time in terms of mood and ambience, what is floating in the conscious mind of a society, what ideas are available to you. It's difficult to be specific about this, but from 1968 to 73 or 74, my project seemed to be an argumentative one. I wanted to stage or shoot to television dialectical argument located within character and situation, realistic in other words. But I wanted to challenge television. There'd been an argument put forward that television was not a medium for words and ideas, it was a medium for images and so on. That's always been said about film and I've always questioned that. Some of the most exciting experiences I've had in the cinema or in television has been listening to words and arguments. I'm thinking of a very long sequence in *Ma Nuit chez Maud*, where it would appear that the two characters who have come together would go to bed or do something romantic, and in fact Rohmer has them discuss Pascal's theory of chance, which is not irrelevant to the plot as it were, but which lasts for forty-five minutes. A very extended sequence. I was overjoyed that he had found that creativity in that moment. We shot *All Good Men* in 73, and it went out in early 74, during the miners'strike. I can remember the senior cameraman saying to me, « You know, this birthday party sequence is the longest continuous sequence that I've shot since the late fifties. » It was twenty-six minutes long. I was very pleased that it was, because it made demands on them. They really had to know what the scene was about. They had to listen to it and understand it. I like that play and I loved that production, I loved its stillness. It moved against the

time of television and all these conventional prescriptions that you get about what television can handle and what it can't. And at the same time, in terms of its content if you like, it was dealing with very important issues in my view, to do with Labourism and reform and revolution. And on another level, it was dealing with family and kin-relations which have always figured in realistic drama. So there were a number of ways in which people on the outside looking in could get to the heart of that piece. They could come because of their interest in the father/son relationship, or in argument, or in a number of other ways. It didn't get a huge audience, but it did get a hugely appreciative one and a particularly good production. But that was a single play. I wrote it in six weeks, and again it came almost accidentally. I was rung by a television producer. She was very honest. She said, « Look, six weeks from now, we are supposed to go into rehearsal with a studio piece. I've just read the play I commissioned and it's no good. I need a play. I can give you a multiple set, but it's a studio piece and up to five characters. That's my budget. Is there any way you can do a play ? » I said « yes, I'll take it. I've just been thinking about a television piece drawn from Eric Hobsbawm's book about parliamentary socialism. » And she said yes. In six weeks I devised and wrote *All Good Men*. A romantic artist would call that opportunism. But I don't give a shit. You have to be ready. I don't control the means of production. My access to it is constrained and delimited. We have to be very subtle, very clever, and to think strategically. Of course there are projects that have to be planned and plotted years in advance, and there are other projects where you really can produce something in heat as it were. I'm not sure that the better writing comes from the long planning. It really depends. You can spend two years on a project and write it indifferently well. And you can spend two months on a project and it's there ! I throw away more than I keep. What I keep on the whole I tend to think is the best that I can do. There are plays where I just give up. I gave up on *Occupations* after ten years. There are still structural problems in that play which I cannot solve and don't want to solve any longer. It will lie with all its flaws as the thing it is. And there is a sense too in which the goal will always be to write the perfect play. But it will always remain a goal, because almost by definition, a play can't be perfect.

N.B. *Don't you think you approach perfection with Country ?*

T.G. I think it's a well-written piece. I've no doubt about that. I took 12 months and three complete drafts to get the shooting script for that play, and it was complicated by the fact that when I originated the idea and sold it to the B.B.C. it was going to be six plays. Collectively they were called *Tory Stories*. My original intention was to do a historical conspectus of British Toryism, starting in 1945 and coming through all these watershed moments in British political and social history, 1957 was the next one, 1963 Profumo, 1968 the students' revolution in Paris and what has come to be called the businessmen's coup, an attempt by certain retired military and business leaders to plan a coup in 1963 in this country. It came out in somebody's diary in the mid-seventies. So I wanted to write about that and its relationship with the Tories, 72-74 and the miners' strikes which led to the fall of the Heath Administration, and then a final play set in the mid-eighties. All of this was an early response in me to the emergence of Thatcherism and Reaganism in Western society. It was a bold notion, six plays written over two years, produced by one director, Richard Eyre, done by the B.B.C. In the event, the first of those plays, *Country*, was costed at something like £ 400,000 and then we were looking at two and a half million pounds to do the whole series. That is a massive investment for a single drama department. It would

