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DOCUMENTARY DRAMA:
its roots and its development in Britain

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Daniel James Garrett, M.A. Cantab.

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Introduction

In a broad sense, documentary theatre is an outcome of the Naturalist movement. Naturalism's outward manifestation has been the faithful reproduction of domestic settings, from the copper pots in 'Miss Julie's' first kitchen, [1] to the interior for Belasco's 'The Easiest Way' which he brought, carpets, window casings and broken gas-fixtures, from a New York lodging-house, on to the stage.[2] Accompanying this search for authenticity of setting, has been a realism of utterance, such as Hauptmann's use of the Silesian dialect in 'The Weavers'. For many theatre directors, of whom Belasco is a supreme example, outward authenticity of setting was an end in itself, a development, if an inverted one, of the spectacular stagings of the nineteenth century melodrama. For the playwright, particularly on the Continent, Naturalism had an underlying purpose. It arose when he depicted man as a result, even a victim, of his heredity, or of his social environment, or both. Strindberg, writing of Miss Julie, could say she was 'a relic of the old warrior nobility... a victim of the discord which a mother's "crime" implanted in a family; a victim of the errors of her age, of circumstances...'[3] In such plays, the purpose of an authentic setting was to give credibility to this view, and to show the precise manner in which environment moulds the man. Erwin Piscator would label it 'scenic documentation'. Thus Hauptmann requires of the stage setting that it demonstrates in extreme detail the poverty of the weavers, and in consequence, the reason for their revolt. With 'The Weavers', Hauptmann moved from a descriptive to a prescriptive form of Naturalism. Not content merely to describe the brutality of poverty, he suggests the need for revolution. It is not enough to know how an environment moulds, it must be evaluated, and those whom it oppresses must be encouraged to remake it.

At a point such as this, the theatre, by questioning the basis of society, is taking an overt political stance. It is entering the realm of polemic. In order to justify its arguments, a wide range of evidence is needed to place the environment itself within a moral and political context. Documentation is required.

In very general terms, in the four countries, Russia, Germany, America and Britain, where forms of documentary drama have flourished, the same pattern can be observed. Agitational, political theatre is established by groups of workers anxious to convince their fellows of the need for concerted, possibly revolutionary, activity. As the sophistication of argument increases, the short polemical plays rely more on dramatisations of contemporary events,

on statistics, on quotations, and other documentary evidence. There the similarity ends, because of the different social conditions in the four countries. In Russia, the documentation could exist for the purpose of informing a backward peasantry, or it could be used to recall and celebrate events from the victorious Revolution. In Germany, teetering for well over a decade on the brink of revolution, documentary theatre was a political spearhead. In the U.S. and Britain, workers' theatre sought to confirm and strengthen solidarity amongst those sharing a cause which usually fell far short of revolution.

We shall note frequently the use of documentation to reconstruct not only a past occasion, but also the feelings associated with it. One of the earliest and most massive, the Russian 'Storming of the Winter Palace' used hundreds of the original participants, massed in the historic setting itself, to recreate the central event of the Revolution. The authenticity lies ultimately less in the documentation of setting and dialogue, although these are initially important, than in the quality of re-enactment. It is in the experience of the participants who are not 'acting' so much as reliving. Their experiences provide the 'documentation', the evidence for the accuracy of what is being portrayed. Confirmation is provided by the quality of the audience's response. Curiously, a similar response is to be found in some contemporary British documentary plays which confine themselves to particularly local events. Hull witnessed such an emotional involvement in response to 'Settle Us Fair' which dramatised the loss of local trawlers in the bitter winter of 1968. The effect is in marked contrast to the distancing of the audience by the language of Weiss's documentary plays.

The 1920's saw the climax of documented workers' plays in Russia and in Germany. We shall be tracing this movement in some detail and noting the cross-fertilisation between the two countries. In the 1930's, with Stalin's consolidation of power, and Nazi suppression in Germany, this theatre died. It arose again, based on these models, in America and then Britain. We shall see how a combination of circumstances led to the Federal Theatre's 'Living Newspaper', which had grown from these roots, being given State support. The price was a blunting of the polemic purpose which had existed in the workers' theatre. 'The Living Newspaper' took an apparently non-aligned approach to the exploration of social problems, but in practice supported the New Deal policies of the Roosevelt Administration which financed it.

In Britain, Unity Theatre developed its own form of Living Newspaper that not only reflected the Theatre's connection with the radical working-class movement, but showed the influence of other art-forms, especially film, and in particular, British documentary film. Joan Littlewood's Theatre

Workshop had its own origin in workers' theatre and developed its own form of documentary play. The two groups re-formed after the war and revived the documentary play. The combined influences of Theatre Workshop and the documentary film led to the development after 1957 of the Radio Ballad. Finally we shall consider how Theatre Workshop's production of 'Oh What a Lovely War' embodied the approach of the documented polemic and displayed the particular qualities of Theatre Workshop's approach. It summed up and transmitted for a later generation of directors much that had been learnt about theatrical montage, agitprop and documentation.

Implicit throughout the survey will be the notion that there is no single unassailable definition of a documentary play. Frequently, I have been asked whether I would count a particular play as 'a documentary'. The very use of the term in this way is misleading in a theatrical context for it suggests the existence of a genre defined by its outward form. In practice, what are to be found are playwrights or theatre groups with a didactic or polemic purpose who use a factual basis for their plays and may, in addition, quote more or less primary sources in order to sustain a case. Their concern is with communicating a precise content, not with theatrical innovation for its own sake. A clear illustration of the point occurs in a recent book by Professor C.D. Innes on the work of Erwin Piscator.[4]. Innes describes what he sees as a conflict between two aspects, 'Total' and 'Documentary', of Piscator's theatre. 'Total Theatre' is Piscator's own title for all those aspects of staging, such as the use of film, and huge stage constructs, which were used to display political and economic arguments to an audience. Innes rightly sees the emotional appeal of these devices, but he sees them in conflict with a documentary need for the stage to mirror reality. The confusion is his, since for Piscator, 'Documentary Theatre' meant what I have called the documented polemic. The idea that it should in some way be a 'mirror' is a modern interpretation conditioned more by film and television than theatrical example. Nevertheless, a fair number of the plays we shall consider, especially the more recent British ones do not use documentation for openly polemical purposes: they are perhaps the result of the television influence. In consequence, although I have tried to avoid the phrase 'a documentary', I frequently refer to 'documentary play' and 'documentary drama', using the terms loosely as a matter of convenience. With the survey complete, we shall be able to make one or two broad distinctions of kinds of documentary drama, of which the 'documented polemic' is one. Such is the variety, however, that it has not proved possible to make hard and fast distinctions.

The variegated species which is modern British documentary drama has been amply demonstrated by its many London examples. The chapter which deals with them amounts, as a result, to a survey of possible categories. Their

variety is a result, in the first place, of such 'documentary' tradition as had been built up in this country being broken by the Second World War, and secondly, of the multitude of influences which filled the vacuum. There were accounts of the Federal Theatre and Unity's Living Newspapers; there were plays written around a basis of fact; there were documentary-influenced plays from the U.S.; and there was the not inconsiderable influence of the radio feature, and film and television documentary. It is hardly surprising that the result was such a diversity of plays. What is more of a surprise is that in the decade after 1963, documentary drama should have flourished so.

Its first growth point outside London was at Stoke-on-Trent. Here, in contrast to London, Peter Cheeseman insisted on a rigorous definition which demanded that every utterance in his 'musical documentaries' should be an authentic quotation. Coupled with a desire to express the viewpoint of 'ordinary' working men and women, Cheeseman's demand led him at first into an impasse - such material does not exist on any useful scale. His solution was to create his own material by means of tape-recorded (actuality) interviews. The result has been to give him artistic control over his sources, so that his plays have become, paradoxically in view of the rigour of the definition, unique expressions of an implicit viewpoint. He has explored an area which may be defined as the documentation of feeling. Curiously, his commitment to the local 'voice' has led him, in his most recent documentary play, to support the cause of the threatened Shelton Bar steelworks. It is as though the integrity of his method has forced Cheeseman to rediscover the roots of documentary theatre.

Following the inspiration of Stoke-on-Trent, there was what Irving Wardle called 'a wave of local documentaries'.[5] The majority of repertory theatres appear to have attempted at least one, and indeed, the well-known maxim that every person has one novel in him might be re-stated for cities and documentary plays. We shall first compare three theatres, Sheffield's Playhouse, Bolton's Octagon, and the Greenwich Theatre, all of which have attempted a number of documentary plays and might be said to have had a tradition of them. They have each had successes, especially 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night' which has been revived repeatedly, but none of them have emulated Stoke's continuing tradition. In order to understand why this might be, we shall look at two main aspects, the manner of the plays' creation, and the appeal they had for their audiences. We shall go on to survey other theatres' 'one-off' documentary plays, and although there is poor work, a surprising number of them have managed to kindle a very particular kind of audience response. It is one - which arises from a shock of recognition as audiences are confronted with familiar places and events as well as with local issues which burn deeply,

and above all, hear a language which is idiomatically their own. Where the agitprop and documentary theatre of the inter-War years spoke to, and aroused audiences who were united in their political beliefs, these latter-day documentary plays speak to the feeling of community, of local patriotism, latent in many repertory audiences. By dealing with intensely local events, the theatre affirms the audience's worth and individuality.

In a final chapter, we shall look at forms of staging which are appropriate to documentary drama, and the ways in which a number of recurrent problems have been solved. Stoke's theatre in-the-round offers certain advantages over the proscenium stage.

What will emerge strongly is the quantity of documentary drama which has been created in this country since 'Oh What a Lovely War'. There are about 200 plays which might merit some attention, although only about a quarter of these deserve serious study. There has so far been no published attempt to survey this body of work and form some general conclusions about it. Equally, only a handful of the plays themselves have been published. All of this is at a time when numerous playwrights, even quite minor figures, reach a wide audience through publication and critical attention. Further, the sheer bulk of examples has led me to ignore, with reluctance, the major contribution to documentary drama of the Theatre in Education teams. Additionally, the genre has had a strong appeal in schools and colleges, not only because of its academic discipline, but perhaps because of a real desire to discover community roots.

To study this whole area of theatre, is like travelling cross-country on minor roads. On these B roads of documentary drama, the surface quality is often indifferent, but the vistas opened up are excitingly new. Every now and again, there are glimpses of the A roads where playwrights follow well signposted routes. They appear congested with domestic situation and conventional plot-mapping. Documentary drama, in contrast, has discovered a perspective which is peculiarly suited to our contemporary situation.

CHAPTER 1
Russia: the affirmation of contemporary events

In Russia, after the October Revolution, theatre blossomed. A 'craze for theatricalisation' gripped 'almost the entire territory',[1] and the results, for the next decade at least, were highly beneficial. The well-established director, Meyerhold, enthusiastically espoused the Revolution and would have transformed the repertoire of the 'Academic' theatres, had he been allowed.[2] Instead, Lunacharsky, the cautious People's Commissar for Education opted to retain their traditions, but gave Meyerhold his own theatre to experiment in. He began to rehearse Mayakovsky's 'Mystery-Bouffe', written to celebrate the October Revolution, and the first Soviet play. Like Meyerhold, Mayakovsky was an experimenter with styles, and was at one time known as leader of the 'cubo-futurists'. But he had become politicised earlier, and in 1905 was a member of a Marxist group when Meyerhold was no more than an observer of the Moscow uprising.[3]

In its content and technique, 'Mystery-Bouffe' is seminal to the theatrical 'line-of-descent' we are tracing here. It is subtitled 'An Heroic Epic and Satiric Representation of our Epoch', and a preface to the second version, staged in 1921, is important in suggesting that the playwright's words are not sacrosanct, and that a revolutionary drama must be responsive to the audience of the moment:

> 'In the future let all men who act, present, read or print the Mystery-Bouffe change its contents, make its contents that of their own time, their own day, their own moment.'[4]

The play is indeed full of topical allusions, and in the second revision, Lloyd George and Clemenceau appear. Primarily, though, it is an allegory. Seven 'Clean' couples, comprising such characters as the Negus of Abyssinia, a Rajah and Russian Priest, are alarmed by the threatened inundation of the world by the 'flood' of Revolution. They persuade seven 'Unclean' couples, including the proletarian Blacksmith, Farmer and Seamstress, to build an Ark, and in a series of events closely paralleling those in Russia leading to the Revolution, the Clean present the Negus as a supreme oppressor and encourage the Unclean to unite with them in his overthrow. The Unclean find themselves still usurped of food, and throw overboard the Clean who are now identifiable as the supporters of the liberal leader, Kerenski. When a 'Man of the Future' imbues them with a vision of Utopia, the Unclean visit first Hell and then Paradise. Hell has no terror for the proletariat, as the Blacksmith scornfully remarks to Beelzebub:

> 'What have you here? -
> A bit of sulphur smell.
> At home when they send the poisonous gas around,
> Then all the plain grows grey with overcoats:
> A whole division topples to the ground.'[5]

Finally, after mining coal and producing oil, they discover an electrifed Socialist Utopia where goods are freely available and machines are the servants of man.

'Mystery-Bouffe' provided a model for many successors. The use of allegory enabled wide-scale events to be contained easily within a dramatic framework and comment was implicit in the parody of the Noah's Ark story. The allegorical grouping of characters made clear the moral and political evaluation, that right lay inevitably with the oppressed, and at the same time particular characters could display a topical individuality. In the same way, the basic Pierrot costume in 'Oh What a Lovely War' would comment continuously on the folly of particularised characters such as Haig. 'Mystery-Bouffe' also made a deliberate attempt to involve its audience. Not only was the stage-curtain entirely done away with, and the setting extended into the auditorium where the action frequently took place, but at the end the audience were invited onto the stage, to step, as it were, into the Utopian future and join the actors in singing a version of the 'Internationale'. [6]

The irony, that the real Hell is man-made, reverberates in Continental documentary drama, most notably in the Auschwitz scenes of Hochhuth's 'The Representative.' [7] Such a direct example does not exist in this country, but an equivalent irony suffuses 'Oh What a Lovely War' and to a lesser extent, 'Hang Down Your Head and Die' and 'Aberfan'. The implication, of course, is that moral values are not absolute and that temporal solutions must be found to ethical problems. For 'Mystery-Bouffe' and its immediate succesors, the solution was revolution, and the consequent dramatic resolution was to celebrate it with the 'Internationale'. In plays of the American and British Depressions, there is an equivalent in final-curtain appeals to working-class solidarity. The need to search for political or Utopian solutions to social problems is implicit in much documentary drama.

The design for 'Mystery-Bouffe' was also influential. There was no attempt at a naturalistic representation, but instead, there were large geometrical shapes, cubes, and a hemisphere representing the world.[8] The Cubist influence extended to the portrayal of machines and tools as characters, rather like Picasso's designs for the ballet 'Parade' in 1917.[9] Mayakovsky was thus able to dramatise the Marxist concept of machines and tools not as passive objects, but active agents in a social process. Where formerly machines had been used by their owners as agents of enslavement (as in the assembly-line speed-up) now machines were to be under the control of those who worked them.

The characterisation of machinery is an anthropomorphism that found few successors,[10] but the need to dramatise the work process in order to show man's

position within it, is a recurrent problem in staging documentary drama. Where the film camera can reach with ease into the place of work, the stage reconstruction has more than scenic difficulties. Later we shall consider the problem and the solutions that have been discovered.

If the setting for 'Mystery-Bouffe' had few direct successors, certainly the underlying principle was copied. As in the staging of a Medieval Mystery, different areas were assigned to groups of characters, so that they assumed a metaphorical meaning. The hemisphere, which revolved, and was similar to a larger one used later by Piscator in Germany, had a segment removed, and from this opening the devils emerged. Heaven was on a high rostrum, surrounded by hanging clouds. Meyerhold, with his considerable knowledge of theatre history, would have been fully aware of the meaning embodied in such a representation, and the consciousness of the Medieval tradition expressed also in the title was to recur in a number of Soviet dramas of this time, especially in 'The Storming of the Winter Palace.'

This mass spectacle was performed in Leningrad on November 7th, 1920, to celebrate the third anniversary of the Revolution. From a number of scattered sources it is possible to reconstruct a fairly clear picture of the event.[11] The principal director was Nikolai Evreinov, whose theory of 'monodrama' called for a heightened emotional involvement of the audience.

> 'The task of monodrama is to carry the spectator to the very stage so that he will feel he is acting himself...'
>
> 'The cornerstone of monodrama is the "living experience" of the acting character on the stage resulting in the similar "living experience" of the spectator, who through this act of "co-ordinate living experience" becomes one with the acting character.' [12]

While the 'Storming of the Winter Palace' has many dramatic similarities to 'Mystery-Bouffe', its intrinsic interest lies in its staging, for it took place in the open air, in the very square where the events it celebrates occurred. Many of the original participants, even, took part and the sense of occasion must have been heightened for them by the bullet scars which marked the façade of the Winter Palace. In the pageant-like manner of its staging and the closeness to its prototypical event, 'The Storming of the Winter Palace' resembles an American outdoor reconstruction of a strike, 'The Paterson Pageant' performed in 1913, which also involved the original participants as actors, and took place on a massive scale.[13] It is tempting to suppose that Evreinov may have learnt of the pageant from its director, John Reed, who was of course well-known in post-Revolutionary Russia.

Opposite the Winter Palace, two enormous stages, each 64 metres long, were set up, one to the right for the supporters of Kerenksi, the 'Whites', and one to the left for the 'Reds', the Bolsheviks. The square itself was

left clear for the climactic battle scene. On the roofs of surrounding buildings and on the central Alexander Column were fixed searchlights to illuminate the various acting areas. Next to the Column a tall command tower enabled the cueing of the spectacle by telephone. At least 6,000 and perhaps as many as 15,000 took part initially, and drama clubs, theatre studios and their schools were drafted in entirety, together with detachments of Red Army soldiers and sailors from the Baltic fleet.[14]

The spectacle began at ten in the evening (under a light drizzle). When, suddenly, the White Stage was illuminated, Kerenski was seen on a throne, presiding over his Ministers and a great crowd of aristocrats, merchants, and capitalists in top-hats. While the conduct of the war in Germany was debated, a low murmuring grew from the Red stage, and suddenly, the proletariat were revealed: ragged workmen and their wives, children and cripples, staggering out of factories represented by huge red scenic flats. The startling visual antithesis reminds us immediately of the 'Clean' and the 'Unclean' groupings in 'Mystery-Bouffe'.

As in the earlier play, there is parody in the next theatrical image, when top-hatted capitalists use their paunches to push sacks of money in front of Kerenski's throne. Representing the fever of war-speculation, the image has its counterpart in the fox-trotting bankers of Toller's 'Man and the Masses' and it will be repeated regularly in the two decades that are to follow. In a further striking image, Kerenski's Ministers swayed to and fro on their bench, to the political Left and to the political Right, while Lenin's voice could be heard on the Red side rallying the workers and soldiers to the Red Flag. The windows in the factories and jails suddenly blazed as the proletariat erupted to form the Red Army. Kerenski's forces, on the other hand, were parodied, by having his famous Women's Battalions stumble as they entered. The satire was completed when the Ministers, in a final paroxysm of vacillation, overturned their bench with a crash.

From this point on, the staging became as seriously representational as possible, setting out to create an exact model of the events of 1917. Lorries whisked Kerensky to the shelter of the Winter Palace as the Red Army overcame the White in spectacular combat, and prepared to assault the palace itself. A signal rocket flew up from the square and from then on, 'the spectators and the participants too witnessed one of the most astonishing sights imaginable which... boldly mixed recent reality with a vivid, audacious, theatricalised interpretation of that reality on a scale hitherto undreamed of'.[15] From its original anchorage on the Neva, the guns of the same battleship Aurora began firing in the direction of the Palace. Kerenski made a

hurried and undignified exit and from then on the crowd, now 100,000 strong, took over the square. Its whole gigantic area 'was filled with hurrying, running, singing and roaring crowds, all struggling to the Winter Palace. Rifle shots, machine-gun clatter, the fearsome rumble from the Aurora,(were) gruesome, horrifying...' [16] Fireworks and rockets marked the end of the event.

The influence of 'The Storming of the Winter Palace' was to be felt in a number of ways. It set a precedent for the dramatisation of an historical analysis by means of episodic, satirical scenes. In its ability, by the use of suddenly switched spotlights to cut from one area to another in the square, and thereby to create a relationship between the scenes taking place in them, it anticipated the theories of cinematic montage. From proximity both geographically and in time to the prototypical event, and from the re-involvement of the original participants, it generated an emotional charge which we shall find recreated, although never on the same scale, time and again in documentary drama.