have meant, since the average play cost £ 150,000 to produce in television, that for one play of mine they were paying three times the amount, which meant that two other writers were not getting work. That was a problem for me, plus the fact that I didn't think the B.B.C. could afford to make six films, and I didn't want to write them as films and then find that we were doing them in a studio, cutting corners. So I finally said O.K., and I put all my eggs in one basket and I rewrote the first one. The first one was originally called : *The Gang's all here*, which is a line out of a song. I then tried to settle everything from the whole series in one play and I retitled the play *Country*. I reworked that play very extensively. That's the thing that we shot, £ 450,000 it cost, made on 16 mil. A wonderful illustration of what can be done inside the domestic television service. In this country there's writing, directing and ensemble performance as good as anything you will see at any theatre in any year of your life. Thrilling. Thrilling. And not unique in our society. You can point to a dozen or maybe twenty films of similar quality that have been made over the last ten years by B.B.C. television. But you're quite right, the form of *Country*, the style of writing *Country*, is different from *Bill Brand* for example. *Bill Brand* just leaked down my arm and onto the page, so much of *Bill Brand* as so much of *Comedians* came almost unmediated from my own experience. The sense of habitude and deep familiarity with the social terrains of those lives enabled me to write very directly and not to cogitate too much about the style and form involved.

When I come to a terrain like *Country*, I'm dealing with a class that is not mine, with something that has to be externally approached as a piece of discrete research. My sense of what those people are beyond the next that I give them is clearly more limited, more constrained and more slender than my sense of who Eddie Waters is when he leaves that class-room and goes home. It seems to me that there is huge pressure on the writer to find a style and a form which will enable him to use everything he knows and understands about the people and the class that he is writing about, but which at the same time will help him to negotiate those areas that he doesn't know about. And if you watch *Country*, or indeed if you read it, you do get a sense that if there is any author in that piece it is the camera. It's like a very detached inquiring eye. Part anthropological, part sociological, part political, part psychological, always stranger, always detached. So that you are offered entry into the spaces of these people's lives. It's not a subjectively empathizing entry, you don't go in and say, « I am this person. » Something about the lens of the writing. You're looking through a glass at people, I don't mean literally looking at people. You get that sense of people not quite in the same room. And that's what I wanted to do. Too often, in country-house drama, that class is represented just like you and me. I wanted to get that sense of their own detachment.

That whole discourse about modernism versus traditionalism, realism, naturalism, has got new stimulus from the theorisation of practices inside academic institutions. New academic institutions like schools of drama. There are probably five or six now in this country and they're quite powerful. It's made a difference there are some hundreds of people going through drama courses in this country every year now, many of them come into acting, some into directing, and a lot go into the groves of Academe to become theorists of drama, and not surprisingly, when they look at the philosophical basis of contemporary drama, then they ask questions. Realist theatre, epic theatre, and so on. They find Brecht enormously persuasive, both as a practitioner and as a theorist, and very often that becomes the bottom line of evaluating work that's been written in the contemporary period. So for somebody who works within

realist modes where I suppose I position myself, uncomfortably in some ways, there were initially reactions to my work which said this belongs to a former period, it's a recrudescence of an older form that isn't really appropriate for contemporary periods, certainly not for socialism. And I had to remind these people that that debate was very far from completed theoretically and philosophically, that Lukacs had not really been dealt with in this society, very accurately or very well, and that Lukacs, Adorno, Brecht and Sartre had engaged in extended and passionate discourse about what the nature of contemporary drama should be, and that Brecht had not scored all the points in that one. So in a sense, I have interested myself in that discourse as somebody who practises the creation of the dramatic text, you have to be involved in what is involved. Then you see that there are now more media of drama available than Brecht had at his disposal, and he had to deal with radio principally and then film, but television was still not a medium to engage with, in other words, he was still dealing with a theatre which was class-based and class-biased. Part of his aesthetics was also a politics about shifting the audience. And to make a play epic was to insert a decisive rupture with all bourgeois forms of empathetic theatre, what people call realist and naturalist theatre, where audience was passive, supine, emotionally involved and not intellectually stimulated towards objective analysis. I think we moved on from that, that is not the terrain we're in. It seems to me there are starker choices to make now, television or theatre. We have to theorize a practice within a different terrain from the one that Brecht was operating on. But I still have fairly lively encounters with David Edgar or John McGrath, both of whom I respect.