Earlier in 1917, during the February Revolution, when the director Ta'irov had stood in the streets watching troops and guns sweeping past, he had described the sight as 'an incomprehensible Mystery Play which was taking place before our eyes'.[17] Thoughts of the theatre's medieval precedent must have been current, for Holitscher, describing 'The Storming of the Winter Palace', coined the phrase 'Political Mystery'. It is an apt description, for the medieval Mystery both dramatised and interpreted a story that was accepted by its audience as historically authentic. It was an 'historical' parable. In a similar way, the selection of events and the manner of their staging in the Winter Palace spectacle was such as to make the political parable abundantly clear. Just as the multiple staging of the medieval drama emphasised righteousness and evil, so it did in 'The Storming of the Winter Palace'. The Red and White stages were equivalents of the Heaven and Hell mansions. Where the manner of staging revealed the inner meaning of a series of apparently disconnected events in the Mystery, so the staging of the Political Mystery made clear what Ta'irov did not understand.

'The Storming of the Winter Palace' called for immense participation. At the climax, people streamed in from the side-streets and down from the grandstand, quite blurring any distinction between actor and audience. If the performance vindicated Evreinov's theory, it also alarmed the German observer, Holitscher, who feared such a spontaneous demonstration might be turned to counter-Revolutionary purposes. He considered that the spectacle in its immediacy, and with its loud orchestral accompaniment was not only 'thrilling' and 'rousing', but 'foolhardy' and shocking', because it deceived the audience with its emotionalism. He conceded that the performance was

theatrically revolutionary but felt he now knew why attempts at mass theatre 'must miscarry and, after contriving prejudice as they do now, vanish away'.[18] It is the kind of sentiment Brecht was later to voice. The issue is not simple, but the audience would hardly have participated so readily if the spectacle had not corresponded to and clarified their experiences of three years earlier. There is no doubt that the feelings of the audience were orchestrated, but in the context of anniversary celebrations, such an aim appears perfectly proper; after all, ex-combatants frequently find memorial services for their comrades extremely moving. We might say that 'The Storming of the Winter Palace' documents not so much facts, as a set of feelings related to a particular event. Facts are marshalled to support the Political Mystery's purpose, which is the interpretation of the original event.

On the same evening, in Moscow, another play was giving rise to similar criticism. It was Meyerhold's production of Verhaeren's 'The Dawn', and like Evreinov's spectacle celebrated the Revolution's anniversary by asking its audiences to participate. The play, written in 1898, is a symbolic vision of a future revolution, and Meyerhold decided to adapt it, with the help of his assistant Valery Bebutov,[19] to meet what they saw as the new theatre's demands.

> 'We have a new public which will stand no nonsense - each spectator represents, as it were, Soviet Russia in microcosm. Now we have to protect the interests not of the author, but of the spectator.' [20]

Accordingly, the two adapters removed what they saw as the more 'literary' elements of the play, emphasised the physical action, and most important of all, interspersed the scenes with reports of the victories won by the Red Army in the Civil War which was still being waged. According to Leo Wiener, Meyerhold

> '...sovietised it, and clothed it in the living forms of the present, weaving public speeches and Bolshevik mottoes with Verhaeren's prophetic utterances.' [21]

In this way Meyerhold achieved the aim summed up in the slogan, 'The theatre is the tribune of agitation'.[22] But, for the oratory of the declaiming actors to have its effect, a crowd was needed, and Meyerhold, declaring that even two hundred massed on stage, if that were possible, would not be enough to achieve the desired effect, used instead the audience. A handful of actors were sprinkled throughout the auditorium to lead the response, and this led to an unfavourable reception in some quarters. In Pravda, Lenin's wife, Krupskaya complained bitterly that

> 'to cast the Russian proletariat as a Shakespearean crowd which any self-opinionated fool can lead wherever the urge takes him is a sheer insult.' [23]

Whether she was complaining because the participation was successful, or because

it was not, is difficult to know. Certainly, on the night the critic Shklovskii attended, the audience must have responded poorly for he noted that 'the public have stopped work'.[24] Yet on other occasions the audience participated in strength:

> 'The Herald announced the decisive break into the Crimea at the Battle of Perekop, and the entire theatre rose in a triumphant rendering of the "Internationale"' [25]

If the support that Meyerhold expected from his audiences was not always consistent, nevertheless the production played to capacity houses for over 100 performances.[26]

The run vindicated what Meyerhold had understood, that it was not so much what the Herald had to say (except on the night of Perekop) that gripped the audience, as the fact of it being intercut into a play of revolutionary vision. Verhaeren provides a context in which the October Revolution, the Battle of Perekop and the audience's Civil War experiences, all fall into place. The very act of intercutting, of montage itself, makes the point, requiring the audience by the rapidity of the inserts to hold in their minds two viewpoints at once. It is an Hegelian form of thought. Two views, thesis and antithesis, are synthesised in the spectators' minds to achieve a new understanding. They are forced to see the causal relationship between a vision and its political realisation.

Meyerhold understood that the theatre could be exactly tuned in to the audience, to their revolutionary ardour, and it could demonstrate that it was engaged in a similar course of committed action. We shall see this commitment to aims felt by the audience - not always revolutionary ones - recur consistently in the evolution of documentary drama. We shall see it in Piscator's work in Germany, and in our own time it has been notably demonstrated by Hull's 'Settle Us Fair' and the Half Moon Theatre's 'George Davis is Innocent, OK'.

Meyerhold was also responsible for inaugurating a new style of acting. He required his actors to be declamatory and dispassionate.

> 'There must be no pauses, no psychology, no "authentic emotions"' [27]

Important statements were not to be communicated as intimate explanations to those grouped on stage opposite the actor, but

> 'As a tribune, (the actor) demands the right to engage in open debate with his opponents at a public meeting.' [28]

We can see here the beginnings of an acting style that was to be formulated more clearly by Brecht a decade later. It is a style that attempts to show man as primarily a social being. Such intimate emotions as might have been seen in the appealing gaze of a Lillian Gish or a Mary Pickford were irrelevant to the scale of events being dramatised by Meyerhold and his comrades.

Inspired by Meyerhold's approach, the Theatre of Working Youth (TRAM) was begun in Moscow in 1922 by twenty-four young workers. Their intention was to create 'a theatre of the barricades of the new social life',[29] and a 'pamphlet' style of play. They scorned traditional approaches, seeing the actor as an 'emotional lecturer'.[30] Presumably they wished to achieve the same effect as Meyerhold's 'actor-tribune', who, rather than creating a psychological characterisation in Stanislavsky's terms,

> 'needs to convey to the spectator his attitude to the lines he is speaking and the situations he is enacting; he wants to force the spectator to respond in a particular way to the action which is unfolding before him.' [31]

Such an acting style was a necessity for Meyerhold's experiments and for a theatre like TRAM which portrayed types such as the 'NEPman', the petty speculator of Lenin's New Economic Policy, in such a way as to show their social undesirability.

Seen together, the terms 'emotional lecturer' and 'actor-tribune' bring us very close to Peter Cheeseman's current work at Stoke-on-Trent. We shall see him use the phrase 'emotional barrister' to describe an actor whose job is to represent a person's strongly held beliefs and feelings without total involvement. It is interesting to note that Cheeseman's concept is best seen in his most overtly political documentary play, 'Fight For Shelton Bar'.

Meyerhold continued his theatrical experiments, but his main contribution to documentary drama was contained in 'The Dawn'. Some of his subsequent work continued the innovation of that production, but although his were the first significant attempts at relating plays on abstract issues to contemporary political reality, he failed to develop a coherent theory. In 'Earth in Turmoil', for example, he tried to give the production a concrete realism by resorting to purely utilitarian objects. Against a huge gantry-crane lit by searchlights were displayed machine-guns, field telephones, a harvester, an aeroplane even, as well as cars, lorries and motor-cycles. In addition, each episode of the play was announced by a contemporary slogan projected on a screen which served to underline its political relevance. Meyerhold's last production in this chapter of his work, the 'agit-sketch' review, 'Give Us Europe', expanded the captions to give not only title and location of episodes, but comments on characters and, significantly for our purposes, quotations from the writings and speeches of Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev.[32] It would be Piscator in Germany who would develop the use of inserted quotations into a theory of documentary drama.

In Moscow and Leningrad at this time, every district, every army unit, had its own "theatre circle".[33] Even unsympathetic historians such as Gorchakov

recognise the immense upsurge of dramatic activity. Most of the groups did not have their own theatre, and created plays on a co-operative and improvisational basis. As a result, the plays were closely related to the workers' own conditions and viewpoint, and were frequently satirical. In one, a committee of 'fat men' purchased human beings for cannon fodder but the final tableau contrasted peaceful factories under a red star with the Stock Exchange in flames. In another, a high wall across the stage symbolised the divisive effect of capital. Ragged workers approach from the auditorium (a clear indication of where the audience's sympathies were expected to lie) and peep through a window to see a life of leisure beyond. When they beg for bread and are rejected, they unite and destroy the wall. For all the apparent simplicity of plot and character, the importance of these plays lies in their ability to dramatise the overall economic relationships existing in a Capitalist society. What comparable British plays there were, and only Galsworthy's 'Strife' springs to mind, were much narrower in scope and emphasised the psychology of character at the expense of a wider economic understanding. The Russian plays, like 'The Storming of the Winter Palace', were an attempt to understand the workings of society in its economic entirety.

A further popular form, similarly devoted to revealing the causes of large-scale events, was the 'agitational trial'. The accused might be a counter-revolutionary such as the commander of the White Army, or sometimes the personification of an abstract problem such as drunkenness or even the typhus louse. Their actions would be dramatised and the audience-jury would give their verdict.[34] The trial format, although not new, is convenient for stating large-scale problems in dramatic form and we shall come across a number of more recent examples.

Most important of the small groups in laying the foundations of documentary drama were the Living Newspaper troupes. They would give a name to a whole genre. They arose from the many touring groups which were established in the early years after the Revolution to bolster morale in the Red Army and in the factories. Impetus was given to all these groups when, in 1921, they were given formal status by a new, more liberal, Theatre Department of the Commissariat for Education. [35]

At first, 'The Living Newspaper' was no more than the presentation of ordinary newspaper texts by a number of speakers on a rostrum. At a time when many were illiterate and newsprint in any case scarce, it was an important device for spreading information and propaganda. In order to make a stronger impact, dramatisation began to be introduced.

> 'The text was divided between an individual and chorus... Slogans were shouted into a megaphone. Sometimes the performers...would put on masks or head-dresses or would change their clothes... A small number of

performers could thus impersonate many characters.

> The 'living newspaper' was compounded from the operetta, choral singing, folk-rhymes, songs, dancing, gymnastics, acrobatics, declarations and pantomimes. It used lantern slides and bits of film... The 'living newspaper' could be performed on any premises; its decor and properties were uncomplicated (consisting of some shields, projectors, megaphones, and screens). It was therefore very practical. Its dynamic quality, rapid tempos, and variety of changing genres made it most suitable for club audiences...'[36]

It also became common to heighten immediacy for a particular audience by adapting the 'script' to include local news of relevance to them.

It is not easy to be precise about the date of origin of the Living Newspaper since it grew from the earlier sporadic groups and is closely linked with a similar form, the Blue Blouse agitprop troupes. 1923 is a crucial year, for it was then, according to Huntly Carter that the State Institute of Journalists became involved, while in the same year, according to Gorchakov, professional actors began calling themselves the Blue Blouse. They were soon imitated throughout Russia, quickly enough for a periodical, 'Blue Blouse', to appear in the very same year printing playtexts and songs. The Living Newspaper under the journalists' influence presumably developed alongside, but the first account of its activities is not until 1926.[37] Both the Blue Blouse and the Living Newspaper appear to have reached a peak of activity in the late 1920's, only to die away in the next decade, presumably as a result of radio and more widely available films and newspapers. Gorchakov asserts that they had died out as early as 1927, but the publication of 'Five Years of Blue Blouses' in 1928 and 'The Theory and Practice of the Living Newspaper' in 1929 tends to corroborate Huntly Carter's perhaps generous figures of 5 or 6,000 troupes, of twenty players each, active in 1928.

The Blue Blouse's name originates from the workers' shirts that the troupes wore, but other costume could be slipped over them to indicate character changes. The Living Newspaper, on the other hand, tended to use more colourful costume, but both kinds were especially suited to, and emphasised, the absence of identifiable characters sustained throughout a performance. They suggest a more abstract conception of man, able to take on any one of a number of roles. So far as the theatrical concept is concerned, it is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the stock 'mask' of, say, the Commedia dell'Arte. Simple though the concept is, it dramatises the assertion, important to a revolutionary drama, that man takes on the role that circumstances demand: he can change as the circumstances change.

We have become so accustomed to associating changes of token costume and hats with documentary drama that it is important to forget neither the origins of the device, nor its implications for characterisation.

The principal difference between Blue Blouse and Living Newspaper lay in the former's use of vaudeville and a music-hall style, so that performances contained a large element of light entertainment. The quality of physical movement was important, and the actors used exaggerated group postures. While still basing its work on documentary material and contemporary event, 'in its insistence on physical culture and the laying bare of artistic technique' [38] the Blue Blouse was inspirational to agitprop theatre in Germany, England and America, and the stylistic tension between documentary source and the highly physical quality of its stage realisation recurs in all three countries. It is apparent to this day in the work of Joan Littlewood and those in Britain inspired by her example.

Concurrent with, or perhaps arising from the Living Newspaper, was the 'Literary Montage'. It grew out of a need amongst the workers' clubs to create their own drama in the absence of Bolshevik plays. 'Lenin', 'October' and 'War' were created by selecting extracts 'from such sources as letters, documents, police dossiers, memoires, political speeches, Communist Party Congresses, slogans and verses'.[39] As use of the form grew, so did the sophistication of the treatment.

Finally, the Russian experiments established in the theatre the principle of montage. We have seen how the twin stages of Reds and Whites in 'The Storming of the Winter Palace' juxtaposed two views of pre-Revolutionary Russian society, and how the intercut announcements in Meyerhold's version of 'The Dawn' compared a vision with its realisation. It appears to have been not Meyerhold, but his pupil Sergei Eisenstein, who formulated a theory of montage for the theatre. In an essay published in 1923 he defines an 'attraction' as an element or 'molecular unit' of theatre which subjects the spectator to a precise sensual or psychological impact. [40] A number of these 'attractions' must be placed in a proper sequence so that the spectator may experience an ideological understanding of the totality. Eisenstein compares such elements of theatre with the component elements of photomontage which his contemporary and designer for Meyerhold, Rodchenko, called 'elements of photo-illustrations' and Grosz in Germany, a 'storehouse of images'. At the time of the essay, Eisenstein was a director of the Proletcult Theatre, and as an example he describes his division of Ostrovsky's 'Diary of a Scoundrel' into 'attractions', which included soliloquies, farcical scenes, clown interludes, film excerpts, songs and music-hall numbers. However, it was to be Piscator in Germany who would develop the application of theatrical montage to documentary material. Eisenstein, after a realistic production of Kaiser's 'Gas' on the floor of a factory among the machines, would, of course, go on to become famous for the use of montage in film. His

'Battleship Potemkin' had a direct influence on such plays as Unity's 'Busmen'. Indeed, it seems likely that the use of montage in the theatre spread because of the influence of film rather than theatrical precedent. We shall see later how documentary plays in Britain have been influenced by the documentary film, which itself owes a debt to such films by Eisenstein as 'October'.

The immense upsurge in theatrical activity in Russia after the October Revolution required a new content, expressed in new forms. Mayakovsky and Meyerhold introduced a new range of characters dominated by such types as the Imperialist, the Kulak, the Banker, the White Army General, the Menshevik conciliator. Of these, the Banker, the Imperialist and the inhuman General would reappear wherever there was agitprop drama. The kulak, or landlord-farmer, would become in Europe and America, simply the landlord. These characters were taken over by the Blue Blouse and the Living Newspaper who needed them to express their own views of contemporary events, but the quick-change style emphasised roles which could be put on or taken off. Character-isation in this new drama thus emphasised man as capable of changing or being changed by his circumstances rather than being subject to an immutable 'human nature'. It is the position that Brecht was later to take up in his theories of contemporary drama. The immense range of the new subject matter which frequently dealt with events on a world-wide scale, accustomed audiences to watch for underlying causes in the political and economic sphere. For all its crudity, this theatre enabled an audience to see themselves in relation to national or even global events; and it did so by montage, and by emblematic forms of staging. Furthermore, by involving the spectator, it showed him as a participant able to shape events. 'Without each one of you', this theatre implied, 'the events depicted could not have occurred, and nor could similar ones in the future'. Because these theatrical innovations were a direct response to the social revolution that took place in the years after 1917, they were eagerly seized upon by workers' theatre groups in the West anxious to promote their own social change. We shall see how, in a climate luke-warm or hostile to revolution, the case had to be argued, and agitprop needed documentation.

CHAPTER 2

Germany: documented polemic for revolution

In Germany, in the years immediately following the 1914-18 War, there were considerable parallels with Russia in both social and theatrical events. But the revolution in Bavaria following the Kiel Mutiny and the end of the war was suppressed after a few months,[1] and the development of workers' theatre in the next decade was in the face of growing Right-wing pressure. As a consequence, it lacked the triumphal and celebratory nature of its Russian counterpart and, rather than being a consolidating force in a new society, it was a political weapon in a continuing struggle. In addition, there was at first no established central theatre like Meyerhold's to offer a focus and an initiative. The principal theatres were offering comparatively traditional plays, if illuminated by the imaginative staging of such directors as Jessner and Reinhardt,[2] and even the Volksbühne served more to introduce its working-class audiences to theatrical classics than to plays about their immediate condition. There was, of course, the upsurge of Expressionist drama, but its generalised cry of anguish was directed against abstractions of war or misery, and although it may have helped pave the way, it was too diffuse for a platform against the Right. It was the work of Erwin Piscator which provided the necessary theatrical spearhead.[3]

For three years from 1920, Piscator directed and toured agit-prop theatre around the working-men's clubs of Berlin. Then for the next three years, he attempted, in the face of considerable internal dissension, to politicise the Volksbühne with experimental revues and by expanding the scope of extant plays much as Meyerhold had done with 'The Dawn'. From 1927 to 1929 at his own Piscatorbühne, he developed a documentary-based theatre capable of comprehending the large-scale events of the preceding decades. Not only was he an inspiration to Brecht, but to the general development of documentary theatre in Europe.

Piscator's experiments parallelled those taking place in Russia, but how much he was influenced by their example is not easy to assess. He emphasised his independence of them, and Professor Innes's study (to which we shall frequently return)[4] does nothing to contradict him. Nevertheless, as a member of the German Communist Party, the KPD, Piscator was in a strong position to hear first-hand accounts from members attending conferences in Moscow. In 1921, Hölitscher's account of 'The Storming of the Winter Palace' was published and , according to Huntly Carter, by 1928 Piscator had made two visits himself to Russia. Ernst Toller and Walter Hasenclever had made visits but it is tantalising not to know the dates.[5] Similarly frustrating is the remark by Käthe Rühlicke-Weiler that Brecht knew 'Mystery-Bouffe' 'at an early date'.[6]

If we cannot be certain how closely Piscator was influenced by Russian theatre, we do know that he had been closely associated with the Dadaist

movement in Berlin, which numbered John Heartfield among its members. He was to become well-known for his photo-montages and was to work as a designer for Piscator on many of his productions. Thus in the association of Rodchenko with Meyerhold, and Heartfield with Piscator, theatrical design, as applied to documentary drama, was to be strongly influenced by two artists at the forefront in the field of montage.

Piscator's association with the Dadaists, as well as his political convictions, led him in 1920 to set up the Proletarisches Theater to tour workers' clubs and beer halls in Berlin. The conditions of performance, namely a platform with its entrances and exits in full view of the audience, no lighting and minimal scenery, and a non-paying audience who were theatrically unsophisticated, were akin to those in Russia. Not only was he rejecting traditional theatre forms, but Piscator was aiming at the furtherance of class warfare on stage.[7] As a result, the scripts created by the company were simple, short and direct, and could be played in a vigorous manner by actors who had neither the experience to portray, nor an audience willing to watch, characters of psychological complexity.

Apparently, only one script survives, 'Russia's Day', and whether because of direct influence, or because similar conditions gave rise to a similar response, it is remarkably close to the short sketches performed by workers' groups in Russia. It is possible to gain some idea of its style and content from Innes's account.[8] The opening scenes dramatise an argument then current in Germany as to the appropriate allegiance of the proletariat, whether to the Social Democrats recommended by a Professor of Sociology who is reminiscent of the Conciliator in 'Mystery-Bouffe', or to the KPD. It is an argument similar to that between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 'The Storming of the Winter Palace'. When the Establishment appears, it is typified by a diplomat, an officer, and a priest, who are shown as servants of 'World Capital', 'depicted as a money-bag wearing a stockbroker's top hat and addressed as Your Majesty'. There are exhortations from Hungarians and Russians both to the German characters on stage and to the audience themselves. Finally everyone sings the Internationale, with the audience expected to join in.

In using stock-types to represent the Establishment, and in opposing them to a chorus of workers and revolutionaries, Piscator is not only parallelling the Russian example, but creating a precedent for characters that will recur in his later work. They are not new in German drama, for Georg Kaiser in the 'Gas' trilogy had already used figures such as 'The Millionaire', and 'The Gentleman in Grey' who is a Socialist, as well as a group of workers. The importance of Piscator's apparently insignificant experiment is his use of these characters as they were used in Russian proletarian theatre, to articulate

an explanatory view of capitalist society.

At the same time in Germany there existed equivalents to the Russian mass spectacles. While the intention was the same, to involve large numbers of workers in their preparation and rehearsal, and even larger numbers in their performance, the emphasis appears to have been on declamation rather than visual effect. In 1920, in Leipzig, there was 'Spartacus' in commemoration of the politically motivated assassinations of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.[9] 900 workers performed it before 50,000 Trades Union members, and it stimulated a number of other mass performances, notably 'Poor Conrad' about the sixteenth century Peasant Wars, and Toller's 'Scenes from the Great French Revolution'.[10] The 'sprech-chor', or spoken chorus, was incorporated in agit-prop plays, and was later used by Brecht. The Nazis, too, adopted the form for use at their rallies, and an example can be seen, spoken by labour batallions with shovels, and platoons with standards, in Leni Riefenstahl's film 'Triumph of the Will'. Single voice and chorus alternate and the effect is highly emotional, particularly when individuals call out their place of origin, and the crowd becomes a kind of aural map, an emblem, for all Germany. The effect is, of course, deliberate, for the chorus sums it up in a crescendo, 'One people, one Führer, one state, Germany!'

The mass declamation appears to have been used less in America, but in Britain one of Unity Theatre's earliest performances was Jack Lindsay's 'On Guard for Spain'. This was a choral poem, spoken by actors dressed in overalls and militia caps who marched in front of the red, gold and purple of the Republican tricolour.[11] The use of mass chanting was explored by other playwrights, notably those who were also poets, such as T.S. Eliot in 'Murder in the Cathedral'(1935) and W.H. Auden in 'The Dance of Death' (1933) The influence can still be seen in post-war documentary theatre, especially in Ewan MacColl's 'Uranium 235', and in the later 'Radio Ballads' of MacColl and Charles Parker. Contemporary British documentaries frequently resort to varieties of choral speech, sometimes simply to make a list of facts more interesting, but also to heighten the emotional effect, as in Ronald Graham's 'Aberfan' where the Borough Engineer speaks of the increasing coal-tip heights that are, we know, to lead to the engulfing of the village school:

> 'The first one reached a height of 85 feet.
> The second reached 90 feet.
> The third reached 130 feet.
> The fourth reached 147 feet, then it fell.'

This embodiment of factual material in a rhythmic form depends for its effect on giving dramatic shape to feelings that are already latent in the audience. Riefenstahl's film shows how the Nazi rally dramatised the delegates' gathering

into a collective unity apparently representing the whole German nation. 'On Guard for Spain' and 'Aberfan' both require audiences for whom the plays' references will evoke recent newspaper and film accounts. The emotional force exists in the audience, and the dramatic structuring of the choral speech releases it.

The influence of the mass declamations has had an even more direct effect on modern German documentary drama. Peter Weiss explores the possibilities of choral and 'heightened' individual speech in both 'Song of the Lusitanian Bogey' and 'Discourse on... Vietnam', although the extreme example is 'The Investigation' where, by paraphrasing and depersonalising the Auschwitz trial records, he creates an 'Oratorio'.[12]

Piscator was also influential in the use of a mixture of styles, rather like Eisenstein's 'montage of attractions'. He showed how dance, burlesque, circus-act and chant could be used to articulate a single theme. He did this in two political revues which were commissioned by the KPD, the first, 'The Red Revue' [13] for the parliamentary elections of 1924, and the second, 'Despite All' [14] for the Tenth Party Congress of 1925. The purpose of 'The Red Revue' was two-fold. It had to affirm to KPD members the importance of their vote at a time when the party's policy had been changed from one of rejecting parliamentary democracy, and convince them that the party's general strategy was correct. In attempting this, Piscator's innovation, for the political revue as such was not new in Germany, was the thematic linking of fourteen separate items. Each of these had an obvious ancestry in his earlier agit-prop work. There were caricatured right-wing candidates shouting distorted Socialist slogans; a communist agitator who was tried and sent to prison; actors who, impersonating Lenin and such important left-wing German figures as Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, made exhortatory speeches which led to a victorious finale in which all sang the Internationale.

The extent of the material was needed, if the political point was to be made; the dramatic problem was to hold the audience's attention over such a span. Piscator found two solutions. The most overt was to have a compère 'split' into two opposing voices, Bourgeois and Prole. Before the revue commenced, these two were concealed among the audience, and began the performance with an argument about social conditions, carried on over everyone's heads. They climbed on the stage, and watched the revue as observers, commenting on what they saw. Between each item, they continued their argument, basing it on the content of what they had just seen. Innes lists the values of such a form:

> The audience's reaction to the material can be controlled, and hence even apparently counter-revolutionary material can be included.
>
> Both sides of an argument can be presented, to give an appearance of

objectivity.

> The working-class audience have a character with whom to identify, and a scape-goat in the Bourgeois. [15]

Of all Piscator's innovations, this one had the most far-reaching effect outside Germany. More than his scenic innovations, which most have found too expensive to copy, the arguing double 'chorus' recurs frequently as a means to comment and expound upon the dramatic material. The most influential example is in Odets's 'Waiting for Lefty' where the scenes depicting labour conditions in America are linked by the ongoing meeting of the Union Committee. The argument, over the course of action to be taken, has Fatt the chairman opposing a strike, while arguing for it are Joe Mitchell and then Agate, whose speeches finally carry the taxi-drivers and then the audience. One of the most recent examples, Phil Woods's 'In Place of Strife' has Phil Mann in the dock as the 'Everyman' worker we are to identify with, and the Judge as his opponent. The issue is that of the Industrial Relations Bill, and the evidence is the dramatisation of the crucial legal confrontations of Trade Union history. Since the double chorus is of most value to the playwright of polemic, it will be interesting to compare it, when we turn to American theatre, with the single Voice of the Living Newspaper.

Piscator's second solution for spanning the material of 'The Red Revue' was much more integral, and depended on forming a particular relationship between scenes. Innes points out that they were 'each designed to arouse a simple and specific reaction, (and) shared a common message so that the diversity of techniques was linked by a single theme.' While this is undoubtedly true, it would appear from his synopsis of the revue that the relationship between scenes was more precise and more complex. Piscator has edited them to create a constant and developing emotional reaction in his audience. The two opening scenes appeal to the audience's sense of justice and integrity by contrasting hypocritical right-wing politicians in the first with the Communist condemned for agitation in the second. The contrast arouses, presumably, a sense of outraged justice, and it seems natural when the revue follows it with the aggression of a cudgel dance. This is then justified by appealing to the audience's sense of reason with a dramatised newspaper account of working-class exploitation. This, in turn, is reinforced by the 'objective' view of an incredulous 'Martian' who cannot believe that inequality can exist between human beings. The final scenes of the first half, when a resolution of the social conflict might be expected, instead dramatise the confused attitudes of the various Social Democrat parties. This is done by a 'Boxing Match Election' which is resolved when a Communist knocks the contending parties into a heap and triumphantly proclaims the KPD manifesto.

In the second half, contrasting experiences are again placed in montage. In particular, inflammatory speeches by Lenin, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg are interlaced with film of the 'Noske Atrocity' and slides of executions and military repression. This contrast between the oppression of the past and a programme for the future was meant to demonstrate the relevance of the Party's platform, and to involve every member of the audience in a gesture of solidarity.

Piscator's control of the emotional response was obviously intentional. As he said in the manifesto of the Proletarisches Theater:

> 'The style... must be completely concrete... with a simple, steady rhythm which in itself has a tremendous emotional effect in its unmistakeable clarity.' [16]

In order that his audience should allow its emotions to be controlled, Piscator had to prove the truth of what was being shown. To do this he used slides of familiar locations such as the Reichstag, a Berlin tenement, or the Supreme Court, to place the action within the audience's experience. The newspaper-based scene and the Noske film were intended as further justification. Within the terms of 'The Red Revue', Piscator thus proves that certain feelings, of anger at injustice, and sympathy with the oppressed, are inevitable when certain facts are known. His production throws light on the apparent paradox of the use of factual material on stage and the emotional response it may arouse. He understood, like Eisenstein, that it was the rhythm created by the editing of scenes that provoked the response. But Piscator went further in attempting to avoid any incredulity in his audience by the use of a factual content to scenes. In this, he anticipates the documentary film, where each shot has a 'real', factual content, but the editing creates a mood or emotion. Piscator needed proof in the German situation where one revolution had already failed, and another, if it were ever attained, could only be the result of a prolonged struggle.

> 'For we Marxist revolutionaries, the theatre cannot confine itself to sketching reality without criticism nor can it be conceived of as a "mirror of the age"... The task of the revolutionary theatre is to take reality as a point of departure for underlining the disharmony of society and to make of it an element of accusation.' [17]

The second of Piscator's revues, 'Despite All', went even further in establishing the play's argument. In his book 'Das Politische Theater', Piscator describes it as the first of his productions in which 'political documents formed the <u>sole</u> foundation' (my emphasis).[18] He thus introduced the idea that a play could be created from no more than the juxtaposition of quotations.

In its final version, the revue dealt in detail with the 1914-18 war,

the Russian Revolution, and the German workers' struggles up to date. One of its purposes was to illuminate the then current problem in the KPD of how far to support the Social Democrats against the Right. It was hoped that for the opening of the Tenth Party Congress,

> 'the presentation of the revolutionary tradition of the Party... could bring about the necessary process of clarification...' [19]

To do so, in front of such a politically sophisticated audience required that the play be demonstrably accurate in the presentation of its facts. With the exception of the final scene, which once again used the Internationale to unite stage and auditorium,

> 'the entire production was a single immense montage of authentic speeches articles, newspaper cuttings, slogans, leaflets, photographs and films of the War and the Revolution, of historical persons and scenes.' [20]

The filmed material was supplied from government archives and its large-scale effect must have been important, for the Sunday evening performance took place on the immense arena of the Grosses Schauspielhaus, Reinhardt's 'Theatre of Five Thousand'.

The skill with which Piscator dramatised his documentary sources is apparent in Innes's description.[21] He merged film into scenes about the same historical personages; a war vote in an acted parliament was followed by film of the ensuing trench warfare; the contrasting reactions to events by different groups was emphasised with the use of levels; slide projections identified stage action. As with 'The Red Revue', all this material was very carefully edited to achieve a cumulative emotional effect.

In 'Despite All', Piscator expanded the use of source material far beyond written documents. Each element of his montage was chosen to embody a certain idea or attitude, and these were juxtaposed one against the other to synthesise a new viewpoint. It was the same dialectical approach to editing that we found in Meyerhold's production of 'The Dawn' but used with far greater sophistication and skill. Moreover, Piscator had learnt that the principle of montage alone was insufficient:

> 'Form is everything; but form alone can never be revolutionary. <u>Content</u> makes it that...' [22]

Thus, when Piscator quoted documentary material, made it, in fact, his entire content, he did so out of the need to prove the revolutionary conclusions of his productions. It is difficult to agree with Innes when he writes:

> '...there is no direct relation between stylistic qualities and political theories. In spite of the way that Piscator was accustomed to place artistic styles in political categories, the propaganda experts of both extremes' (Innes does not state whom) 'realised that there was nothing

specifically Marxist about his techniques.'[23]

On the contrary, we have seen how montage was, for Piscator, a stage expression of dialectical thought; at the same time he was driven, by his political stance, to the use of documentation.

Piscator's revues were immensely influential on working-class theatre, not only in Germany. There, reinforced by the example of the Blue Blouse who toured in 1927, groups such as the Left Column and the Red Rocket performed their own revues. While they appear, from what information is available, [24] to have relied little on strictly documentary sources, their material was closely related to contemporary conditions and events. The influence of these groups spread to England and led to the formation, amongst others, of the Rebel Players in Hackney and the Red Megaphone in Salford.

Piscator is commonly remembered for his use of complex stage machinery. I do not propose to discuss in detail here the development of his experiments in this field, since this has been done elsewhere, but rather to discuss the most important aspects as they touch on documentary drama. The most interesting productions from our point of view are Gorky's 'The Lower Depths' at the Volksbühne in 1926, and at the Piscatorbühne, Toller's 'Hoppla, such is life' (1927), a very free adaptation of Alexei Tolstoy's 'Rasputin' (1927), and 'Economic Competition' ('Konjunctur') by Leo Lania (1928). Underlying his approach to these plays was the philosophy he expressed in relation to 'The Lower Depths':

> 'We search for the latent, most sensitive ways of giving expression to this epoch, with the help of the technical and artistic discoveries born of the time, with whatever means comes closest to reality' (my emphasis)[25]

The common factor in Piscator's approach to scripts at this time was so to produce them that the outside world, which he and his critics sometimes symbolised as 'The Street', was seen to bear upon the central characters. With 'The Lower Depths', unlike Stanislavksy who approached it from a mainly psychological viewpoint, Piscator emphasised the impinging environment. Where Gorky's directions require the interior of a dirty lodging-house, Piscator showed in addition the surrounding slum. When the play opened, the early-morning sounds of the city were heard through loudspeakers in a 'symphony' comparable to one created by Marinetti a few years before. Workers could be seen trudging to their jobs, while in contrast, the figures in the lodging-house did not stir. They were the unemployed, the dregs of that kind of society. After this 'picture of a city', the roof of the lodging-house was flown in, to shut out the sunlight, and Gorky's script began. In this simple way, Piscator showed the squalid life of Satin, Luka and the others as an

abyss confronting all working people. In Act Three, the fight which begins between Natasha and Kostylyov and ends with Pepel killing the latter was staged so as to suggest an 'upheaval of this outlawed class'. The police, whose appearance is only rumoured in the Gorky script, here cordoned off the whole forestage to protect the 'threatened' audience.[26]

In his discussion of source material in 'Das Politische Theater', Piscator distinguishes between scenic and textual document, and in his production of 'The Lower Depths', we see how the slum, sound-effects, and trudging workers are a <u>scenic</u> documentation. They verify the context. Piscator wants us to see Gorky's down-and-outs not as an unalterable phenomenon, but as the consequence of a society which requires a pool of unemployed in order to function.

Piscator's quest to dramatise the exact relationships between apparently unconnected phenomena led him, in subsequent productions to use physical images to reveal them. The setting provided the image, and was a free-standing structure on the stage - a 'stage-construct'.

'Hoppla, such is life' is about a revolutionary, Karl Thomas, who is released after eight years in an asylum to find his former comrades have sold out to the establishment. One, Kilman, has even become a Government minister. To express the relationship between scenes, and to continue the action without interruption, Traugott Müller designed a three-storey cross-section of a building that could serve for asylum, hotel or jail. Each of the seven 'rooms' could be closed by a projection screen and the events of the eight years of Thomas's internment shown in a film montage by Heartfield. One value of this form of staging was extreme fluidity of action, but this was only a spin-off. Its main purpose was to show the links between apparently isolated and disjointed events. Actions taking place in different rooms could be contrasted and the motives behind them compared. For example, we see why Thomas sets out to murder Kilman, and how he is pre-empted by an assassin motivated by right-wing leanings. Finally, the removable screens allowed Piscator to quote on film events from the real world juxtaposed against other film, or captions, or acted scenes. On such a stage, any combination of these was possible, and the stage-construct could thus show the interrelationship of national events and an individual life. Rather like a bee-hive analogy, the construct suggested a society in which people lived in isolated cells, and yet could exert power one over the other.

Because of the complexity of the dramatic form which Piscator and Traugott Müller had evolved, we need perhaps to distinguish between elements of composition shown concurrently as part of the same stage picture, and the

relationship of scene to scene in time. It is convenient to use the term 'montage', as in the cinema, to describe the assemblage of scenes, speeches and inserts one after the other in time, and to reserve 'collage' for the simultaneous juxtaposition of elements of a total stage 'picture'.[27] Subsequent to 'Despite All', all Piscator's important productions used a collage stage picture in conjunction with scenes and other dramatic elements in montage. The value of these two techniques is such that they recur in documentary drama to the present day.

In 'Rasputin', Piscator used a quite startling stage-construct to provide the framework for the diversity of scenic and textual documents. The play celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution and had the same political scope as 'Despite All', but this time, Piscator took as his starting point the eight scenes of Alexei Tolstoy's play and with Felix Gasbarra added a further nineteen. It was renamed 'Rasputin, the Romanovs, the War, and the People who rose up against them', which indicates the scope of the revision. The documentary nature of the additions was made clear in the programme[28] which, along with two critical essays, printed extracts from the sources such as telegrams, letters and diary extracts; a chronology of the Revolution; a Bolshevik proclamation; the words of a Russian peasant song; historical photographs; and a comprehensive bibliography of source-material.

The stage-construct was an immense hemisphere, the 'globus-bühne'. Constructed of canvas on a metal frame, it symbolised half the world. Segments of it could be raised to reveal rooms in which the more intimate scenes took place, especially those concerning the Romanov family. The likeness to Meyerhold's hemisphere in 'Mystery-Bouffe' is striking, and anyone knowing that production with its devils emerging from a segment would have equated them with the Tsar and his family. The 'globus' could revolve to reveal different segments. As well as being expedient for scene changes, this must have suggested to the audience the idea of a demonstration model. Given a (Marxist) vantage-point, they can see the globe, or world, turned and opened to reveal the mechanism of social events.

Three film-projectors were used, a large number for that time, and they could be shone upon the globe, on a gauze across the proscenium, or upon conventional screens. At one point three battles were projected simultaneously, and by such means the vast scope of naval and military action in the war could be suggested. Where named historical characters such as the Romanovs or Lenin appeared, they were impersonated; film was used to portray the mass of people. In this manner a contrast was created between the individual attempting to influence or avoid the consequences of events, and the masses playing a collective role in the shaping of history. By its mechanical nature, the film

must have suggested the inevitability of mass-action. Like the turning of the globe, the inexorable unrolling of the film was a demonstration of the Marxist view that revolution was inevitable. Characters such as the Romanovs or the war-generals might cause battles to commence but they were then compelled to respond to the forces they had unleashed; seen in front of the unremitting filmed consequences, they became puny and irrelevant. Finally, when the victorious Revolution was celebrated, actors as workers crowded into a segment of the globe, while on its sides and on all the other available surfaces, film was projected of the actual celebrations in Leningrad. In this way, the individual was shown as united with the mass-action. The audience, too, were implicated in the documented reality, for the stage picture, a mass of faces turned towards them, was like their mirror image. In Piscator's theatre film became the inescapable unrolling of history: it was the 'Russian steamroller' turned against the Imperial dynasty, and it was the gathering force of the proletariat, to be identified with and applauded.

'Rasputin' has influenced our own Joan Littlewood. It suggested the ironic use of captions as, for example, in a sequence on the Tsar's ancestry. The main screen showed portraits of each ancestor in turn, while on a screen at the side appeared a comment for each one: 'Died suddenly','Died insane','Committed suicide', and on on.[29] A more direct influence appears in a scene where Foch and Haig argue over their plans of campaign. While the 'calendar' screen announced 'The Battle of the Somme' and its date, on another screen film of the fighting was shown. Superimposed on it was the caption,'Loss - a half million dead; Gain - three hundred square kilometres'. The production of 'Oh What a Lovely War' has reminded us how effective in the theatre this kind of juxtaposed comment can be, but at the time some critics saw it as a split between content and form. René Lauret, who was generally sympathetic to Piscator's work, saw it, however, as the 'fusion' between the individual and his epoch. It is better still, perhaps, to consider Piscator as dramatising the <u>interaction</u> between individual and epoch.

The intentions of Piscator's 'Rasputin' were set out by one of his collaborators, Leo Lania, in a brief programme essay entitled 'Drama and History'. In it, Lania develops the argument that for a modern audience historical events can only be a meaningful experience in terms of their relationship to events now current. In the light of contemporary circumstances, documents from the past will be seen not as fragmentary episodes, but as forming a concentrated entity. Given this fundamental attitude, the 'inner curve' or unity of an existing dramatic form must give way to the insertion of new material. What is essential is that there must be an 'all-embracing exposition of the epoch from its roots to its effects'. While this could be read as an apologia for the extensive adaptation of Tolstoy's script, it seems in practice to reflect the genuine belief of Piscator and his collaborators that a play dealing from a psychological standpoint with characters

whose actions affect millions can express only a half-truth.