N.B. *Where do you place films in your career ?*

T.G. They have the highest critical importance in the development of my writing sensibility. I saw my first film when I was three and I remember it as vividly as if it were yesterday. When I was a kid growing up I guess we went to the pictures every time we could, three or four times a week in some periods. All through my teens, I was deep into films, mainly Hollywood films, in a very unreflexive way. I saw a film when I was quite young called *Keys of the Kingdom*, with Gregory Peck, about an American catholic missionary who worked in China and got finally killed by a grenade. It made an enormous impression on me. For a year or two I wanted to be a missionary, because I was raised as a catholic. When I was thirteen or fourteen I saw what I would perhaps now consider a very bad film about the life of Rimsky-Korsakov called *The Song of Sheherazade*, with Jean-Pierre Aumont and Maria Montez. Another film was called *A Song to Remember*, about the life of Chopin. Both of them were about artists, that's the important thing. Lives of the artists were very helpful. It did give one a sense of a life beyond the life one had, and of possibilities for personal creativity that did exist out there in the world, and did not seem to exist particularly in the world in which one lived. For a very long time I lived the life of the people, unreflexively. Now my judgement on those films would be quite different. I didn't have judgements on the films as films at the time. When I got to University, I became more intensely interested in films and I can remember a sort of crisis developing in my first and second years. I was studying literature, but I was getting my greatest excitement from the James Dean movies, Carmen Jones, Anthony Perkins, those movies that began to talk about modern life, our life, not rich people, but working people. I saw *On the Water Front* in 1954, six times in a week. I missed every class I had at the University. I saw it six times in seven days. I knew every line of dialogue, I knew every tone or inflexion, particularly in Brando's performance, every camera angle. I knew the

whole musical score and could whistle it. I didn't have a clue about the politics of that piece. I have it on tape and it is fiercely reactionary. But I was not living on that level at that time. I can remember going into my tutor in the second year, a poet, and saying, « I want to abandon this whole course in favour of film, I think we should talk about ... » I had listed six films. I was voted down. Rightly so I suppose. Film remained important. Enormous impact of European films. They were so exciting. They were modern, they did challenge the realist view of the world in a very exciting and liberating way. They seemed realer than realism, though in fact they were subtle blends of the real and the expressionist and the surreal and so on. They were a wonderfully crafty mélange, salads of style rather than single styles in opposition to realism. I never considered myself as a potential film-maker. I always saw film as a major conduit for writing. And then the whole thing got muddled by what I think on the whole were arid aesthetic considerations to do with the quality of film and the quality of video, the quality of film sound and studio sound, and the possibilities for doing good work on tape as opposed to on film, all of that which was an argument in the seventies that I engaged in with David Hare, who took a very precious and purist view of his work and believed that you couldn't work well in television and therefore it was your responsibility to work only where you work well. I argued that you could work well in television, but you had to work a lot harder. It was a kind of quasi-aesthetic discussion that didn't get anywhere and was really a distraction, I think.

N.B. *Did you enjoy writing Reds ?*

T.G. The two and a half years I spent on that project, which were among the most intense, passionate and conflicted years I've spent as a writer, I learnt about writing for film, about the writer's role in Hollywood, the role of the producer, the studio, as it were the politics of making a film in America, and what films were for, what Hollywood movies were for. I'm trying to use that learning to wrest more control than it has ever been possible for a writer to wrest. If you look at the history of the writer in Hollywood, you can look at Fitzgerald or Hemingway or Faulkner or Steinbeck, it's a history of unhappiness, disillusion, exploitation and alcohol, it's not a happy tale. It would be folly for a writer with some political nous in the seventies and eighties to be going down that same road towards disillusion. You've got to start somewhere else. So I slightly extend my notion of strategic penetration, which I developed in the late sixties, to Hollywood, very instrumentally. And I say I have to look for places to position myself, for projects that I can believe in and believe they have good chances of being realised in production and distribution. In other words, I approach Hollywood in the same way as I approach television. I get anything from half a dozen to two dozen offers a year from Hollywood, usually in the form of a book. Nine tenths of everything that is offered is silly beyond belief and not really worth reading beyond the first page. Some of it taps into preoccupations and obsessions and needs in me. They will be things that I will then examine more closely. But beyond the project itself, you have to evaluate the people involved. The producers, the potential directors, the studio that will put up the money and all the rest of it. It's a very long road to have a film made properly, and Hollywood is the hardest factory in the world in which to get serious work done seriously. In seven or eight years when I have been as it were available to them, that's to say when I've considered film as a place for strategic penetration, I've done two pieces, *Reds*, *Midnight Clear*, which is still to be made, and *Acts of Love* which is the South African one which I am just beginning. In a way I see films as part of a constellation of possibilities. I've never said that I would

only write for television. What I've sought to do is stress the primacy of television in my output. But I've never discounted theatre, I've certainly never discounted film.