> 'Drama is important to us only insofar as it is subject to documentary proof'. [30]

For Lania, and presumably Piscator, human experience is not truthfully embodied in the single continuous 'life' of a stage hero. The experience of ordinary people is discontinuous, subject to sudden upheaval brought about by external events beyond their control. Action cannot be explained, therefore, solely on the grounds of personal motivation. The job of the new drama is to prove, through its documentation, the many forces at work on an individual and causing him to act in a particular direction. The value of this standpoint is immense. It suggests an immediate opposition to, for example, Theatre of the Absurd, where man's actions are not only discontinuous, but inexplicable as well. It suggests an experimental approach to drama in which hypotheses about the causes of men's actions are tested in front of the audience. It is, in addition, a theatre of the picaresque, for it can show not only those who initiate action but those who are caught up in the results. The perspective provided by Lania's essay and exemplified in Piscator's productions will help clarify our approach to all subsequent documentary drama.

While 'Rasputin' remains the most interesting of Piscator's productions in the 1920's because of its unification of wide-ranging documentary sources, mention must briefly be made of the only play written expressly for the Piscatorbühne, Leo Lania's 'Economic Competition'. In it, Lania and Piscator found a means of dramatising an economic process, that of the commercial exploitation of an oilfield.

> 'On an empty stage - the bare field - from the smallest beginnings, there must develop like the movement of an avalanche this struggle over an accidentally discovered oilwell. It is a play-construction which is carried out under theeyes of the spectator, and shows the whole technical process of oil production... - This story of oil, with its rivalries, graft, corruption, killings, revolution - must unroll before the spectator, involving him in this way in the whole machinery of petroleum politics.' [31]

Gorelik describes how Piscator's description was carried out in practice:

> 'Three travellers... discover the oil, hammer a crude stake into the stage floor. Now begins the sale of parts of the stage. Large signs go up as the rival companies fence off with barbed wire. The drillers arrive, followed by loads of lumber for the derricks, which are erected then and there. The stage is finally crowded with oil-derricks...' [32]

The simplicity and effectiveness of this stage picture are without question. The political and social meanings are contained in the image. The

bare stage has been exploited, and the forest of derricks seems unnecessary. The script confirms our view, for the oil-wells, all tapping the same pocket, work well under capacity. The political moral is clear; the capitalist, laissez-faire method of exploitation is highly wasteful.

The distance Piscator had travelled in formulating a new dramaturgy can be seen from a simple comparison. 'Economic Competition' was in part based upon Upton Sinclair's novel 'Oil' which had been published in German a year previously. (An advertisement for it appears in the 'Rasputin' programme.) Sinclair himself, presumably in ignorance of Lania's script, made his own adaptation of the novel in 1928, under the encouragement of a Broadway producer who had already commissioned two unsuccessful adaptations. Sinclair's play is sadly inadequate in comparison with the scope of the novel. In a revealing preface to the privately published version he writes,

> '...In a panoramic novel like "Oil", there are, of course, many different plays. The one chosen here is the story of father and son, devoted to each other, but seeing the world through different glasses. In the effort to meet "Broadway" with a coming-on disposition, I concentrated upon the human story and reduced the "propaganda" to a minimum.' [33]

Early on, Dad says, 'You'll see the derricks all over these hills'. In fact, we never do, unlike the Lania script. Instead, the oil field is off stage, or painted on a drop. The foreground is occupied by a psychological drama. Even in the second Act, where the side of a derrick is visible, and the first few lines of dialogue concern the 'spudding-in' of a new drill, the main content is family argument. When the scene climaxes in the commencement of drilling, the focus is on the joy felt by Dad and the spectators; there are no political ramifications. Piscator, on the other hand, had evolved a method of dramatisation that could link the individual with an economic system.

As well as his contribution to staging, Piscator created a new approach to character. He was often condemned for the poverty of language in his plays, yet this seems to arise from a misunderstanding of his intention. When he has an actor impersonate an historical character, he is not intending the audience to see a 'rounded' psychologically complex characterisation. He is asking us to hear a viewpoint and respond to it for the content of what is being said. We are to understand a character's speeches not from what he has said or done before, but from the context of causality erected by Piscator with his stage constructs and documentary film. Causation lies primarily not in psychological motivation but in response to external events. The actor, like Meyerhold's 'actor-tribune', is representing a point of view. When critics complain that man becomes on Piscator's stage inconsequential beside the machinery and the film of mass events, this is precisely the point he is making, however unpleasant it may be to accept.

In 1929, 'Das Politische Theater' was published. In it Piscator described his productions and the philosophy underlying them. He formulated the theory of documentary drama which we have seen expressed on stage, that the purpose of quotation is to enable the audience to see the proof of the play's viewpoint. It is quite different from the dramatisation of a current event, derived perhaps from a newspaper, but the two kinds of documentary dramatisation may exist in the same production for the purpose of commenting on each other. Sadly, this work was never translated into English, and its effect in Germany was nullified by the Nazis' assumption of power. Accounts of Piscator's productions were published in American theatre journals, and they were known by hearsay in this country. In consequence, the coherence of his approach has often been muddled by, for example, attacks on what has been seen as a misguided insistence on elaborate stage machinery. Had 'Das Politische Theater' been available in England and America in the early 1930's much of the confusion that now surrounds the documentary genre might not exist. Certainly, arguments over the 'reality' or 'objectivity' of documentary plays would gain immeasurably in clarity had Piscator's use of dramatic 'quotation' in support of an argument been common knowledge.

Piscator set an example for a kind of theatre that could dramatise the economic, political and technological complexity of the twentieth century and yet relate it to the daily existence of individual human beings. In this task he was aided by his disciple and collaborator, Bertolt Brecht. In his essays on theatre, Brecht emphasised the importance of the new form and the subject-matter which inspired it.[34] He took over and developed the use of the 'epic' terminology which Piscator began.[35] In particular, Brecht notes epic theatre as emphasising man as part of a process rather than being fixed in his nature; montage replaces dramatic growth; man's thought is determined by his social relationships. Brecht's theory of 'alienation acting' where the actor distances himself from the part by such formulae as 'He said...' derives from the quotational style of acting demanded by Piscator. Indeed, it may be time to re-evaluate the nature of our debt to Brecht. Although the stature of the total body of his work, in particular the plays and poetry, is unquestionable, it begins to appear that he is not the innovator he has sometimes been made out to be. His critical writings are not so much theories which were then translated into practice, as codifications of a dramaturgy which was being evolved by a whole movement of which he was a part. Nevertheless, with the unavailability of Piscator's own theories, Brecht's essays on dramatic theory were an important force in awakening directors in England and America to the possibility of a new kind of theatre.

CHAPTER 3

The U.S.: the documentation of social problems

The great flowering of off-Broadway drama in the fifteen or sixteen years from the mid-1920's is only now becoming adequately documented. By 1931, Hallie Flanagan, who was to become the director of the Federal Theatre, could write, 'The theatre being born in America today is a theatre of workers. Its object is to create a national culture by and for the working class in America.' [1] It is not possible to assess here the total extent of the European influences, but two figures stand out as transmitters of the Russian ideas and artistic forms. Hallie Flanagan is one, Michael Gold the other.

Gold had already been to Russia when, in 1926, his play 'Strike' was performed. The opening production of the Workers' Theatre, it was a piece of agitprop with the form's conventional ending adapted to the situation in the US. Dealing with a dispute between management and labour, it ends with the workers transformed not into successful revolutionaries, but into a militant class-conscious force. New Masses published the script, making knowledge of the agitprop form widely available. Other groups were set up, and further knowledge of agitprop was acquired from performances by emigrants from Nazi Germany:

> 'In the fall of 1930... a German-speaking theatre group... the Proletbühne, staged plays and mass recitations with very little scenery and simple, symbolical costumes, deliberately calculated for mobility and adaptability to the playing environment. The plays themselves, like all the scripts of the early years, were crude in plot and characterisation and full of revolutionary labor "clichés". Yet they had a hard-hitting directness of statement...' [2]

As in Germany, agitprop drama preceded the growth of documentary forms. There were also a considerable number of plays dealing with contemporary problems in a naturalistic style, such as Lawson's 'Loudspeaker', a satire on American politics, and Gold's 'Hoboken Blues' which deals sympathetically with negro problems. Of more interest here, because of its staging, is Paul Sifton's 'The Belt' in which naturalistic scenes of the attempts by some car-workers to form a union are linked by a device which echoes the treadmills of Piscator's production of the 'Good Soldier Schweik'. It is the Belt, the assembly-line of the car factory. To a clanking line of car bodies shown, presumably in silhouette, behind a gauze, the workers added new parts in a rhythmic movement 'in the fashion of a machine ballet'.[3]

In America, the horizon for agitprop theatre and the plays which grew out of it was support for a reformist rather than a revolutionary attitude. Even in 'Unemployed' by the Workers Laboratory Theatre, one of the more radical groups, a speech by an agitator was not for revolution in the US, but to

defend the USSR. When the Internationale was sung at the end, it was to celebrate only the 'consolidation of the unemployed'.[4] Odets's 'Waiting for Lefty' summarises the achievements of the genre. Where the Russian theatre and Piscator at their most expansive could dramatise a sweep of history leading to revolution, left-wing American plays were obsessed with labour relations at a local, factory level. Their investigation rarely went farther than the background to a particular incident, and the dramatic resolution was generally a call to strike, or for the audience to show solidarity with an existing group of strikers. Similarly, the successive Living Newspaper plays of the Federal Theatre were concerned only with social reform, as we shall see.

The second figure linking American theatre with Russian, Hallie Flanagan, was the founder of experimental theatres first at Grinnell College and then Vassar. In 1926, a Guggenheim award enabled her to spend a year in Europe making a comparative study of its theatre. She later published an account of her visit, [5] which is largely favourable to Russian theatre, although her sympathies were often torn, as when she saw one of Meyerhold's productions.

> '..."The Death and Destruction of Europe"[6]... takes place to the accompaniment of jazz... Insolent rhythms mercilessly underscore the theme, that the nations of the earth are dancing on a mine which is presently to explode capitalism and the bourgeoisie. America is on the list, and with a curious mingling of antagonism and amusement I watch a succession of scenes satirising our national characteristics. In a Turkish bath, several tired business men are being "done over" in order to prepare for putting across big deals on the morrow... Propensities to brag, to shoot up the town, to spoil their wives, to shake hands violently are all caricatured as traits of... entirely immature children. The satire is neither brilliant nor bitter, but broad, and filled with Rabelaisian laughter.'

The production introduced Hallie Flanagan to the fast-moving political revue. There were ninety-five roles shared by forty-five actors who played in a highly flexible and effective setting made up of movable screens. There were projected captions, as in Meyerhold's previous work, which not only gave location and date, but commented upon characters and quoted from Socialist writers. Additionally, Mrs Flanagan managed to see performances of the Blue Blouses. Her experiences suggested a line of experiment to be followed when she returned to Vassar.

In 1931, she and a former student Margaret Clifford, created 'Can You Hear Their Voices'. Based on an article in New Masses, this was a moving story of Arkansas tenant farmers starving during a drought. It was a

> 'series of black and white vignettes... capped by small blackouts and interwoven argumentatively with the stark facts of Congress's inaction thrown at you from printed slides on a huge white screen. Dominating the picture was the barbed lampoon of the quarter million dollar debutante party which startled Washington at the end of the drought.' [7]

Echoing 'The Storming of the Winter Palace', the stage had one side to represent power and security, the other, weakness and poverty. The principal characters were directly related to this polarity: an immensely wealthy politician who spends the quarter of a million dollars, and Wardell who typifies the poverty of the farmer. Such characters are close to the types of agitprop drama.

Mrs Flanagan's indebtedness to Meyerhold is clear, but the use of statistics may owe something to Piscator. Descriptions of his work had been published in 1930,[8] and there were probably other accounts available. What seems to have been original to this production, was the use of a loudspeaker to convey factual information. Possibly it had been inspired by the unadorned spoken commentaries of the first documentary films with sound; in any case, it anticipated an important stylistic element of the Federal Theatre's Living Newspapers.

'Can You Hear Their Voices' aroused its student audience to action: they organised for the farmers. Workers' Theatre soon found a place for it in their repertory, but much to Hallie Flanagan's annoyance, amended the script to make it more revolutionary. For the next three years, she sat on the fence between experimental College drama and workers' theatre. In 1932 at Vassar there was 'We Demand', a verse play on unemployment which was subsequently published by the League of Workers' Theatres of the USA for their member groups. Hallie Flanagan also directed another of the League plays, and was a contributing editor to New Theatre, the successor magazine to Workers' Theatre.

By the early 1930's, a great number of groups were in existence who were prepared to tackle subject matter close to the kind of material employed by Piscator. They dealt with corruption in local politics; with a strike against the sale of munitions to foreign governments; with a Marxist interpretation of racial hatred on the New Orleans dockside.[9] The well-known Group Theatre, formed after a production of the Russian post-revolutionary 'Red Rust', staged Paul and Claire Sifton's '1931', an episodic play which intercuts the story of an unemployed shipbuilder, Adam, with scenes showing nameless workers gathering at factory gates in the hope of employment. With each scene, their number and their anger grows, and finally, Adam is converted to radical politics and joins a mass demonstration. Goldstein suggests that '1931' could be claimed as the first play to 'include documentary glimpses of the Depression'[10] but he is using the term in the general, rather than the quotational sense, referring to the dramatisation of real events. On one night, the play provoked a shout of 'Long live the Soviet Union',[11] which may be a reason why Group Theatre productions were afterwards less overtly political. Later, the Group performed 'Waiting for Lefty' which was already in the repertoire of the League

of Workers' Theatres. The play is now legendary for the 'spontaneous' roar of 'Strike!' from the audience who are addressed as Union members at a meeting. Its episodic structure, reminiscent of the 'Red Revue', was to have many successors, including Irwin Shaw's 'Bury the Dead' and Paul Green's 'Johnny Johnson' in America, while Unity's London performances would influence the British Living Newspaper.

By the mid-1930's in America, there was thus a theatrical climate similar to that which had existed earlier, first in Russia and then in Germany, which was predisposed to the staging of plays on contemporary issues of political and social importance. On the whole, the audiences for this theatre were localised and sympathetic. Plays aimed at asking for solidarity would go down well at Union meetings or in workers' clubs, and there was no need for documentary proof to convince the hostile. When the Federal Theatre Project was formed, however, although many of its personnel were acquainted with the material and techniques of the 'labour stage', its audiences were not, because of a policy of leasing city-centre theatres. When the Unit responsible for creating Living Newspapers began to tackle controversial topics from a mildly radical stance the need for factual verification arose. From the start they used documentation in an attempt to convince the 'man-in-the-street' of the solutions they were offering.

The history of the Federal Theatre Project is well known, [12] and only the briefest outline is necessary as a background to its contribution to documentary drama. Roosevelt's 'New Deal' stimulated the national economy by putting the unemployed to work on public projects, rather than paying them the dole. The Federal Theatre was set up in the wake of an earlier failure to apply this policy to the theatrical profession. It was based on plans originally submitted by the playwright, Elmer Rice, who was appointed director of the New York Region. Hallie Flanagan was appointed national director. In addition to her basic brief, she had the vision of creating a national theatre of high artistic standard that would eventually be self-sufficient, and go on long after the Depression was over. It was an immense undertaking, and her problems ranged from the large-scale administrative ones down to the reluctance of some actors to have their names in the progammes because it would advertise that they were on relief. More seriously, the Federal Theatre came under attack at the outset from opponents of the New Deal for whom a subsidised theatre was an unforgiveable extravagance. On the basis of the more radical plays, among them the Living Newspapers, they contended that the Federal Theatre was a front organisation for the Communist Party. The accusation was ludicrous as the catholic choice of plays shows, [13] but pressure was steadily increased until the Federal Theatre was investigated by the House Committee

of Un-American Activities, the notorious Dies Committee, named after its Chairman. Hallie Flanagan contended that any large organisation must contain a proportion of left-wingers, but she failed to deflect her opponents. Largely on the basis of hearsay, the Committee condemned the Federal Theatre, Congress accepted the recommendation, and amidst general protest, not least from Roosevelt, it was axed. On one of its stages, where Pinocchio was being performed, the company protested in their own way, by letting the puppet die on the last night, instead of reviving him as a living boy. 'Thus passed Pinocchio. Born December 23, 1938, died June 30, 1939. Killed by Act of Congress', they intoned.[14] Some 10,000 were thrown out of work again by the closure, and the viable audiences they had created in many cities dissipated.

In quantitative terms, the Living Newspapers were only a small part of the Federal Theatre's output, but they were one of its more controversial areas, because they dealt with contemporary political issues. They were put together by a special Unit, which was technically separate from the Theatre Project, as Hallie Flanagan, apparently unheard, pointed out to the Dies Committee. It was organised as a newspaper, employing journalists as editor, sub-editors, and reporters. Mrs Flanagan attempted a further disclaimer which, in view of earlier experiences, appears somewhat disingenuous:

> 'Although living newspapers were sometimes compared by critics to the broad cartoon of news seen in London music halls or on Russian or German stages, they were not like them; to the best of my knowledge they did not resemble anything hitherto seen on the stage.' [15]

In any case, use of the term was not new in America, for in March 1933, Workers' Theatre had published a short play, 'O Learned Judge' by Isaac Murinson, calling it a 'Sketch for Living Newspaper', and in the same year, a commercial revue 'As Thousands Cheer' had based its sketches on news headlines. Arthur Arent, a member of the Unit from the outset, and responsible for a number of scripts, was even more evasive.[16] Listing what he emphasised were the alleged 'birthplaces' of Living Newspaper, Soviet Russia, Vassar College, and so on, he went on to write of those productions, 'I never seem able to locate anybody who saw one'. Presumably he knew where to 'locate' Hallie Flanagan; he could hardly have avoided Joseph Losey, the director of Arent's first Living Newspaper script, who had returned a few months earlier from Russia, where, as well as making first-hand observation, he had met Brecht and translated Piscator's 'Das Politische Theater'.[17] Such are the evasions when witch-hunts are in the air.

Whatever had to be said at the time, the origins of Living Newspaper in workers' theatre are now generally accepted. Arnold Goldman sees it in the

'multiple short episodes', the 'generic characters', and the'emphasis on social problems and recommendations for action!.'[18] In the use of projected maps, and the occasional scene in a revue style, can be seen Meyerhold's influence, if at second or third-hand, and Piscator's work is apparent in the quotation of statistics and the juxtaposition of documentary slide projections with the stage action. The size of the debt to these earlier forms will become apparent. Arent asserts one specifically American influence, that of the March of Time film series, begun in 1934. From the sound-track commentary, with its air of objectivity, comes the loudspeaker Voice of the Living Newspaper. Arent may well be right, but we have seen how Hallie Flanagan's 'Can You Hear Their Voices' pre-dates the March of Time in its use of commentary.

Arent compares the two forms. The March of Time was

> '...in essence a dramatisation of an event - a news event - while the Living Newspaper was "the dramatisation of a problem"' [19]

Living Newspaper was, in fact, a misnomer. Although the intention had been to dramatise daily events, it was soon realised that the results would have been quickly outdated by radio and the press. The situation was quite unlike post-Revolutionary Russia. Consequently, the Living Newspaper Unit settled for issues that would be topical over a period of weeks or months. Nevertheless, there were attempts at immediacy, and the ending of each performance of 'Triple-A Plowed Under' was updated with latest relevant news.

In the first projected Living Newspaper, 'Ethiopia', Morris Watson, head of the Unit, dramatised the 'problem' of Italy's invasion of that country. He did this solely by means of a montage of extant news material, considerably edited and carefully juxtaposed. There was no dramatic dialogue between characters. If the intention of using only quotations was to ward off criticism, it misfired. Elmer Rice offered to resign rather than see the play altered. His resignation was accepted, and'Ethiopia' only received a press showing. Rice took the opportunity of this occasion to comment caustically on an earlier remark by the administrator of the WPA,[20] Harry Hopkins, to an inaugural conference on the Federal Theatre, 'What we want is a free,adult,uncensored theatre'.[21] Hallie Flanagan felt that Rice's resignation was an important factor in keeping censorship at bay in later productions by the Unit.[22] Alternatively, it could be argued that the Living Newspaper authors had learnt a lesson, for none of the later scripts contained material which might embarrass the Administration.

'Triple-A Plowed Under' was the first Living Newspaper to reach the public. It was written 'by the Editorial Staff... under the supervision of

Arthur Arent', and directed by Joseph Losey. In twenty-five scenes,[23] the play explains the relationship between post-war deflation and unemployment, between the price of milk to the farmer, and the price to the consumer. The plight of farm and city families is compared: with no jobs to create money, food lies rotting while people starve. A drought is shown to raise the price of wheat; in consequence a woman drowns her young son rather than see him starve to death. The Agricultural Administration Act, the 'Triple-A' of the title, which had been set up to levy a food processing tax to pay farmers to keep their land fallow, is shown in action. In one scene, a wheat speculator congratulates himself that it is the consumer, not he, who pays the tax, while in another, sharecroppers demand from a farmer a share of the relief payout since it is his fallow land which has put them out of work. We see the Supreme Court declare the AAA unconstituional, and the middle men, in a scene entitled for obvious reasons, 'The Big Steal', receive a 200 million dollar tax rebate. Finally, the farmers and the unemployed find they have a common cause and march with banners to demand adequate funds for the revival of agriculture. Over the Loudspeaker come newsflashes giving up-to-the-minute news of the Farmer-Labour Party.

Not only does the ending bear a strong resemblance to that of many agit-prop plays, so do earlier scenes. In one, there are off-stage calls of 'Strike!' in response to a scheme for restricting farm production. There are further similarities of style, as for example in the scene 'Vicious Circle'. Over the loudspeaker, as a backing, we hear statistics of rising unemployment, intercut, number by number, with decreasing farm incomes. On stage, we are shown the causal relationship of the one statistic to the other:

> 'Farmer (To Dealer) I can't buy that auto.
> (...Dealer turns head sharply left, speaks to Manufacturer)
> Dealer (To Manufacturer) I can't take that shipment.
> (...Manufacturer turns head sharply left, speaks to Worker)
> Manufacturer (To Worker) I can't use you any more.
> (...Worker speaks directly front)
> Worker I can't eat.[24]

The agit-prop antecedent is apparent not only in the cumulative repetition, but in the generalised characters. Interestingly, where we might have expected a 'Capitalist', the role is split into Manufacturer and Dealer, for one of the main targets for attack in 'Triple-A Plowed Under' is the middle-man. The political economics of the play never go so far as an attack on Capitalism; the underlying philosophy is Keynsian, that provided there is Government regulation, a private enterprise economy is workable and satisfactory to individual well-being.

The loudspeaker Voice of the Living Newspaper provides a datum line

against which the action of the play is intended to be judged. It introduces most scenes, and its language is that of a newspaper headline, sometimes quite literally: 'Triple-A pays out four million dollars daily'. The quotation, like all the others, is attributed to its source by a footnote in the mimeographed script. At other times the Voice slips, almost unnoticeably, into editorialising:

> 'Voice of Living Newspaper As our economic system now works, the greater the surplus of wheat on Nebraska farms, , the larger are the breadlines in New York City.'

Nearly always, the Voice tells the audience what is to happen, and the scene shows how. The combined effect, as it accumulates over a number of scenes, is to make the Voice authoritative. The impression is given that here is the incontrovertible truth. It thus takes on one of the functions of film in Piscator's productions, it is evidence for the veracity of the ensuing scene. The hints of editorialising show, of course, that Arent and his team had a point of view like any other author.

Other 'official' voices were heard over the louspeaker. In an often-quoted scene, two voices alternate, one announcing the weather report for a number of successive days in May 1934, and the other repeating each time, 'Fair and warmer'. On stage, a farmer is examining a 'sun-baked plain', suggested by lighting . When the voices end, he straightens up, slowly lets a handful of dust sift through his fingers, and says simply, 'Dust!' Juxtaposition such as this makes a compelling statement that personalises large-scale events. We are able to see their consequences in human terms.

Fortunately Arent, in his essay on Living Newspaper,[25] has described the method by which scenes pinpointing human consequences came to be dramatised. The simple montage of different elements which characterised 'Ethiopia' has given way in 'Triple-A' to a closer engagement of the playwright in the reorganisation of his material. Now he is operating much more as a writer than as an editor. The results of the process can be seen in this comparison:

DAILY NEWS	LN SCRIPT
	Voice of LN Newburgh, New York: August 20th, 1935. Mrs Dorothy Sherwood.
She walked into the Police Court with the baby in her arms and said, "He's dead, I	(Police desk... Enter Mrs Sherwood... with dead infant in her arms... Light her with overhead spot, center)
	Mrs Sherwood He's dead. I drowned him.
	Lieutenant You what?
just drowned my son because I couldn't feed him and I couldn't bear to see him hungry... I let him wade in the creek until he gottired. Then	Mrs Sherwood I just drowned my son. I couldn't feed him, and I couldn't bear to see him hungry... I let him wade in the creek until he got tired. Then I led him out into the middle, and held him thereuntil he stopped moving.
	Lieutenant (calling, not loudly) John!

I led him out into the middle and held him there until he stopped moving.

(Policeman approaches)
Lieutenant Take the body. Book this woman for murder.
(Policeman takes child from her. Blackout on everything except Mrs Sherwood... Offstage voice comes through loudspeaker.)
Voice Why did you do it?

I had only five cents

Mrs Sherwood I couldn't feed him. I had only five cents.
Voice Your own child. Did you think you were doing the right thing?
Mrs Sherwood I just thought it had to be done...
Voice How could a mother kill her own child?

and he was hungry...
I just thought it had to be done, that's all. [26]

Mrs Sherwood He was hungry I tell you. Hungry, hungry, hungry, hungry!
(As her voice mounts it is blended with... a progression of nine voices crying 'Guilty!')

It was perhaps some consolation to Mrs Sherwood that her dilemma was offered in this chilling form as a dilemma for the whole nation. In the play's context it is quite clear that she was not the murderer.

We can see from the comparison how this was done. The loudspeaker suggests the authenticity of the scene, although in fact we must trust that the facts are correct. Without the introductory Voice, many in the audience might have questioned whether such an event could have ever occurred. The quoted speech is broken up, and made to appear as a set of responses to questioning, which is how the reporter must in fact have gathered it. The lighting change and the questioning voice suggest a change from police station to court, from action to consequence. These last questions serve to underline the woman's motive, and Arent calls this method the 'build of dramatic emphasis'. Coming where it does in the script, the scene enables us to sympathises immediately with Mrs Sherwood's motives, and when the chorus of jury-voices reminds us of the possible penalties for her action we are forced to dissent. The scene is astonishing for the economy with which it attracts the audience's interest, enlists their sympathies, and points them towards militant action.

In his discussion on the form of the Living Newspaper, Arent distinguishes between 'montage' and 'episodic'. He does not define montage, but it would appear he is referring to the juxtaposition of spoken documents, projections and extremely skeletalised scenes. Each element is of short duration, so that a great deal of information is telescoped into a short time. It is like the montage of 'Despite All'. In the alternative episodic approach, there are scenes which each achieve three primary functions:

> To say what has to be said.
> To build to the scene's own natural climax.
> To build to the climax of the act curtain and the resolution of the play.[27]

His discussion amplifies these generalisations, and we can see that Arent is

describing scenes that are self-contained, articulating one aspect of the central problem, yet adding a further point to the developing argument. We are reminded of Brecht's definition of Epic Theatre,[28] in which he gives as two of its attributes or emphases, 'each scene for itself' and 'montage'. In Arent's definition, too, each scene has its own characters and there is no plot of individual motivation linking them. But the arrangement of scenes makes an economic, wide-scale causation very apparent. Had Arent used 'episode' rather than'scene', his definition might have been clearer. A survey of the episodes and their relationships in 'Triple-A Plowed Under' shows that he is organising a montage of episodes, as a film-maker organises shots, to create an emotional response.

The purpose of Arent's over-emphatic distinction between montage and episodic was to mount an attack on Morris Watson and Joseph Losey's 'Injunction Granted' the third public Living Newspaper. According to Arent, the first act contained twice the average number of episodes and asked too much of the audience because of its fragmentary nature. In fact, the play drew audiences and, incidentally, was enjoyed by Ernst Toller. Nevertheless, if Arent's attack cannot be sustained in this instance, his attempts at defining the form do suggest a useful distinction to be made between a montage of documents and a montage of dramatised episodes. Piscator's work up to 'Rasputin' developed the former, while modern British documentary plays stay rather firmly in the latter area.

'Injunction Granted' brought the differences of opinion over the political stance of the Living Newspaper to a head. Its director, Losey, maintained in retrospect that Living Newspaper was

> 'a form of agitational propaganda. The point was to break into new forms and freedom to speak protest and into a more direct communication with ideas. You had to share a common social objective...'(sic)[29]

The consequence of this approach was clear in his production. In one episode, a Demagogue, standing between Landed Gentry and Workers was dressed in a split suit. The side facing the Gentry representing Capital had a striped trouser leg, a half-moustache and slick hair; the side facing Labour had an overall, blue half-shirt, and rumpled hair. The Demagogue was followed by John D. Rockefeller and Howard Heinz who, making similar points, were to be equated with his two-facedness. An indecent exit reinforced the point. The parody was even more politically pointed when, to curb successive combinations of workers, the judge repeats the title like a formula, 'Injunction granted!' Such open ridicule of the Judiciary and the clear implication that it sided with big-business interests, was too much for Hallie Flanagan, and not long afterwards Losey left the Federal Theatre Project. Subsequent Living Newspapers

were politically more bland.

Losey's production was heir in two ways to the European theatre he had visited. He employed Okhlopkov's concept of a 'montage' setting by using an abstract arrangement of ramps, curves and levels to deploy his actors in separately defined spotlit areas. This enabled Losey to achieve a visual collage equivalent to that in 'Hoppla, such is life'. Secondly, insofar as he used documentation, it was assimilated and deployed in support of a radical approach to the problem under consideration. He could not accept the neutralist stance of Flanagan and Arent.

The writer for the last two Living Newspapers was again Arent.[30] 'Power', about the excessive price of electricity under private monopoly, extols the value of New Deal policies in creating public bodies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority to provide power at lower prices.[31] Perhaps because it was less openly political, or because audiences were becoming accustomed to the form, it has received more acclaim than 'Triple-A Plowed Under' but it lacks the bite of the former play's pithy images. 'Power's' episodes are also based largely on newspaper reports, but there is much greater use of conventional dialogue with correspondingly less juxtaposition of causal facts. Lines rather than scenes are attributed to documentary sources, and there is an increase of invented characters. While there are some memorable sequences, as when company linesmen race to connect up their electricity supply before the Government, there is a general flabbiness.

The function of the loudspeaker, too, has changed. No longer is it called the Voice of the Living Newspaper. While it still frequently opens scenes with a factual announcement, it now enters into dialogue with on-stage characters, principally the Consumer. No longer is it an objective repository of information, but at times it is deliberately ignorant in order to provoke a knowledgeable response from a character such as an electrician.

The use of an 'Everyman' figure, the consumer Angus K. Buttonkooper (what a patronising name for the man in the street), is one of the most noticeable differences in 'Power'. A constantly recurrent figure, we are asked to identify with him, and learn as he learns. Towards the end of the first Act[32] he vows to fight the monopolies, and from then until the end of the play, we are shown scenes of other consumers becoming more militant for low price electricity. Significantly, considering the Federal Theatre's backpedalling, the Consumer figure with whom we have identified does not join in the struggles; he fades from the play. There is thus a latent message, running counter to the apparent statement of 'Power', that other people will do the fighting. The ending confirms this view. The problem of low-price electricity is resolved because Buttonkooper is lucky enough to have a Government willing to supply cheaply, and a Supreme Court willing to interpret the Constitution in the Government's

favour.[33] 'Power' is virtually an apologia for the New Deal administration, and given the Right-wing opposition, we can applaud it. Certainly the Project Administrator, Harry Hopkins did:

> 'I want to tell you thatthis is a great show... People will say it's propaganda. Well I say what of it? It's propaganda to educate the consumer who's paying for power...' [34]

If Hallie Flanagan remembered that she had once told Losey that she barred the use of Federal funds as a 'party tool' whether for Communists or Democrats, she must have blushed.

Arent's final Living Newspaper, 'One third of a nation' takes its title from a speech by Roosevelt which stated that one-third of the country was poorly housed. The play was initiated at a Federal Theatre Summer School and in its vitality and closeness to sources (the script has a bibliography of nearly fifty titles) resembles 'Triple-A' rather than 'Power'. The Loudspeaker no longer holds whole scenes, and although Angus K. Buttonkooper returns as the questioning Little Man, he is much more actively involved in seeking a solution. Arent seems to have recognised the weakness of the Consumer in the previous play.[35]

The setting was appropriately chosen, and consisted of the cross-section of a tenement house. The device was not new, and had been used in Sidney Kingsley's 'Dead End' (1935) and Elmer Rice's 'Street Scene' (1929) Given Arent's script, we might have expected it to have been used as Piscator's construct in 'Hoppla', both as a symbol of the play's meaning and as a method of creating a visual collage. Instead, the Belasco tradition triumphed, and the structure only housed groups of characters; there was never juxtaposition. But by opening and closing the play with a spectacularly-staged fire, Arent ensured a memorable impact. 'One third of a nation's' didactic passages were played on the stage in front of the house, and the growth of the slums and their social consequences were shown by projections and symbolic dramatisations. One in particular recalls the growth of the oilfield in Lania's 'Economic Competition'. A landowner enters and 'stakes out his plot' by unrolling a grass mat. One by one, men come to lease parts of the plot, and the owner grows rich 'because a man's got to have a place to live!' The end result with all the dwellers performing mimes of everyday activities while packed together on the mat, is a striking image of the effect of tenement growth.

Despite such demonstrations, the tenement scenes of quarrels, unhappiness and disease have a melodramatic sentimentality. We can accept their reality, but because there is no positive force in the play with which to identify, the ending seems diffuse. At first, as the play draws to a close, it is suggested that a solution lies in low-rent Government housing, but it is

soon stated that, at the rate funds are available to New York, it will take 200 years to solve the crisis. Since the play does not suggest where extra funds might come from, Mrs Buttonkooper's final cry is urgent but fundamentally unconvincing:

> 'CAN YOU HEAR ME - YOU IN WASHINGTON OR ALBANY OR WHEREVER YOU ARE! GIVE ME A DECENT PLACE TO LIVE IN! GIVE ME A HOME! A HOME!' [36]

The evolution of the Federal Theatre's own brand of Living Newspaper illustrates a number of the dilemmas of documentary theatre. Because of the unwillingness of the Theatre's administration to admit any radical critique of society, the plays, especially the latter two, fall into the trap of only appearing to offer ameliorative solutions. 'Triple-A Plowed Under' is more successful in this respect, for after demonstrating a social problem, it does not attempt to offer its own solution, but instead documents current actions by existing political groups. The suggestion is made that the audience could participate in seeking a solution. The need for a dramatic resolution arises in the latter two plays because the 'Everyman' figure, Buttonkooper, needs a solution himself. It is a problem specific to radical documentary plays in a non-revolutionary society. Had Buttonkooper been a Russian, then a celebration of the Utopian power of the Revolution to ensure adequate housing might well have been a satisfactory conclusion.

A similar dilemma exists in connection with the Loudspeaker. Once it enters into dialogue with on-stage characters, it becomes part of the play's plot, and a factor in the dramatic resolution. So long as it is confined to aannouncements of fact, it remains one element of a montage, and its accuracy and objectivity can be cross-checked against the other elements at the same time as the audience draw conclusions from the juxtaposition.

A fundamental distinction can thus be drawn between the 'problem' play of the nineteenth century, which requires an on-stage resolution, and the montage presentation of a contemporary problem which requires each member of the audience to resolve for himself the debate presented between different, but documented, points of view. Arent's playwriting hovers unhappily between the two forms. Indeed the clue to the weakness of his Living Newspapers is to be found in his essay on the form, where he states that the typical motif is 'the line of cause and effect'. What he fails to distinguish is the difference between cause and effect in the motivation of an individual character (say for example when Ibsen's Karsten Bernick is aware of the consequences of sending 'coffin-ships' to sea) and the impersonal cause and effect of social or economic forces in a montage (which may have equally murderous results). Arent's salvation has been in those scripts where the documentary source

material has forced him in the second direction.

If the Federal Theatre's Living Newspapers lacked, in general, the polemic bite of Piscator's documentary theatre, they certainly demonstrated to the US and Britain the potential of factually based material to grip an audience by rousing a latent emotional response.

> 'The real surprise, for those who have never before seen productions of this sort, is the amount of emotion they can call forth... the rapid-fire technique and the simplification of problems which, however abstract and complicated they may seem, are of immediate importance to the audience, combine to produce something akin to that Shavian goal, the intellectual passion. There was electricity in the air when 'Triple-A Plowed Under' explained that milk costing the consumer 15 ¢ a quart brought the farmer only 3 ¢. And there was, in 'Power', a stirring of long-pent peevishness over monthly bills that ended in a real emotional release as the curtain went down on a famous folksong.

> My name is William Edwards,
> I live down Cove Creek way;
> I'm working on the project
> They call the TVA.' [37]

CHAPTER 4

Britain: fitting the pieces together

The growth of documentary drama in Britain arose from agitprop roots in much the same way as in America, but it was the influence of the Federal Theatre's Living Newspaper Unit that gave the decisive impulse.

There is a dearth of published material on early British agitprop groups. There were exhortations, as when the Sunday Worker in 1926 called for 'satires and sketches acted in the open on barrels, soapboxes or a couple of planks',[1] and in the same year Ness Edwards wrote 'The Workers' Theatre', but it was not published until 1930. In it, he tried to define a drama which would express the feelings and consciousness of the working class. It 'must be a means of organising', and it should show cause, effect and solution of social problems, in order to provide an object lesson in working-class tactics.

> 'It is propaganda by a dramatisation of facts; only the projected solutions are debatable or represent opinions.' [2]

Although he does not call for documentation, his orientation is similar to Piscator's in calling for a factual basis to propaganda. He prescribes some possible subject areas for dramatisation, and they are of interest insofar as they have all been dealt with in recent British documentary plays: the Peasant Revolt, land enclosures, the Chartist uprisings, the miners' struggles.[3]

By the end of the 1920's a number of groups were in existence. Ewan MacColl recalls acting in a 'street performing troupe' towards the end of 1930, and believes that by 1932 there were twelve such groups in the Northwest of England alone.[4] He formed the Red Cops in Rochdale, based on Salford's Red Megaphone, a group which modelled themselves on the German Rote Sprachror. MacColl not only recalls the influence of Piscator's experiments but also of American groups. In 1934 he met a young actress, Joan Littlewood,[5] and between them, they formed 'The Theatre of Action', with Littlewood bringing to it a desire to experiment in movement along the lines of Continental theories such as those of Meyerhold and Rudolf Laban.[6] MacColl provided his agitprop experience. From the outset they determined not to alienate their street audiences by any trace of conventional 'theatricality'; instead, they would use totally inexperienced actors, and develop their own worker-oriented style.

In the first six months, the company's repertoire was impressively international. They performed their own brief anti-war sketches, including 'John Bull wants you'; Norman Hall's 'Free Thaelmann' to draw attention to the imprisoned German Socialist; Sergei Funarov's 'The Fire Sermon'; songs for mass demonstrations by Hanns Eisler; and 'Newsboy' compiled by Alfred Saxe and a

group drawn from the New York Workers Laboratory Theatre.[7] The latter piece in particular must have appealed to the company's desire to experiment with movement, for the original had been influenced by the ballets of Kurt Joos.[8] Its characters pop up and are replaced with 'machine-like rapidity' and the manifesto describes 'Newsboy' as 'built on a series of images placed in juxtaposition to the ideology of the Newsboy who represents the right-wing press. The factual 'images', by the end of the short piece, have converted the Newsboy to Marxism.

Theatre of Action began to work on longer scripts. MacColl claims the group was the first to perform 'Waiting for Lefty', but offers no corroboration. Whether their production or Unity's was the first is less important than that both came into contact with, and were influenced by the play's style. Theatre of Action also performed the Piscator/Brecht script of 'The Good Soldier Schweik', and although treadmills were out of the question, back-projection was used. The transformation of the street agit-prop group into a touring company had begun. After the war, it would re-emerge as Theatre Workshop.

Before we consider Unity Theatre's contribution to the documentary play, we must first look briefly at another influential form, the documentary film, established in this country in the early 1930's by John Grierson. Although he acknowledges the influence of Russian films, especially Eisenstein's 'October', Grierson maintains that 'the documentary film was... an essentially British development'. His assertion is borne out by the quantity - some 300 made before 1939 - and their quality - many are memorable today. They were the work of directors which Grierson gathered under him in a group that became the GPO Film Unit. Among them were Arthur Elton, Basil Wright, Alberto Cavalcanti, and Paul Rotha. Their influence was felt throughout British film-making.

Grierson's introduction to film had been as a critic, and reviewing Robert Flaherty's film 'Moana' in the New York Sun in February 1926, introduced the word 'documentary' into the English language. 'Moana', 'being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth, has documentary value'. [9] Previously, the French had applied the term 'documentaire' to their travel films. Grierson gave it the meaning that, basically, it has retained. He defined his approach as 'the creative treatment of actuality', and Paul Rotha's description of 'October' could equally well be applied to Grierson:

> 'It is creating a form of documentary approach which gives new meanings to familiar things; not representing persons and things as they are, but relating them in such a manner to their surroundings that they temporarily assume new significance.' [10]

Let us see what this meant in practice by considering the only film Grierson directed personally, 'Drifters'.