Let's go back to some of your questions : is writing for television different from writing for the theatre ? The answer is probably no. I do know this : when ideas for a play present themselves actively in my mind, they usually come with the way they should be positioned. Like *Comedians* was always a stage play. I carried that idea around for over two years before I got down to writing it. And all that time I knew, because of the nature of the second act, even though I hadn't written it and even though I could only very dimly apprehend it at that distance, I knew that the second act demanded the co-presence of the audience with the event, in the same space. And *Occupations* was always a stage play. And yet *All Good Men* was a T.V. play. But it could be a stage play, it has been. But that's something that occurs afterwards. *Country* could not be a stage play. From the moment I got that idea it was always locked into its medium. By and large, that's how ideas come. There's not a moment of conscious choice where you can say I want to write it for T.V. It's always predetermined by the form in which the idea finally emerges and persuades you, convinces you. I carry three or four play ideas around with me all the time. One of my biggest problems as a writer has been my facility. I write like other people breathe. The great danger for me is to do it like that. I have to slow down that thing and deepen it, and you have to dare more all the time. The point I was trying to make is that I have three or four play ideas at any one time, and the only way in which I can be sure that an idea is worth spending a year on is by deferring the writing. And if the idea is around in a year or two years' time, if it's grown a bit, then it probably persuades me that it is worth the writing, that it is « a good idea ». This helps with this problem of hyperfacility, that you slow down the whole process and you make the idea work subterraneously, as it were, inside your life, before you commit to it. A play idea may be one image, it may be one phrase, but for me I know the ramifications and implications.

N.B. *Your plays contain some very uncompromising characters as well as more sceptical ones. Where do you stand yourself ?*

T.G. I think it's deducible from the texts I write that I don't wholly occupy either of these positions that are in contradiction, in conflict. But I respect those positions. That's the important thing. I never find myself writing plays where I know the answer. What I'm interested in is an audience taking in the ideological and political positions being realised in all their contradictions, taking them and seeking to make some kind of usable synthesis to go beyond the play and in a sense to transcend the play. I suppose that's what I work for. I work for realism and feeling. Anger, passionate resistance. In *All Good Men* there's a life laid out for us. Edward Waite's life, which is not just one long history of corruption and pettiness. He's come from the working-class and has sought to represent working-class interests, both in the trade-unions and in the Labour movement in Parliament, and has been a Minister of the Crown who has got progressively further and further and further away from the lives of the people. That's what happens to Labour leaders very often. They end up in the House of Lords, representing nobody but their miserable selves. When I think about that, I think that life is criticized, but I don't think it's dismissed, it's given its space. That man is given his space in which to argue, I think he does it pretty well and pretty effectively, and the play is careful not to collapse one person into a whole period. The Labour administration from 1945 to 1952 did certain things which

he claims transformed society, which his son claims didn't because they were simply a minimal adjustment. That argument exists outside the fictional characters of Edward and William. We have access to evaluation of that period, politically, socially, morally, whatever, independently of this play or the characters within the play. And I don't think that the play manipulates the audience's objectivity, its capacity to take an objective view of this, even though they get involved in the lives and the relationships of the characters. It's still possible to see that there are questions of facts and questions of judgement being raised, that are independent of the characters raising them. You don't have to be like William in every respect, in order to believe that the socialist administration of 1945 to 50, and 1951 to 52 didn't achieve what they claimed they achieved, and weren't even on the right lines. You don't have to be like William to believe that. Nor do you have to be like Edward Waite to believe that they did achieve it. First of all, there are issues raised in these plays that are not decidable simply by a reading of the play. They exist independently of the play. The second thing is I don't think, technically and formally, that there is any attempt to manipulate an audience to identify with a character and therefore with a set of positions that that character is advancing. I think the plays in that sense are more objective. I call this a form of critical realism.