At a time when British film-makers were studio-bound, it was revolutionary for Grierson to go and film the fishing industry in situ. Not only was almost the entire film shot on location, but Grierson used the fishermen themselves, not actors. This was to typify his approach:

> 'The basic force behind it was social not aesthetic. It was a desire to make a drama from the ordinary to set against the prevailing drama of the extraordinary: a desire to bring the citizen's eye in from the ends of the earth to the story, his own story, of what was happening under his nose. From this came our insistence on the drama of the doorstep.' [11]

Grierson applied the principles of editing he had learnt from the Russians, principally Eisenstein and Pudovkin, to make his audience realise that a herring is not an item of food to be taken for granted, but a product of the dangerous toil of a real group of men.

> 'As the catch was being boxed and barrelled... and the hammer raised to complete the job, I slid back for a flash or two to the storm and the hauling. The hammer is raised on mere fish; it comes down on dripping oilskins and a tumbling sea...'

Such a montage admirably demonstrates Grierson's purpose, which was 'to say that what was really being boxed and barrelled was the labour of men!. [12]

In making the familiar herring strange, a product of extraordinary effort, Grierson is working parallel to Brecht, whose theory of 'Verfremdung' points in the same direction, for a similar social purpose. Alan Plater's recent play does the same for the coal industry, and Alex Glasgow's song (which gives it the title) sums up the point:

> 'Close the coalhouse door, lad, there's blood inside.'

Grierson was inspired by a view that the documentary film should be propaganda for a democratic way of life. As a consequence, the Unit's directors took not only camera, but microphone, to the factory floor, and for virtually the first time, the voice of working people could be heard by the public at large. In 'Night Mail', for example, we hear the driver's own description of his work, it is not done by a voice-over commentary, and the result is to accord him a stature and importance. Similarly in 'Housing Problems' (1935), South Londoners tell their story in spontaneous interviews.

Grierson's enthusiasm pointed also in an aesthetic direction. In theories of the sound-track, he envisaged fragments of recorded speech built into a montage 'conversation' and commentaries written by a poet to add colour rather than fact. In 'Night Mail', the well-known poem by W.H. Auden (with its echoes of the mass declamation) serves to point an underlying rhythmic

unity in the actuality shots of train, driver, and letter-sorters. In the juxtaposition of sound and image, it is the picture that carries the factual content, while the sound-track expresses purpose and consequence. Grierson experimented with editing sound to achieve a union between voice actuality and poetic monologue. Traces recur in post-war documentary plays. It can be found in Theatre Workshop's 'Uranium 235', and more recently in 'Aberfan' and 'Would you look at them smashing all the lovely windows', although the poetic quality is more often in the arrangement of rhythmic dialogue than in a specially written monologue.

The influence of the GPO Film Unit on plays of the 1930's is less obvious. Indeed, the American Living Newspapers have been cited as an influence on British documentary film.[13] The process is one of cross-fertilisation, and the immediate importance of these films was to create a climate in which ordinary people, their work and daily problems, were seen as fit material for audiences to watch. They indicated a direction for the theatre, if not that of the West End, to follow, and in our own time, Peter Cheeseman's work at Stoke continues the GPO Film Unit's stance. But there was some immediate influence, especially on the form of Unity Theatre's first Living Newspaper, 'Busmen'.

As with the Theatre of Action, Unity's origins lay in the agit-prop movement. A group of East-Enders formed The Rebel Players in Hackney in 1933, and, along with a general resurgence of interest in political theatre, grew by 1935 to about sixty active and three hundred associate members. Their position was consolidated by performances of the pirated 'Waiting for Lefty' and, joined by the Red Radio group, they renamed themselves Unity Theatre and a year later moved to the present premises in Goldington Street.[14]

Although 'Waiting for Lefty' dominated the early repertoire at Unity, receiving three hundred performances between 1936 and 1937, there were also mass recitations such as Toller's 'Requiem', and the most popular, Jack Lindsay's 'On Guard for Spain'. The programme as it evolved was anti-war and anti-fascist from a militant rather than pacifist standpoint. It appears to have been less influenced than Theatre of Action's repertoire by American and German examples. Certainly Unity gave Brecht's 'Señora Carrar's Rifles' its first British performance, but this was not until September 1938, and in any case, it is Brecht's most naturalistic play. Unity had no similar opportunity to that provided by Theatre of Action's production of 'Schweik', to explore the concepts of 'epic' and 'documentary' theatre.

'Busmen', the second play in the Goldington Street theatre,[15] was evolved in response to unofficial strikes which were being organised against the London Passenger Transport Board's policy of 'speed-up' on the buses. It

opened in February 1938. The play springs from two combined sources. There was the example of Odets's 'Waiting for Lefty' which had aroused sympathy for the New York taxi-drivers, and there was information coming through about the Federal Theatre's Living Newspapers. 'Busmen's' director, John Allen, believes that at the time actual scripts had not reached him, but there were magazine articles and Van Gyseghem's eye-witness account of 'Triple-A Plowed Under'.[16] Allen also acknowledges the influence of Eisenstein's 'Potemkin' for its suggestion of montage structure, and 'Night Mail' for the combination of poetry and recorded voices. Allen's own interest in the potential effect of topicality in the theatre had been aroused three years earlier, when he had performed the Leader in the Asylum scene of Group Theatre's production of Auden and Isherwood's 'Dog Beneath the Skin'. During the play's run, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, and Allen, noticing a similarity between the Italian leader's speech of justification and his own in the play, substituted Mussolini's words to electrifying effect.[17]

'Busmen' was created collectively. Drivers and conductors were consulted, coming to the theatre during the rehearsal period, although none took part in the production itself. Crowd scenes were improvised and then scripted, while the scenes within the drivers' and conductors' families, recalling those in 'Waiting for Lefty', were scripted by Herbert Hodge, a taxi-driver whose previous play, 'Where's that Bomb?' had also been performed by Unity, directed by John Allen. Music was composed by Alan Bush, who was associated with Unity throughout its early days.

The play falls mainly into two sections. The first describes conditions on the buses; the second, the strike action taken by the men as a result. The influence of 'Triple-A Plowed Under' is clear from the start, when a Voice of the Living Newspaper announces background statistics of increased industrial production, and we learn through documentary speeches of the formation of the monopolistic LPTB. Scenes by Hodges pinpoint the result: a 'speed-up' and increased stress on the men from driving and dealing with passengers; petty and patronising disciplinary measures imposed by the inspectors; unpleasant repercussions on home life. The men begin to agitate for better conditions and the resultant Inquiry is documented. Further scenes show the build-up to a strike for shorter hours which is precipitated by a management ultimatum. The growth of the strike is chronicled by scenes revolving around journalists, public, and the busmen, and an emotional climax is created by the death of a busman, which, it is strongly suggested, is the result of the stresses of his job. The social climax was provided in performance by up-to-the-minute reports of the strike's progress.

The play, superficially at least, is very like a Federal Theatre Living

Newspaper. A general problem is shown from its wide-scale origins to the consequences for a number of typical individuals. Structurally, it is a montage of episodes interspersed with factual material (rather more informative and less like headlines than in the US) from the Voice of the Living Newspaper. Here's how a driver's feelings are expressed in a mixture of monologue which is close to actuality, and song:

> '...What does the traffic remind me of? A St Vitus case getting real bad. Trying to go to sleep in a Wurlitzer factory. The old woman trying to say it all at once. Bell again...
> (Sings) What is my trouble and strife?
> That blasted bell.
> What regulates my life?
> That blasted bell.
> What is the word between
> Stop, Go, the Red, the Green?
> What runs the whole machine?
> That blasted bell.
> (The bell itself sometimes takes the refrain while the driver grimaces and points back with his thumb.)'

It goes further than Living Newspaper in the US in turning personal feeling into song. The following sequence is held together by a chorus of voices which remind us of Auden's sound-track poetry. Were we to ignore them, we would have a scene which is almost identical in form to the Mrs Sherwood scene in 'Triple-A Plowed Under'. It is a flashback, and since we already know that Nobby dies, this information and the verses alienate and remove any melodramatic sentiment.

> 'Shark There is nothing in our reports to show that the incidence of gastritis among busmen is above the normal of the population at large. It is the opinion of the Board that any tendency showing itself among our staff to exalt their abdominal symptoms to a matter of public importance is a direct result of so-called left wing propaganda.
> 1st Woman* Which is number 13?
> 2nd " You want Nobby the Busman's?
> 1st " That's right.
> 2nd " Right in front of you.
> (The boy goes to the door)
> 1st " I'm afraid it's bad news.
> 2nd " A telegram for Nobby's wife, eh?
> 1st " You know he's in hospital. Poor thing.
> (Boy knocks at door. Voices off recite)
> Voices off London to Nobby was new roads
> Suburbs to shops and on
> Through the long working-class streets
> Into the pleasure town.
> ...
> (Door opened by Nobby's wife)
> Mrs Nobby (agitated) What is it? What is it? (Seeing the telegram)
> Is it Nobby?
> Voices off Every thought you think
> Watched and regulated.

*Presumably she accompanies the boy, unless it was an actress playing him.

The Board feels happier with every
Nobby humiliated.

Boy Do you feel all right, Ma?

Voices off Keep 'em down, keep 'em down in their place,
They're paid too well for their work,
"Send out an army" says Ashfield
Of spies to report in the dark.

Nobby's Wife There isn't any answer. (She closes the door)' [18]

The montage structure is clear. The acted scene comments on Shark's statement and makes its formality seem no more than a disguise for a callous inhumanity. The verses generalise the emotion we feel; we respond not to Nobby's death, but to the potentially lethal nature of an apparently ordinary job. Of the whole play, this sequence and its rhythm of cutting from acted voice to choral verse comes closest to film in its structure and particularly recalls Grierson. We should note, however, the distance it has moved from a straight montage of quotations. The degree of invention is such that it begins to appear like any imaginative piece of writing, but we must then remember the context which is provided for scenes like this.

There is in fact a considerable framework of documentary quotation. We have seen 'Shark's' speech which quotes an LPTB spokesman. As well as the factual 'headings' to each scene from the loudspeaker Voice, quite a number of the scenes are from minuted meetings, and quote appropriate speeches. The quantity and placing of documentation are such as to lead us to accept the authenticity of the whole play, but it must be noted that we never learn in fact whether there was a real Nobby. Where the Mrs Sherwood scene, which it resembles so closely, was a dramatisation of one particular real occurrence, the Mrs Nobby scene must be taken to typify the deaths which are inferred from a doctor's evidence to the Inquiry. Given the framework of documentation, it is a reasonable inference. Sadly, many contemporary British documentary (or self-styled documentary plays) make do with even less quotation, and the factual material is almost entirely absorbed into the dramatisation.

'Busmen' contains a wide political spectrum of characters. Some are highly conscious of the nature of their work and its implications:

> 'Nearly twenty years ago, the Busmen got their eight-hour day - in theory - but what does it mean in practice in these days of carefully scheduled bus running, of actually intensified bus running, of speeded up to hell bus running, cramming into every minute - every hour - more service, more distance? ... - more profits to swing into the fatted guts of greasy bankers, who got loads of their dough sunk deep in LPTB just because - only because - of <u>profits</u>.'

He goes on to draw an agit-prop conclusion:

> '...but <u>we</u> can do a lot... a helluva lot. <u>We</u> can fight, make demands - like the old Unionists did 50 years ago, and if we use our heads as well as our fists <u>we</u> can win.'

He was speaking not only to the characters on stage, but to the audience as a whole. It reminds us of the 'tribune' style of acting, and its debt to 'Waiting for Lefty' is clear. It is difficult in reading 'Busmen' to grasp the effect it must have had, but we must remember that everyone in the audience would have been inconvenienced by the strike, and the play was an attempt to arouse sympathy and solidarity. Apparently, where the remaining script seems to tail off at the end, in the theatre the nightly updating with material which was appearing at the same time in the newspapers seems to have created a tension of immediacy in the auditorium. 'This strike is still being fought', the play must have seemed to say, 'your attitudes and opinions can help sway the result.

'Busmen' had a number of favourable reviews. The News Chronicle thought it had 'a vitality and freshness which made it incredibly vivid and appealing', while Reynolds News found it to be 'a play possessing the essential qualities of outstanding theatre' which 'will live as people's drama'. The Times, perhaps inevitably, found it 'inexcusably dull'. John Collier, writing after the war,[19] doubted if Unity's Living Newspapers were ever as dynamic as 'Power' and 'Spirochaete'. But he stated that

> 'What it did achieve was a humanising of such material in the manner that has since (sic) made British documentary films unique.'

Paul Rotha was more specifically critical, accusing 'Busmen's' production of 'lazy continuity'. More significantly, though,

> 'being unable to portray well-known living persons on the English stage or to use their voices, robs the play of much of its vitality.' [20]

This inability has almost certainly been one reason why overtly political stage documentaries have been slow to emerge in this country. It was not until 1961 that a Prime Minister was satirised in the public theatre, and then not by name, in the revue 'Beyond the Fringe'.[21]

The overall stance of 'Busmen' owes more to the ethos of Grierson's films than to any of its other sources. It is sympathetic to the working-class busmen and uses documentary material to illustrate both the stresses under which they were operating, and the justice of their demands. It suggests that solidarity with the rank-and-file of the TGWU would be helpful, but the manner is restrained and there is none of the stridency of Piscator's political revues, or of street agitational theatre. If it converted members of its audience, it did so by understatement and a faith in the direct and straightforward presentation of ordinary people's lives.

There were a number of successors to 'Busmen', but unlike the Living Newspaper Unit, Unity did not have a single commitment to the form. It took

its place amongst agit-prop pieces, 'straight' drama, and political pantomimes such as the famous 'Babes in the Wood'. The second Living Newspaper was created eight months later, in September 1938, as a response to Hitler's threatened invasion of Czechoslovakia! 'Crisis' was again a collective effort and was reputedly complete in under 48 hours.[22] It illustrated official British inaction during the 1930's in the face of such threats to democracy as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Franco rebellion in Spain. Although there were interventions from the Censor, this did not prevent the impersonation of Chamberlain, Hitler, Mussolini and others, which suggests that, for a club theatre at least, the restriction were not as important as Rotha believed.

It seems likely, although the absence of information on Unity's early years makes it difficult to be sure,[23] that there were no other Living Newspapers, in the sense of documentary plays dealing with urgently topical problems, until 'World on Edge'. This was hurriedly put together under Andre Van Gyseghem's direction and dealt with the twin invasions in 1956, by Britain of Suez, and by Russia of Hungary. It provoked heated arguments, and Page is probably right when he describes it as Unity's 'last big moment.[24]

The invasion of Ethiopia also stimulated Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood's group, now renamed 'Theatre Union', to stage 'Last Edition'. This has been claimed [25] as Britain's first Living Newspaper, but 'Busmen' certainly predates it. Songs to traditional tunes were used to comment on the action, and the documentary material was changed frequently to keep abreast of events. In its staging, it was indebted, as Losey had been, to Okhlopkov, and platforms were arranged on both sides of the audience so that the conflict could be played over their heads as well as to the top stage. The effect seems to have been considerable and with amendments, 'Last Edition' played until the outbreak of war when it was stopped by the police.

The war put an end, temporarily, to both theatres' activities. But one of Unity's influences was in the Army Bureau of Current Affairs. In effect a touring theatre, this was run by Michael MacOwan as a Living Newspaper unit with Van Gyseghem, Jack Lindsay and Ted Willis from Unity, as well as Bridget Boland and Stephen Murray. A total of about sixteen people used film, statistics, songs and scenes to dramatise current affairs or war-related topics such as 'The German People', 'Lease-lend', 'Demobilisation' and the 'Atomic Bomb'. Their purpose was to educate British troops in the reasons for fighting the war, and the performances were intended to stimulate discussion. One outcome at least of the ABCA work was that the W.E.A in 1946 used cooperative methods to create a dramatised documentary outline of Anglo-Soviet relations.[26] ABCA's work was seen by many thousands of troops, and its unacknowledged

influence in acclimatising audiences to the documentary play form must be considerable. [27]

After the war, Unity, at least in London, was politically much more mellow and its documentary plays did not have the immediacy and agit-prop partiality of the pre-war Living Newspapers. 'India Speaks' was about the independence movement in that country, while 'Black Magic' dealt with the nationalisation of coal. It was the offshoot, Glasgow Unity, which was for a few years, the more vital. In particular, there was Robert McLeish's 'Gorbals Story' which bears resemblances to both Elmer Rice's 'Street Scene', and 'One-Third of a Nation'. The play depicts life in the Gorbals slums by showing the stultifying effects of overcrowding and the consequent brutalisation of a number of typical families. One reviewer, having castigated 'the whole bagwash of feeble chronic drunkenness, death in childbirth, violent brawls and rough, tough reckless fornication' suggested the need for a central Communist character who would riddle 'with contempt the feckless folk around him'.[28] Notwithstanding, the play delighted its presumably equally feckless audience. It had a long run, and was toured to London. Although not documentary in any precise sense, the play captured the local dialect and humour and treated the slum problem with sympathy. In its fierce parochialism, it anticipates the regional documentary plays of the late 1960's.

The influence of the Living Newspaper can still be seen in the work at London Unity. Arnold Hinchliffe's 'Strike' (1969) about the 1926 General Strike, managed to revive some of the strength of feeling characterising Unity's original work. The montage of episodes showed both the humour and sense of purpose felt at the time by Trade Unionists. The quality of acting was characteristically rough-hewn, displaying a vigour which arose from a deeply-felt commitment to the issues embodied in the material. This was particularly so in some of the choral speeches which recalled vividly the agit-prop approach of the 1930's.

Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood also revived their company after the war, and 'Theatre Workshop' was founded at Kendal in March 1945. Although no longer a street theatre, it was nevertheless a touring company with the following aims:

> 'If the Theatre is to play an effective part in the life of the community, it must face up to contemporary problems and at the same time revive all that is best in theatrical tradition'. [29]

One result of this Janus-like approach was MacColl's adaptation of 'Lysistrata', 'Operation Olive Branch', which Peter Ustinov, reviewing it for New Theatre, called 'a scathing indictment of modern warmongers'. More in line with their pre-war work was MacColl's 'Uranium 235', in which factual material was

approached through the media of movement and choral speech.

The opening sirens of 'Uranium 235' suggest a wartime setting, and a Scientist puts the view that mankind is confronted by an open choice between progress and destruction. Suddenly there is a blinding flash: the old world has been destroyed by atomic fission. The Man in the Audience is confused, and the Scientist suggests a journey of education, through 'the corridors of the mind'.

Short, conversational scenes bring us from Democritus to Mendeleev, with interruptions from dancers who suggest the indifferent mass of humanity embarked upon a Dance of Death. The second half of the play, set in the 20th Century, becomes more abstract, with the scientists responsible for developing atomic fission, from the Curies to Bohr, performing before a Puppet Master who symbolises the control that Capitalism has over science. A corps de ballet represent such scientific abstractions as Mass, Energy, and the sub-atomic particles. They dance a Ballet of Atomic Fission, and recreate the material in terms of Hollywood gangster movies. An 'atomic nucleus' first repels 'Alfy Particle' and then is fissioned by 'Chadwick's neutron' alias Lola the Smasher. 'Energy' is freed and exults in his power:

> 'Stand back and give me room according to my strength. I'm a rip-tailed snorting child of the elements. I'm half fire, half light, with a punch that can knock holes in the moon'.[30]

It is slightly self-conscious and patronising, but it does demonstrate roughly the process of atomic fission.