N.B. *Do you consider yourself as a Marxist playwright ?*

T.G. I don't know whether it makes any sense to talk about Marxist plays or Marxist playwrighting. I don't know what that is. I know what Marxist history is and I think I know what Marxist sociology is. But I don't know what Marxist drama is in particular. I think of myself as a Marxist and a playwright, but I'm not sure that you can simply collapse those two things together and call me a Marxist playwright. I don't know what a Marxist playwright is, and I'm clearly not a Marxist playwright in the sense that Brecht was a Marxist playwright, and I'm not a Marxist playwright in the sense that Edward Bond might be described as a Marxist playwright. In other words I write very differently from both Bond and Brecht. I also write very differently from Brenton, and he also considers himself a Marxist and a playwright. In other words, the very practice of playwrighting is very complex and complicated. It's probably better to leave the adjective out - Marxist, political - I think I'm a playwright.

N.B. *But although your plays are undidactic, they are often critical of the society they describe, so why do you refuse the label of Marxism for yourself and not for Bond and Brecht ?*

T.G. It's possible to describe Marxism as the answer to the riddle of history, an answer that knows itself to be the answer. It has that amount of reflexivity and self-consciousness. I don't think of Marxism as an answer. I think of Marxism as a body, a very untidy body of illuminations, insights into the nature of societies, historical societies, to some of the principal pulses and thrusts of change within historical societies. But insights, not bodies of knowledge to be applied. I don't have that view of Marxism. And Marxism unaided, it seems to me, is incapable of dealing with the modern world. A Marxism that pays no attention to empiricism for example, or to « country primitivism », I'm talking about folk ways, peasant practices, third world, traditional approaches to questions of medicine for example, I think a Marxism that inflexibly excludes the knowledge of the people is pointless and self-defeating. John Berger, a very important Marxist writer in my view, has over the last ten years almost

single-handedly sought to refute the crude Marxist idea that the European peasantry knows nothing, that its function is to be rescued from « rural idiocy », which is a Marxist phrase - « rural idiocy. » That whole way in which Marxim took industrialization aboard, and said « this is the way of the future and anything that gets in the way has to be smashed », ignored the knowledge of the people. Berger, by positioning himself in the centre of Europe, in some Swiss canton in the mountains, and living the life of the people at a very simple level, has written a series of books that show, very clearly and very precisely, what has been learnt by the common people about life and death, about the importance of things, about humorous resistance. A whole range of knowledge-yields have come through his writing that have forced all of us, and have increasingly forced Marxists, to see that their whole notion of rural idiocy, that electrification, organisation and industrialization will eliminate it immediately and create the new man, is deeply troubled as a notion. But he is not very popular. I don't know how well he goes down in East Germany or the Soviet Union, I would not have thought that well. I was reading last night about a people in South Africa, a people called the Venda. A small rather distinctive group of Blacks who, it seems, came possibly from much further North in Africa with some Arabic influence. Somewhere around the end of the sixteenth beginning of the seventeenth century, they fetched up in the North of the Transvaal, which is where they now are. They have a thing called a play-village which is part of their training for life that they apply. All their children between the age of twelve and fifteen, when they get to twelve, go to this play-village. But they actually construct it themselves, they make the huts from branches and leaves, they make their own cooking pots, they elect a chief and a council, they take wives and husbands. It's a microcosm of the adult world that they now come into. They go back at night to their homes. They spend every day for three years in there then they come out. But just look at the elements in that, of preparation, of democracy, electing a chief and so on. It's there to be seen and yet we don't see it. We erase all of that inside our general Western urbanite industrialized sensibility. We just think of it as quaint and charming and passé, overtaken by history. As a Marxist I don't do that. For example *Last Place on Earth*, the first image is Amundsen sitting in an igloo with three Eskimos, learning to live the life of the people in ice and snow, which is just what he wants to do.

N.B. *When I said you were a Marxist writer I didn't mean it in a crude sense. I meant that the characters in your plays are always involved in some kind of project. You seem to believe in human resources. You also combine the orthodox Marxist belief in the class struggle with the New Left view whereby the future belongs to minorities, artists and intellectuals. Do you agree ?*

T.G. For strategic reasons it is always better to refuse labels, because they are not put there accidentally. Having been labelled a Marxist playwright in this society, it's now possible to be hit over the head with that very ascription every time I produce anything. I see myself as a socialist. I think that philosophically, as it were, I would call myself a Marxist. My practice is to make play-texts, that's my craft, and it's absolutely true, but it's for others to say, that I'm interested in some things and not all things. And those some things I'm interested in will be reflected rather than my philosophical Marxim and practical socialism. I can't explain why I'm interested in public and private for example, which is another dialectic that runs through my plays. I know that when I saw a film called *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, I'd realized at once that was the axis I wanted to work in. I saw that in the late fifties, and while I didn't for a

moment understand the bloody thing, I knew that it was important. So I think that's how I would account for who I am and what I do. But I think it's wrong to collapse all these things into a convenient tag and then call me a Marxist playwright, because it gives too much ammunition to an enemy which already has an arsenal of weapons to hit the socialist producer with.

N.B. *But you enjoy being hit, don't you ? You find it stimulating.*

T.G. Yes. But that's to reduce everything to a game. A contest between me and them. And I don't think that's what it's about. The work is much more than the personal consideration of the work. The object is to address a large audience directly, as directly as you can, and it can be very determining if bad newspaper critics mediate your work and set up set up all kinds of distracting problems for an audience, the audience can't get at the work direct because these arse holes have written this garbage about you as a Marxist. Then I get angry. I get very disturbed. There has been the most incredible controversy about *The Last Place on Earth*, for weeks and weeks this year, and I engaged in that to some extent with a very long, very heavy letter to *The Observer*. It is customary with my work to attempt to trash it, simply on the grounds that I'm a Marxist and therefore not to be trusted. They never say that Tom Stoppard is a card-carrying member of the SDP, if he is, I don't know if he is, he probably is. Somehow he transcends the political ascription.

N.B. *Should art galvanize people into action ? Do you write agit-prop ?*

T.G. I know some of my own limitations, and I know that there is a craft of agit-prop which I haven't learnt and which doesn't particularly interest me to do. I'm quite interested in watching some agit-prop work and I can think of all kinds of uses for agit-prop, even in a society like our own. For example video agit-prop where you have community video services and what people can actually seek to present themselves with their problems via video, taking it around to housing units or however you distribute that stuff. If you've got a community video unit in Leeds, they can look at their problems through video, in an agit-prop way, they can look at Asian communities, attitudes of police or housing departments, or the council, or the fascists, they can actually take this round once they've done it and show it to other groups of people within the community and invite them to give their views. This may not be art. I don't care about the distinction, it could be enormously valuable. I don't think agit-prop is necessarily anti-truth. It depends who is engaged in it. I don't think that it is tendentially the case that agit-prop denies the truth. Agit-prop of course, like all art, is selective and sometimes it becomes strident, hysterical, insistent and self-defeating. The tone of the piece and the tone of the people, the tones of the lives of the people who are to receive it, there has to be some kind of relationship between those two things. If you're in a society which is in deep and rather hysterical crisis, where things are beginning to break down, where major dislocations are beginning to develop, what I would call a pre-revolutionary situation, then your agit-prop might be much more expressive. The idea that agit-prop is the simple statement of a party line is a faded idea anyway.

N.B. *In a previous interview, you spoke about the impotence of the fringe. Do you believe in community drama ?*

T.G. Very much so. Community drama, theatre-in-education, touring drama like

7:84, Monstrous Regiment, Red Ladder, Belt and Braces, all that stuff, *the* most vital work in the theatre in my view in the seventies, must be sustained and is currently being cut to the bone. I think that had a vital function and on the whole discharged it very well. What I meant by the « fringe » I think was the London fringe, like a shop-window on the real world, the place where deeply ambitious apolitical artists seek to sell themselves to all comers in the real world. Alternative theatre in London between 1967 and 1973 afforded an incredible opportunity for people who wanted to write, act, direct, light and design drama, enabled all of those people to work cheaply and effectively and to devise shows, entertainments, that were quite different from anything that was going on inside institutional mainstream theatre. It's still important to « épater les bourgeois. » Peter Handke wrote a very fine play called *Offending the Audience*. The assault on the conventional taste was very highly positioned as an objective inside much of that world. At its worst, it was the converted speaking to the converted, whistling in the dark. I've always taken a much more active view of what one should be doing. I think we have to engage with the real world of Capital and State, and that's why I agreed to do a play for the National Theatre. That's why David Edgar now talks about a decade in the theatre in which the alternative theatre workers staked their claim to a space on the national platforms of theatre. That's his argument, that we now have that place as of right, that we've worked for that. I'm not so sure that he is right, but he is largely theorizing his own position rather than a broader position. But anyway I always believed we should stake that claim, that we should say we're here, we're playwrights, we can do work well and we are going to put plays on your stages without affiliating to you in any way. The play is more important than the institution that uses it. That's still my attitude. When Peter Hall took over the National Theatre and Olivier was doing *The Party*, the first question he asked me was, « Do you want to become a National Theatre writer ? » I said, « I have no idea what such a person would be, but I think my answer is definitely not ». I don't want to be a house writer for anybody. If you understand that the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company have been playing this game of opposition for centuries it seems, then you'd realize that what he was trying to do was bind me to the institution with hoops of steel, so that I wouldn't write a play for the R.S.C., which is the pettiest consideration imaginable for somebody seriously interested in doing plays. But for those bureaucrats it's the priority question.