Modern history is recapitulated in brief scenes of oppression set in Nazi Germany and Spain, while a ballad describes a young assembly-line worker, reminiscent of characters in plays by the Siftons, who all-uncomprehending, gets married, conscripted and killed. Finally, we are presented with a choice. The Puppet Master turns the 'victims of war' upon the Scientist, whom he represents as the cause of their suffering. With a piece of rhetoric, the Scientist convinces them that it is not he, but mankind, who determines the uses to which science is put. The choice is summed up by 'Energy':

> 'Energy There are two roads. It is for you to choose and for me to follow.
> (The Crowd hesitates)
> Which is it to be?
> All (turning to the audience) Which way are you going?' [31]

'Uranium 235' was toured in the Northwest and later in Scotland and Germany. It was praised by critics for its presentation of the moral dilemma raised by the atomic bomb. It is a surprise that in the published version, MacColl calls it a 'documentary'. Similarly, the New Theatre reviewer described it as 'a treatment in Living Newspaper form...', although later in the same

review modified this to 'a synthesis of documentary technique, music, mime and dance-drama', which is more accurate. Unlike Piscator, the play does not quote documentary sources, nor, like 'Busmen' was it created by people closely involved in the real events portrayed. Agitprop antecedents can be seen in the simplified personification of Capital and Science, and in the final direct appeal to the audience, but the Man in the Audience is an English variety of Arnold J. Buttonkooper and there is even a microphone voice which functions in precisely the same way as the Voice of the Living Newspaper to introduce scenes, announce facts and give historical chronologies. The play's elements of circus and parody remind us of Eisenstein's 'montage of attractions', and there is the influence of British documentary film. The Ballet of Atomic Fission is the stage equivalent of an animated diagram explaining a process, while the play's language, which can move directly from verse monologue to authentic sounding sports commentary, recalls its sound-tracks.[31A]

All in all, 'Uranium 235' is interesting for the extent to which the term 'documentary' had been stretched by 1947. At this point, it could perhaps be defined as the 'poetic interpretation of factual material', although this would ignore any moral or political purpose which, arguably, is the most constant factor. [32]

Following the war, documentary theatre had become largely detached from its left-wing, militant trade unionist roots. In the process, it seems nearly to have died out, for examples of the genre between 1945 and 1964 are few and far between. 'Pick-up Girl' by Elsa Shelley, a 'social document of first-rate importance' about American Juvenile Courts was performed at the New Lindsay Theatre Club in 1946, and transferred to the Prince of Wales. Although not strictly documentary, its courtroom proceedings are closely based on actual observation. It was revived at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, in 1951, which theatre had earlier staged E.G. Cousins' 'Little Holiday'.[33] This is an interesting and moving account of illegal Jewish immigrants to Palestine. It follows a Rumanian family being moved from one squalid transit camp to another until they are packed with thousands of other Jews into an old and foul ship. The story then opens out with intercut scenes of the British administration in Haifa. In the subsequent conflict of interests, we learn that cargoes of immigrants are being used by Zionists to embarrass the British. The strength of the play is that both sides are portrayed sympathetically, so that we understand the causes of the conflict. Further insights are provided by scenes showing the attitudes of a suburban British couple, and a speech by Bevin about the complexity of the issues involved. The play creates believable characters, yet keeps us aware of the wider political scene. It does lack historical perspective, the reasons for the Balfour treaty, for example, and

exaggerates the fairness of the British. What it shows clearly is the way in which individuals can be caught up against their wish in large political struggles. The documentary nature of 'Little Holiday' is indicated in an authorial note:

> 'This play is strictly factual, being based partly on personal observation... and partly on close interrogation of hundreds of British troops, British and Jewish officials and Jewish immigrants...'

The play deserves wider attention, and it is a pity that its topical nature will not allow its revival.

If the 1950's saw a lull in documentary theatre, they did witness the birth of a new form, the Radio Ballad, which was to exert its influence in the theatre. In 1957, Ewan MacColl and Charles Parker were commissioned by the BBC to prepare a documentary radio programme on the events leading to the death of Stockport railway driver John Axon. Portable tape-recorders were just coming into use and when they began to record Axon's widow, workmates and friends, they found speech so vigorous that they decided to use the tapes as the sole basis of the programme.

'Actuality' voices were not new as such in radio, but the technical problems of disc-recording, or studio tape, had up to that time severely limited the method to more formal or highly prearranged sessions. The inconspicuous portable tape-recorder could capture the spontaneity of idiomatic, locally-occurring, context-related speech. The preoccupation with the value of the utterances of ordinary people at home or at work revives the interest of Grierson and the GPO Film Unit before the war. It needs recalling that before the radio ballad, BBC programmes were created almost entirely by 'professionals', and their aloofness from the majority world was typified by the artificial 'high-brow/low-brow' arguments of the time. But just as the documentary film of the 1930's moved into more lyrical modes, the Radio Ballad was conceived almost from the outset in a musical shape.

> 'The experience of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger in singing traditional ballads led them to perceive that the best moments in the actuality speech were astonishingly akin to the language of the ballad proper.'[34]

The challenge was to edit, mix and add musical accompaniment, to create a narrative true to the texture of the original material. The result of this first and successful attempt is, fortunately, available on record, and the overall impression is well-known. A main ballad theme was composed, with music and metre in a traditional form, which recurs periodically through the action. Snatches of actuality comment and conversation create an impression of the railwayman's life, and this juxtaposition to the ballad owes an obvious debt to 'Night Mail', and will recur in 'The Knotty' at Stoke-on-

Trent. As with the film, the exhaust-rhythm of the locomotive is related to the beat of the ballad, and the dual rhythm hastens on to an impressive sequence where Axon's train, its brakes gone, runs to its destruction.

'The Ballad of John Axon' was the first in a long line which would include 'Ballad of the M1' and 'The Fight Game'. In all of them, the Parker/MacColl partnership ensures an underlying similarity of viewpoint that respects everyday utterances and seeks in them an underlying ethos which the Ballad attempts to reveal. This approach, springing from Grierson's earlier example, is a specifically British attitude to documentary, and is in many ways at an opposite extreme to the political documentary in the Piscator tradition which adduces evidence in support of a polemic. What they both share is a fundamental concern with working-class consciousness.

Over a period of years, radio had been fond of the 'documentary feature', by which was understood a dramatisation of some contemporary issue, closely based on factual sources. Television, however, followed film practice and typically, in its documentaries, a number of points of view are obtained in filmed interviews, and these are backed up by film of housing conditions, polluted rivers, pickets in operation, specialist investigations, as appropriate. There seems to be a widespread belief in the 'objectivity' of such a process. Recent work has attacked this belief with an argument that such bias as exists lies not in the chosen content, but in what is left out.[35] A recent television series about how documentaries are made contained a graphic example in which two film crews were sent independently, with different briefings, to the same large housing estate. The results were incredibly different. One showed a cheerful, sunny estate whose inhabitants were happily adapting to their new environment; the other painted a gloomy picture of tower blocks already beginning to decay and filled with social problems. The contrast was made possible solely by an appropriate choice of shots and interviews, none of them invented, all of them 'documents'. We should be put on our guard against any naive belief in 'objectivity': there is no such thing. The most we can expect is that the makers of a documentary should state their position; failing this, we must exert our own scepticism.

On stage, the fact that the bulk of even documentary material has been reconstructed must alert audiences to possibilities of bias. We shall, for instance, have cause to comment on the extreme sensitivity of the authors of 'US' to possible charges of partiality. If television documentaries have escaped until now, the 'documentary reconstruction' has not. Peter Watkins's 'Culloden' [36] was the first, and it dealt with Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat in 1746. It was shot on location in the Highlands, and documentary film techniques were used, such as 'interviews' with soldiers and clansmen, often

ironically cut together, so that 'Culloden' had the appearance of being shot at the time of the original event. It ensured a continuing debate in television and radio, particularly concerning the method's application to modern subjects when an audience might fail to understand the distinction between dramatisation and actuality. At one point, the unwritten law was that the two must not be mixed in the same programme, a nice concern with formalistic matters which may have diverted discussion from the viewpoint which is inherent in any documentary film (or play), however 'objective' the surface appearance. Reconstructions such as Colin Welland's 'Leeds United' and Jim Allen's 'Days of Hope' are now usually broadcast in drama 'slots', so that the broadcasting authorities deflect any charge of political bias.

While Ewan MacColl moved away from theatre into the field of folk music and the Radio Ballad, Joan Littlewood established a permanent home for Theatre Workshop at Stratford East. It opened in 1954, and during the next seven years became well known with productions such as 'The Hostage' and revivals of Elizabethan plays. The repertoire was no longer overtly political, but when the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament began organising its Easter marches in the late 1950's, Theatre Workshop sent a contingent. CND, which by 1960 could pack Trafalgar Square with 100,000,[37] marked the growth of a strongly pacifist popular feeling. In response, Theatre Workshop created 'Oh What a Lovely War'.

The play is like an encyclopaedia of earlier agitprop and documentary work. There are vivid theatrical images summing up a political or international situation. There are revue-style jokes with a political edge; there are documentary quotations, projections and captions. In the examination of real incidents and in the general consideration of the question, Who benefitted from the First World War?, there is the style of the Living Newspaper. Especially in the songs, there is to be heard the voice of the ordinary soldier, the conscripted man in the street.

Above all, Joan Littlewood demonstrated her debt to the agitprop tradition in the mastery of her orchestration of all the play's diverse elements. We can best see this at work in a consideration of the play as a whole.

It begins deceptively, in a music-hall setting. The bad witticisms of the Master of Ceremonies and the sexual innuendos of the first number, lead us to expect a show that is basically comic. The Pierrot costume is an important part of this deception. When the Pierrot-Generals reveal the war plans of the combatant nations, they appear idiotic, fundamentally not serious - nor dangerous. The play's stance is maintained in scenes like the parody of the Lanrezac/Field-Marshal French meeting, but an underlying seriousness of purpose is briefly revealed when a Pierrot-Cavalry 'charge' is mown down by machine-gun fire. For a moment

the authenticity of the sound effect is chilling. Such moments recur, during the officers' letters describing the battlefield, and the line of walking wounded. But these glimpses are carefully sandwiched between music-hall scenes. The drilling of the recruits is extremely funny: it is like the lazzi of the Commedia dell'Arte, a further strong influence on Littlewood. In the braggart Sergeant-Major and the Harlequin recruit there is no immediate menace; only slowly does the meaning of the dummy bayonetting sink in.

Principally, the first Act is the war seen from 'civvy street', and to enlist is tobe 'made a man'. As the song suggests, it is, like going with a prostitute, one kind of initiation into manhood. The validity of such an initiation is not, at this stage, questioned, and for a man to overcome any reluctance that he might feel is its own reward.

'You put me through it and I didn't want to do it
But you went and made me love you so I did.' [38]

The main feeling of the first Act is what the Wipers Gazette called 'that dread disease, Optimism'. Nevertheless it does bring us at the end, to the trenches, but they are at peace. It is the phoney peace of the first Christmas, and there is an underlying tension created by the distant sound of artillery, by our knowledge that the war has three more Christmasses to run, and by the present which, when it is thrown, could be a grenade. The cause of the tension is confirmed by the newspanel, 'Allies lose 850,000 in 1914...', but we can still half-believe the sentimental optimism of 'Goodbyee':

'Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee, there's a silverlining in the sky-ee'.

Because with hindsight we know otherwise, the newspanel's final headline is gently ironic at our expense: 'Welcome 1915... happy year that will bring victory and peace...', and the final sound, an exploding shell, is an apt comment both on the song, and our enjoyment so far.

Beginning to emerge in the first half is a rhythm that underlies the whole play. Through the Pierrots, the parodies and the jokes, we are made to laugh; the next moment the newspanel statistics freeze laughter into horror. After the silent statistics, the music and the Pierrots revive the whole process again. This basic rhythm is repeated but with a progression. The duration of the humour lessens, and the emphasis on the horror and reality of the trenches increases.

Orchestrated in this manner, the second half does two things. Firstly, it robs us of any belief that nations had high-minded motives for waging the war and consequently, when it shows the horror of the trenches, it values the fighting and deaths as futile. The first point is achieved by the Grouse-shoot, which shows the war offering great opportunity for profit:

'Switzerland ...war is a political and economic necessity.'
and 'France War is the life blood of a nation.' [39]

For the Generals, as we see in the Palm Court scene, war is a means of furthering a career. Thus when the Verdun and Somme sequences begin, our sympathies are already fully with the common soldier. Verdun is shown mainly through the experiences of a small group of Irish Pierrot-soldiers. The scene opens in a stylised manner as they 'dance an attack under bombardment as an Irish jig'. There follows a comparatively long naturalistic scene with a deceptive peace which is undermined by a stray sniper's bullet (a 'ping' from the orchestra) and a shouted warning. The soldiers realise their danger and try to retreat: as each exits, a shot is heard. As a kind of coda, the final deaths are again stylised. At a 'ping' the soldiers 'reel off as in a dream':

'Sergeant This is it.
(Ping)
2nd Soldier Is it, Serg?
3rd " It's not so bad.
1st " No.
(Ping)' [40]

The scene makes us feel closely acquainted with death: it sets a context for the Somme sequence. This is a complex montage which alternates between Haig's utterances and a series of short naturalistic episodes which sketch the seriousness and the scale of the battle. All the time, Haig is becoming more impatient and more stubborn that it should be carried on whatever the attrition:

'Haig In the end they will have five thousand men left and we will have ten thousand and we shall have won.' [41]

With the Irish deaths echoing in our mind, the newspanel statistics add up to an utter condemnation of Haig.

'November... Somme battle ends... Total loss 1,332,000 men... Gain nil.'
Finally the class conflict between generals and men is brilliantly summarised in the Church Service, when the hymns are sung with their usual words by the officers, but in simultaneously parodied versions by the men.

In the final scenes of the play, a second function of the costume, latent in the first half, becomes clear. The Pierrot costume is no longer only that of the clown, it is the costume of the Fool. Suddenly we see that in war, all soldiers have been made fools. Despite the individuality of the chirpy comment, the wisecracks, the jossing camaraderie, common to each soldier is a non-heroic death, the result of others pursuing profit. The image is reminiscent of Didi and Gogo, except that the Pierrots inhabit not the No Man's Land of Beckett's consciousness, but a real and physically dangerous one. Unlike Beckett, too, 'Oh What a Lovely War' suggests that what appears to be

a hostile universe, has explicable human causes.

The point is forcefully summed up when the French cavalry prepare for a final charge. The commonalty of human suffering made explicit by the Pierrot costume is suddenly put into a political context by a striking image which combines a parody of the Church's 'flock' with echoes of Orwell's 'Animal Farm':

> 'French Officer Alors. Again for the glory of France, prepare for attack. En avant! ... En avant! ... Are you deaf?
> French Soldier Non, mon Capitaine.
> French Officer What is this? A mutiny?
> French Soldier We think it is stupid to go into the trenches again.
> French Officer You don't think - you obey. If you refuse, you will be shot!
> French Soldier Very well. We follow you - like lambs to the slaughter.
> French Officer Bon. Like lambs to the slaughter... Pour la gloire de la France! En avant!
> French Soldier Baaa.
> French Officer Vive la République.
> (The men begin to advance towards the footlights)
> Soldiers Baaa.
> French Officer En avant!
> Soldiers Baaa - baa.
> French Officer and Soldiers Baaa - baaa - baaa...
> (There is a burst of machine-gun fire. They collapse.) [42]

This image so appropriately combines the previous elements of the play's composition, that we are able to accept in what had appeared at first to be a Pierrot Show, the 'Chanson de Craonne' which follows, and feel fully the reverberation of the final couplet:

> 'Car ils sont tous condamnés,
> Ce sont les sacrificés.'

'Oh What a Lovely War's' debt to earlier sources can be traced in some conscious borrowings, and here Piscator's 'Schweik', as might be expected from the company's earlier history, is important. The Beer-stall scene follows very closely the 'Schweik' original in development and in the fun arising from an apparently naive character chatting to a secret policeman who notes every word. Even the final joke, the arrest of the stallholder for allowing flies to dirty the Kaiser's picture, 'to scheister on the Kaiser', is the same in both. The line of walking wounded is from Piscator, and the raw recruit being drilled in rifle practice was originally Schweik. In the scenes between soldiers in the trenches, there is a general similarity both in attitudes and language. All of these borrowings are, of course, of fictional events, even if the language and the references give them an air of authenticity.

We have already noted the Generals' scene borrowed from Piscator's 'Rasputin'. Also from that play was the use of war photographs to suggest

authenticity, and the use of statistical captions. 'November... Somme battle ends... Total loss 1,332,000... gain nil' is almost identical to the caption used by Piscator in the sentiment it evokes, even if the figures are widely different.[43] The main difference is that where Piscator used film for his captions, Joan Littlewood used a horizontal newspanel like one that was used in 'Hoppla, such is life'. As in'Rasputin', letters are a frequent source of documented dialogue, but the soldiers' songs replace peasant songs.

The agit-prop, street-theatre influences make themselves felt in the dramatisation of complex political situations. 'Oh What a Lovely War' uses striking, often emblematic, simplifications. For example, the state of rival national claims is shown by a circus Parade of Nations, in which 'Great Britain' is carried on the shoulders of 'The Empire' and 'Austria', a lady, orbits in dance around a pompously strutting 'Germany' In a somewhat different style, the apocryphal grouse-shooting scene makes the point that the economics of capitalism transcend national boundaries, even in wartime. The businessmen typify their countries. Typical too are the pairs of English and German housewives who repeat the same rumour of atrocities by the other side. The effect of these scenes is to emphasise a left-wing interpretation of the war. Insofar as these scenes have a factual basis, their documentation has been absorbed into the agitprop form.

We have already seen the importance of the Pierrot costume. To it could be added tokens, usually hats or helmets,[44] to differentiate what are roles rather than characters. At this level, the approach to costuming shows the strong influence of the Russian Blue Blouses and has a similar function in emphasising how a common humanity adapts to circumstance. But the particular choice of the Pierrot rather than the worker's 'uniform' is Joan Littlewood's, and so is the use she makes of it as an emblem of folly.

Along with the costume, the company used a generally 'objective' style of acting which is more concerned with showing attitudes than psychological motivation and 'roundness'. However, rather than the stridency of a revolutionary, 'tribunal' style, there was one more in keeping with the political resignation of British workers and Tommies, one that was self-parodying and wryly ironic. Indeed, rather than a single style, it was a range, stopping well short of naturalistic involvement. Perhaps the nearest it went in this direction was the Christmas scene at the end of Act 1. At different extremes were the music-hall jokes, the burlesque of the Beer-stall and French scenes, the emblematic Parade of Nations, and the balletic charges of the French 'cavalry'. Yet coexistent with these styles were the letters from the officers on the battlefield spoken for their full appeal to the emotions, and Haig's despatches and diary spoken so as to comment upon the content. If one can

in fact speak of an overall style, it is the result of a montage of the different styles.

For all 'Oh What a Lovely War' owes to its theatrical precedents, it transcends them in the mastery with which their influences are combined. As an example, let us look at the juxtaposition of slide-projections and songs. The trench-songs used in the play were all parodies of existing, often commercial tunes. In the parodies can be heard the weary, resigned and lonely voice of the ordinary soldier. In the accompanying slide-projections we see documentation of the conditions affecting him.

'Hush, here comes a whizzbang,	(Night photograph of flares, and various Very lights)
Hush, here comes a whizzbang,	(Photograph of a cloud formation)
Now, you soldier men, get down those stairs,	(Three Tommies walking across duck-boards in a muddy field)
Down in your dugouts and say your prayers,	(Dead Germans lying in a shallow trench in a peaceful-looking country field)
Hush, here comes a whizzbang,	(A young French soldier, obviously on burial duty, laden with wooden crosses)
And it's making... ...straight for you,	(Dead French Poilus; one of them has a smile on his face)
And you'll see all the wonders... ...of no-man's-land,	(A field with nothing but white wooden crosses as far as one can see)
If a whizzbang hits you.[45]	

At first the slides convey the feeling of the trenches but then they quickly move to an ironic counterpoint of the line, and an extension into the reality which is only hinted at by the song. It is as though the song is a half-deliberate attempt to censor the information of the eyes: the fragmentation of the human body in war is made less horrific by the ironic humour of 'see all the wonders'. The reality embodied in the projections suddenly makes us aware of what the song is doing.. It is enabling the soldiers to substitute for their experiences a vision of the war in which, like a comic strip or a Tom and Jerry cartoon, the maltreatment of the body is so appalling that it cannot be true. Or if true, it is meaningless. By replacing the soldiers' self-censored vision with the photographic reality, 'Oh What a Lovely War' comments on the process they have undergone.

The combination of song with slides is repeated through the play at intervals, and undergoes a slow transformation. Early on, the documentation runs parallel, and confirms the reality on which the song is based. This is true of 'I'll make a man of you' and, in a humorous sense, of 'Hitchy-koo', where the composite effect is a kind of picture of Edwardian England as yet unaffected by war. 'Gassed last night' has a humour that makes it possible to come to terms with inadequate protection against gas, bombs and shells, and like 'Whizzbang' substitutes for the real horrors. When the penultimate slide sequence, 'I want to go home' is reached, the closeness and reality of

death have been accepted with resignation, and the process of self-censorship is complete:

> 'And when they ask us, how dangerous it was,
> Oh we'll never tell them, no, we'll never tell them...'

To make any definitive statement about 'Oh What a Lovely War' is not easy: it is too diverse a mixture. In underlying attitude, it is most like the work of Piscator in 'Despite All' and 'Rasputin'. Indeed, the production in 1963 was virtually equivalent to publishing in English 'Das Politische Theater', or at least many of its chapters, so well had Theatre Workshop embodied Piscator's views in their work. Insofar as 'Oh What a Lovely War' is an example of documentary theatre, it is of the kind defined by Piscator where facts are documented in support of the play's platform. Like Piscator's work, it carefully orchestrates the presentation of facts and their human consequences in order to create an emotional involvement in its audience. This involvement is with the overall argument rather than with the sufferings of any individual character. By carefully juxtaposing many contrasting statements the play leads us to share precisely expressed feelings about a confusingly large-scale event.