N.B. *Doesn't being a famous playwright make you feel somehow « established » ? How do you feel about being successful ? I know this is a very tactless thing to say but you do keep your family on a more than satisfactory basis.*

T.G. I don't know that I have many feelings about it to be honest. I don't think that I'm any better than I am. And to be honest, nobody will force me to reevaluate what I do in radically different ways from the way I evaluate it myself. I have a fairly shrewd idea of how well I write and what I still have to learn and what I will never learn. If I've written a good text I'm not going to be persuaded otherwise by an academic, or a producer, or an actor or anybody else, because I've spent too much time with that text and I've thought too deeply and too widely about it to be surprised by some other deliberation or determination from elsewhere. That doesn't mean people can't have important insights into the stuff that I may well have overlooked. But in general terms I think I know what I do well and what I don't do well. You can't raise the word « success » in that, that's about craft. You collapse success, fame, reputation, prestige, status and wealth.

N.B. *But you do sell well ...*

T.G. No, I don't think that's true. There's no doubt that I enjoy a standard of life, an ease of life, that very few people in our society do and there is no doubt that it is a direct consequence of having achieved a certain reputation, a certain presence in theatre, television, film. What I was going to say earlier was that what we need to do is to raise some concept like Marcuse's concept of « the repressive tolerance. » Living in so-called plural cultures and plural societies, it's part of the extraordinarily subtle hegemony of those plural societies to incorporate oppositions within a totality of culture. And it's very important for instance for the British Council to be sending Marxist playwrights abroad ! It demonstrates once for all that this is a plural country and plural society. So the extent to which you can be presented as « established » is the extent to which « they » can repress you, as it were, into a more or less homogeneous mell of skills and talents and abilities. Look what the British Council does, it sends Pinter abroad, it sends Shaffer abroad, it sends Brenton abroad, it sends Griffiths abroad, and it's like Penguin Books in the sixties, for purely market reasons, decided to publish the whole of Marx.

N.B. *But you did say earlier on that you didn't mind institutions.*

T.G. What I say is we have to exploit the contradictions of pluralism. We have to exploit those contradictions that *they* have to deal with. We have to open the rift, they have to close it down. I remember Tony Garnett in the late sixties saying to me, « Every time we do a play, we put our heads into the lion's mouth. » It's the inevitable contradiction. The lion is the B.B.C., or it's broadcasting, or it's the British nation, but here we are, using the tax-payers' money and bla bla bla. « And each time we put our head into the lion's mouth », he said, « the only thing you can do, my advice is when you put your head into the lion's mouth, always take a broken bottle with you. » This is an important contradiction. I think we have to explore it.

N.B. *Don't you need the contradictions of pluralism and capitalism to thrive on ? to be a disturbing playwright ? A theoretical question : where would you stand in a socialist society ?*

T.G. I think I would be writing Samizdat, if I were in East Germany or Russia, or any of these so-called socialist societies that we should call post-capitalist rather than socialist societies. They are not socialist societies in any way, and that would be the thrust of my critique. There's no way in which I could write for the C.P., no way, except dishonestly, because I'm in the sharpest critical opposition to their history and to their trajectory. And this they know, which is one of the reasons that maybe I don't get played in Eastern Europe. I'm certainly not happily placed there. I have a critique of capitalist societies which they enjoy, but I also have a critique of so-called socialist societies which they hate. I'm a very passionate anti-stalinist, you have to understand, and I think one of the problems of the left in Europe is that it has not dealt with Stalin properly, which is why I want to write *Kronstadt* to some extent. Also I think you do seriously overstate what fame and reputation mean in this society. I'm not Mick Jagger. I'm not famous in that popular sense, like a football player would be or like a great pop-star or rock-star or even a popular actor would be. I live very anonymously. I live in a community, I live outside of London, there is no other place for me to live. These are my roots, my language roots, my custom roots. I've had to move a great deal about the world and the way it works, the world of capital. But I take

that along with me as active learning, and it reappears as text quite frequently. Several years ago, when I was working on *Reds*, I sat in a very swank bar in New York, meeting seven or eight people, Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson, two Atlanta businessmen and four Namibians. The agenda was to form a multi-million dollar consortium to rape South West Africa of as many of its mineral resources as they could before it became independent. This was in 1977-78, the assumption was that the South Africans would hold on to South West Africa for six years. They'd just time to take out all the titanium, aluminium, diamonds, gold, oil, and so on. Of course, both Beatty and Nicholson were simply there as curious people who had money to invest but who were in no way going to invest in that. I was there just as an observer. The two Atlanta businessmen were the serious sort of core of that thing. So I have experienced that. I've understood something about the way capital is amassed for particular projects which affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in some other part of the globe. And I will be using the core of that in scenes in *Acts of Love* which is the current text. This is one of the positive yields that come from one's engagement with the world of capital. I think morally, personally, you have to ask yourself every day what it is you're doing. I'm young enough to care still. I think ultimately it's not a question of how well or how badly I live in a personal sense. Wall Street does not turn on that. This is to prioretize the person over the project. I'm not interested in that. But it's true that I do inhabit major contradictions at almost every point in my life. But I think that's living. I don't think that's abnormal. I think that too many people live contradicted lives and yet appear not to see that they are contradicted. And contradiction is a form of energy. It creates energy. I would describe myself still like vagrant or gipsy. I don't belong in any organic sense to the world of capital. There's no way, until I die, there is no way I would invest money into capitalist portfolio.

N.B. *How do you know ?*

T.G. I know very well. Just as I know that I will never murder anybody or torture. There are certain things you know that go beyond your moral frame. All right we can all construct scenarios in which the crisis is so intense that it is necessary to do something. But I'm not talking about extreme circumstances. I'm talking about how I will respond to the quotidian problems of my life and process. And I will not leave this country in order to live in a tax shelter, and I will not invest money in capitalist enterprise and everything I earn I spend. I'm not interested in building up some bloody dynasty. The kids know perfectly well that when I've gone they will be coping with their lives in their own ways. They've done it since they were six and they're not going to change now. And they shouldn't be looking for an easy ride for the rest of their life, because it's not the way it's going to be. They know that and they accept that and they cherish it because it gives them an independence and autonomy that many children don't get.

N.B. *All this is very ethical.*

T.G. This is one of my problems. I get locked into certain forms of personal morality that are very important for me and hold me together.

N.B. Trevor, what are your plans for the near future after *Acts of Love* the film-script you'r working on at the moment ? As you know everybody is expecting another stage play.

T.G. I may be writing a stage play this year. There is not that much more to say. I want to write another play for the stage but it is not certain that I will do. If I do, it will be for many reasons, some of them strategic. In our society, television is like second-rate compared to the theatre. It is a second-rate option compared to the magic and literary provenance of drama and the stage. We can talk about Shakespeare and Jonson and Molière, the great tradition. When I sought to do serious and challenging work in television, I realized that I was greatly advantaged by having built a reputation in theatre. I had been taken seriously as a serious writer of some talent in the theatre. And this evoked in the television bureaucrats a certain deference which enabled me to get many of my projects through, that maybe many writers as gifted as me, but without reputation in theatre would have found difficult to get through. So topping it up, as it were [*laughter*], in the theatre may be strategically important for me. That's one tiny part of the nexus of reasons for working in the theatre. Also another reason is that television itself has become increasingly difficult to work in in this country, under Thatcher. The placemen who are now running the Departments of Drama inside television, both the B.B.C. and I.T.V., are not well-disposed to serious challenging and provocative drama. They want to get fifty million people watching and they think the best way of doing that is to do shit. And so you have to fight whatever front you can and if you can't work in television as well as you have in the past, then maybe you've got to return to the theatre or whatever. I'd hate to be so inflexible, so dogmatic that I couldn't think strategically anymore. I think strategic thinking for counter-producers is of the essence I think too few of us engage in, because we primatize ego over project.

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