'Oh What a Lovely War' transferred to the West End where it ran for a year.[46] The transfer marked the acceptability to British theatregoers of a play with a mildly radical stance, and one which was cast in a form that to many critics appeared theatrically revolutionary. Theatres outside London were cautious about the play, although as early as the spring of 1965 it was performed at the Belgrade in Coventry, using the original properties, costumes, newspanel and projections. Over the next five years it was performed steadily up and down the country. If its immediate influence on audiences was delayed, nevertheless many directors learnt about 'Oh What a Lovely War' and its methods, and applied them to their own work. It was a seminal production in reviving interest in agitprop and living newspaper.

CHAPTER 5

Documentary drama in London

To look at documentary drama in London is almost to ask, 'Is there any such thing?' Over a period of fiteen years, an immense variety of plays could be seen. There were trials dramatised from transcripts, and there were dramatised biographies based more or less on fact. But if we were looking for a play which we could hold up and say, 'This is a documentary', then it would be fortunate indeed that Hampstead Theatre Club staged 'In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer'. This is virtually the only example which is, in the main, documentary quotation, and which yet manages to be more than a collage of readings. But as we said at the outset, to search for such a play is pointless. In London, as elsewhere, there has never been any consensus on what constitutes a dooumentary play. Peter Cheeseman's insistence on the authentication of every word, which we shall find at Stoke-on-Trent, went unheeded. Nor, unsurprisingly, was there a desire to appeal to local patriotism. The way, then, to approach documentary drama in London is from the historical perspective we have already established and to look at the kind of documentation in a number of plays, and the purpose to which it is put. Indeed, such is their range, that to look at London's plays in this way is virtually to define documentary drama.

In the years immediately preceding 'Oh What a Lovely War', there were glimmerings of what was to come. Early in 1960[1], at the Pembroke arena theatre he had established in Croydon, Clement Scott Gilbert staged the American 'Inherit the Wind' by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, which was based on the historical struggle to allow Darwin's evolutionary theories to be taught in Southern U.S. schools. The production transferred to the West End for a short run at the St. Martin's Theatre. A year later, the Pembroke Theatre again staged a factually based play, this time 'The Pinedus Affair' adapted by Robert Rietty from an Italian play by Paolo Levi.[2] Based on an actual miscarriage of justice, the play shows how the arrest of a music critic on a trivial parking charge becomes the catalyst of a political duel between the Chief Inspector of Police and the editor of the local newspaper. Like the previous play, it is a rapid succession of short, pointed, naturalistic scenes, but no documentation is quoted as such.

On May 4th, 1961, 'Belle or the Ballad of Dr Crippen' opened in London. It was adapted by Wolf Mankowitz from Beverley Cross's play about the celebrated killer and, a portent of 'Oh What a Lovely War', it told his story in terms of music-hall. The Daily Telegraph found the scene in which Crippen poisons Belle 'very funny', but audiences, apparently, did not share the critic's sense of humour, and the musical had a short run only. 'Oh What a Lovely War's' achievement was to make ironic humour out of mass death, so that its audiences could be sure they were not laughing at the horror itself.

A month later, Bernard Miles directed Saul Levitt's 'The Andersonville Trial' at the Mermaid. It was a military courtroom drama based on the first recorded war crimes trial after the American Civil War, in which a camp commandant, Henry Wirz, was charged with causing the deaths of 14,000 prisoners. The play showed the prosecutor pressing for a verdict which would be politically expedient, and witnesses who were only too happy to testify against the defendant. The result was to swing the audience's sympathies in favour of Wirz, whose defence was to become classic, that he was only carrying out orders. Saul Levitt had been a journalist with the liberation forces at Buchenwald, and one reviewer at least[3] felt the 'shadow' of the concentration camps hanging over the play, and balancing the sympathy for Wirz. The question raised was the highly contemporary one of how much an individual is to blame for carrying out inhuman orders. It was to be another four years before Peter Weiss was to tackle the question in relation to the Second World War camps and it would also be central to a number of other London documentary plays. Indeed it is the strength of documentary drama that it poses such questions in terms of current situations rather than dealing with them at one remove by means of a historical parallel or an allegory.

In the summer of 1962, Lionel Bart's 'Blitz' was to be seen in Sean Kenny's settings. They provided, in Piscator's term, 'scenic documentation', and even if the show's material was sentimental, great trouble was taken in the settings to recreate the naturalistic detail of London's streets under the blitz. Curiously, settings of authentic appearance have played little part in the documentary drama of the Sixties. Partly it has been a matter of cost, but there are stylistic reasons which we must take up later.

In September of the same year, Unity Theatre staged Adamov's 'Spring '71' about the Paris Commune. The play is interesting for marking Adamov's conversion from Absurd to politically committed drama. The play, like those at the Pembroke, is a succession of long and sometimes tedious naturalistic scenes about events in the streets of Paris and amongst the instigators of the commune. They are punctuated by interludes in the style of Grand Guignol which burlesque the political manœuvrings of the time. The audience is encouraged to laugh in outrage at Bismarck, Thiers and others, as in agit-prop theatre, while by contrast their sympathies and support are aroused for the communards. Underlying the play is the wider Marxist question, 'Who are the real makers of history?'. The play is interesting both for its ability to ask such a question, and to handle local event as well as large-scale politics, and it is to be regretted that the production was unable to meet these demands.[4] Ironically, 'Spring '71' was to mark Unity's departure for

a while from overtly political drama. At a time when British drama as a whole was moving, if somewhat uneasily, into this area, Raymond Cross, Unity's administrator, could say,

> 'Many of our early plays were mere political statements...The primary interest here now is theatre and the policy is to do good interesting plays...' [5]

The results were productions such as 'Mother Courage' and a revival of Ted Willis's 'God Bless the Guvnor', first performed at Unity in 1945. It was not until the end of the 1960's that Unity was to revive, too late in the day, its documentary and agit-prop tradition.

Running concurrently in London with 'Oh What a Lovely War' was Rolf Hochhuth's 'The Representative', so much a subject of heated argument, that a book of the exchanges was published.[6] It is also debatable whether it should be included here, but the consideration itself throws light not only on the play but on the nature of documentary. The play was first staged in West Berlin in February 1963, a month before 'Oh What a Lovely War', and Erwin Piscator, now working again in Germany after his long exile, was the director. The uncut script would run for about six hours, and this was halved for Clifford Williams's production at the Aldwych which opened on September 25th, and ran in repertoire. The production added documentary film inserts, uncalled for in the script, which at first sight heighten its claim to be included here.

Briefly, the play deals with the attempts of a fictitious young Jesuit, Riccardo Fontana, to force the Pope openly to condemn the mass deportation and killing of Jews in the Nazi-occupied territories. A first act in Berlin introduces the scale of the drama, from the individual act of sheltering a Jew to the organisational network under Eichmann. In the second act, Riccardo tries to influence the Cardinal, one of the Pope's right-hand advisers, and in doing so, speaks the indictment which is central to the play

> 'The victims... do you really believe he
> sees them?
> ....
> A Representative of God who has
> such things before his eyes and still maintains
> for reason of state a silence,
> ...
> such a Pope is a criminal.' [7]

It is in this scene we begin to realise the political nature of the Vatican organisation, and are made aware that one of the dilemmas is between individual conscience and matters of political expediency. Act Three operates on the scale of individual human beings. A family is taken from the home by

Gestapo agents and in contrast we see the efforts of a single monastery to shelter a number of Jews. Act Four is the climax of the play's argument when Fontana confronts the Pope in person, and Act Five is set in Auschwitz itself.

The play is a valiant attempt to stage an event of the most horrifying proportions. At worst, the writing varies between the tenuous and the turgid, and makes its effect by the piling of detail upon detail. To cut for performance, therefore, is unsatisfactory, for the actions, when brought closer and clarified, have an unfortunate melodramatic quality, and characters re-appear with the improbability of a Russian novel. To operate on such a scale, Hochhuth could have learnt from Brecht. In particular, the scenes on a personal scale need a far defter touch, and hardly bear comparison with their earlier counterparts in 'Fears and Miseries of the Third Reich'.[8]

Yet the flaws do not, in the end, diminish our admiration for the whole play, and this is because Hochhuth tackles his questions squarely, and the arguments are embodied in a wise choice of characters. In a sense, they are all 'representatives' - each of a particular point of view in an overall design which has allegorical quality, and deliberate, if ironic, echoes of 'Everyman'. In a sense, Everyman is split between Riccardo and Gerstein, a turncoat SS officer. The former exists within the Vatican hierarchy and is 'tempted' by Abbot , Cardinal and Pope, embodying respectively, the possibility of individual acts of mercy, the need for political expediency, and the necessity of acting expediently for an ultimately greater good. Gerstein tries to work from within the Gestapo hierarchy, doing what he can to mitigate the atrocities. It is interesting that in Hochhuth's world of 1942, there can be no sihgle Everyman. We are all already part-committed by the society which has reared us. Before we are mature enough to make wise moral choices, we have already become part of an organisation, we have abdicatēd from a degree of responsibility and can only regain it through protest. Modern Everyman is a renegade.

The play has an emblematic power which reaches its height in the fictitious confrontation between Riccardo and the Pope. The scene is a tour de force, with the young Fontana bearing his principles like a torch, and the Pope as a tired politician anxious to preserve his power base at almost any moral price. Finally, he appears to succumb to Riccardo's pressure and begins to dictate a proclamation. In the play's most Brechtian passage, we see the Pope, taking advice on wording from all sides, eventually choose the statements that are most general, most platitudinous. Hochhuth's point is obvious.

It is at this point that we most clearly see the playwright's methods

at work. The pronouncement was in fact published in the Osservatore Romano for October 25th, 1943 [9], and Hochhuth's translation is not only accurate, but he has neither added nor removed any lines. What he has done is to imagine <u>how</u> the document came to be dictated, and in doing this, by adding hesitation and different possibilities which are rejected, Hochhuth appears to show the Pope choosing to be mealy-mouthed and spineless. But of course this is his gloss. The only historical document actually quoted is not allowed to stand by itself, but must be interpreted for the audience as Hochhuth wishes. It is a very different process from a documentary play which quotes a whole document, rendering it faithfully, and then comments on it by some juxtaposed speech or action. Hochhuth is imputing motive rather than investigating social consequences.

It was this scene above all which drew the critics' attack:

> 'Hochhuth... patently stacks the cards against Pope Pius XII...
> ...in the midst of such a rigged argument, an intensely dramatic situation becomes tediously simple...' [10]

> '...the enormous blunder of ascribing to the Pope's personality and human deficiencies more of the responsibility for the Church's failure to speak than rests upon the institutional nature of the church itself...' [11]

The latter point impinges directly on our concern with documentary drama. So far, little of what we've discussed could not have been dramatised in an orthodox, Ibsenite drama. Riccardo is not unlike Gregers Werle. But the Representative' is more, because of its multitude of precise references to external, real events.[12] It is these which enabled one reviewer to call the play 'a factual document'[13], and there is little doubt that the play is successful in authenticating its claim to be dealing with the <u>events</u> of 1944. It is in the relation of its characters, especially the Pope, to these events that the play falls short. Furthermore, because we believe the situation, we believe in the characters' authenticity. It becomes extremely difficult to remember that Riccardo is a fiction, and that the confrontation never took place, so that the Pope might have been quite a different person from that which emerges in this characterisation. In the final analysis, we can see that Hochhuth's mass of documentary detail is accumulated for one purpose only, as a device to encourage our suspension of disbelief.

This is one reason why the newsreel of concentration camp atrocities appeared superfluous. Partly, as Marowitz noted, [14] they are so well-known that ' a private showing is constantly being run in our minds', but moreover, they stand in the way of Hochhuth's moral debate. He is not concerned to create juxtapositions which hold meaning, but rather, having gained our acceptance of the authenticity of the situation, wishes to pursue the

expression of his own opinion. In particular, he expects us to follow him in accepting his characterisation of the Pope.

But his methods backfire. He is too anxious to prove his point, and he loses what might have been considerable sympathy; the issues involved are too serious for the heart of his thesis to be conjectural. What we end up with is an (almost) brilliant piece of debating. Hochhuth holds the floor, and sways us, but afterwards we realise his only proof is that of inference. There is little doubt that the Pope had a case to answer, but it is not the playwright's.

Hochhuth repeated his methods in his second play to be staged in London, in January 1969, 'Soldiers'. It had taken several months to find a theatre for this play, because it was potentially libellous, imputing the death of the wartime Polish prime minister, General Sikorski, to Churchill. The title originally announced, 'The Employer', suggests the connection the play makes between Churchill and the assassins. Once again, there is a meticulous sketching of backgroundfactual detail, such as the reports on the chase of the Scharnhorst by the Duke of York, which punctuate the third act, and serve as aconstant reminder of the 'real' events beyond. But again, the stage itself is held by fictional conversations between Churchill and three main characters, an act for each, Sikorski who wants certain guarantees for Poland, Lord Cherwell, Churchill's adviser, and Archbishop Bell who protests against the mass bombings of German cities. The morality Hochhuth is exploring is that of expedient killing, and he contrasts, to give point to his questions, the death of the individual Sikorski for very precise political reasons with the deaths of thousands of ordinary civilians as part of a general policy of attrition. As might be expected, in this country at least, the controversy over Churchill's involvement far outweighed any discussion of the morality of saturation bombing, although this might have been made relevant by equating it with the effects of the H-bomb, something the Epilogue, cut in production, does.

Again, Hochhuth adds only an opinion to the debate, for his fictional method contains no internal proof except, again, that of inference. It is not sufficient for him to retreat into an attack on the deficiencies of available documentation:

> '...how colossal is the professional researcher's optimistic faith in documents even...after the defeats they have had to accept, since 1933, in investigating the Reichstag fire. Perhaps the available, but uncommunicative, television films of the assassination of President Kennedy, and indeed of the man who may possibly have shot at him, might - temporarily - bring about a victory of scepticism over a slavish belief in "sources"...' [15]

Such a stance raises all sorts of questions. The main one, of course, is whether, in a play purporting to deal with real events, a fiction, however well-intentioned, is preferable to a gap. One method, although it would probably be too coolly detached to appeal to Hochhuth, is to dramatise, and label as such, alternative hypotheses. Kaj Himmelstrup does this for the assassinations Hochhuth speaks of, in 'Welcome to Dallas, Mr Kennedy',[16] and we shall come across another example later, in 'George Davis is innocent, OK' Such a method protects a playwright from charges of bias, and at the same time prevents him from condescending to an audience by presenting as 'inside information' what is in fact invention. Furthermore, it invites an audience to participate in the process of discovering the truth.

Hochhuth's two examples help us to pinpoint a distinction in the use of documentation. On the one hand there is the playwright who wishes to present an opinion about a real event and for whom documentation simply sets the scene. On the other, there is the play which, while setting out to interpret an event, offers as it stands, the evidence on which it is built.

On March 19th, 1964, Michael Codron brought 'Hang Down Your Head and Die' from Oxford to the Comedy Theatre. Charles Marowitz wrote:

> '"The Representative" was atrociously acted by professionals and "Hang Down Your Head and Die" was winningly acted by amateurs... This university production stands as an exemplar of what the theatre ought to be about.' [17]

It had been created by the Oxford Experimental Theatre Company from a script by David Wright, and its first performance had been at the Oxford Playhouse on February 11th. It was an immediate and obvious successor to 'Oh What a Lovely War', being a polemic against capital punishment. The similarity extended to the staging, but where the former production had been set in a Pierrot Show, this one used the Circus. It was a useful choice, suggesting immediately a link-man in the Ringmaster, with the White-faced Clown as the generic fool, the hangman's victim.

The first half of the play is a montage history of capital punishment, beginning with the Royal Commission of 1949-53, In its form, there were many echoes of 'Oh What a Lovely War'. For example, the spoken Home Office instructions on hanging were followed immediately by a beauty contest where four actresses emblemised the different methods of execution open to the Commission to choose from. Songs were written specially and sung in music-hall style with a leg-kicking chorus. They were part of the montage of juxtapositions, so that the song 'An Innocent Man is Never Hanged' was followed by a documentary speech quoted from an expert who argued that the odd hanging of an innocent should not outweigh the punishment's deterrent value. These

and many other impressions accumulated to show hanging as brutal, inhuman, and above all, inefficacious. The second half was held together by the story of one victim, personified by the Clown, from sentencing to execution. An ironically happy climax was reached with the joyful 'One Hundred and Twelve, That's the Magic Number', a song created from the formula for calculating the necessary length of drop to ensure a quick death for the hanged man. Actuality recordings, which had been used throughout, brought the sequence to a level of seriousness, so that the final execution was an unpleasant and largely obscene climax to the play.

This use of actuality recordings, of man-in-the-street opinion, of hangmen and warders talking, marked the first entry of Radio Ballad technique into the theatre. It was the major difference from 'Oh What a Lovely War' and replaced the song and slide sequences which stood for the common man's experiences in the earlier play. 'Hang Down Your Head and Die' also relied much less on overt parody by putting the comment into the songs, and its dramatic scenes were documented to a greater extent. Its great similarity to 'Oh What a Lovely War' was in making a visual contrast between an actor's circus role and his assumed character. At one point, for example, clowns represented priests as they rocked up and down on a seesaw putting arguments for and against hanging. David Wright successfully assimilated the lessons of Joan Littlewood's example, and added from other influences, notably the Radio Ballad, to create a potent piece of theatre. It would have its effect on his later plays, as we shall see, but in London there was no rush to emulate either 'Hang Down Your Head and Die' or 'Oh What a Lovely War'.

It was to be the autumn of 1966 before documentary drama became reasonably established in London. Meanwhile, there was 'In White America' by Martin Duberman which opened at the New Arts Theatre on November 16th, 1964.[18] Directed by Peter Coe, it had been written and performed in the U.S. a year earlier, and was an earnest collection of mainly documentary material such as newspaper accounts, congressional reports and so on, chronicling the oppression of the American Negro. The play suffers from the laborious amassing of evidence and desperately needs the inventive juxtapositions of a Littlewood or a David Wright. Some attempt was made with the use of slide projections, and the design appears to have been influenced by the Federal Theatre's Living Newspapers.[19] For Marowitz, who reviewed it,

> 'The slavery accounts drive home the obscene principle of people as possessions, but one doesn't get anything like the feeling of hemmed-in aggression and futile quest that fairly smoulders on any page of "The Fire Next Time"... One might suppose that the least this show had was a "viewpoint" - but one can't even credit it with that.' [20]

By comparison with the similar 'Martin Luther King' at Greenwich, it is possible to see that the play suffers because it is a chronicle of hopelessness. Even attempts at winning civil rights appear in it as little more than a ray of hope. It is trapped in its time, where 'Martin Luther King', five years later, is fortunate in being able to conclude with the buoyant sense of Negro awakening signalled by the Freedom Marches and the Black Power Movement. Unfortunately, a documentary play relies on events to provide it with a shape for its dramatic structure, and the dilemma of Dubermann was similar to that of the creators of American agitprop labour plays. They could call for a strike, but they could not meaningfully celebrate an imminent revolution. 'In White America' was written three or four years too soon.

The years after 'Oh What a Lovely War' saw a number of 'literary montages', but unlike the Russian precedent, their purpose was mainly to amuse. The inspiration for them may have come, in part, from 'The Hollow Crown', John Barton's Shakespeare compilation.[21] In February 1964, there was 'The Brontës' at the New Arts, a solo performance by Margaret Webster reading from the family's letters, notebooks and poetry, of which one reviewer said,

> '...it has no need of a stage... the proper place... is television in quarter-hour instalments.' [22]

In Tom Rothfield's 'The Foot on the Stairs', again at the New Arts,[23] there was the correspondence between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. The production made its points with virtually no theatrical business and relied on editing for effect. At the Vaudeville on May 6th. 1965, there was 'Portrait of a Queen' in which William Francis compiled what Harold Hobson saw as a 'skillful mosaic'. It creates a picture of Queen Victoria seen mainly through her letters and diaries. Reading confirms Frank Cox's view:

> 'As a selection, the script struck me as largely dishonest, dipping into the letters and diaries of Victoria to pull out only the most banal of her observations and the most sentimental...' [24]

Typical of the plums is

> 'War is, I fear, <u>quite</u> inevitable. Our beautiful Guards will sail tomorrow.' [25]

On the face of it, this play is - obviously - a 'documentary'. Yet it belongs nowhere in the line of descent we have traced from agitprop theatre. 'Portrait of a Queen' is a dramatised biography of the worst kind, using documentary material only as part of a growing fashion, to arouse a coy sentimentality and to reassure us of the veracity of its boudoir revelations. Much more honest in this connection are the compilation biographies of Shaw

and of Aubrey which appeared a year or so later.[26] Both plays pretend to be no more than enjoyable glimpses into the minds of their subjects, and their justifiably narrow scope excludes them here.

The Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych began a flirtation with documentary drama in 1965 and in October announced 'Strike!' by Clive Barker and David Wright, author of 'Hang Down Your Head and Die'. It was to trace in song and dance the aftermath of the First World War from the signing of the Armistice to the General Strike of 1926. The production, if it ever went into rehearsal, never appeared although a play of similar title and description was billed for an experimental season by the RSC at the Roundhouse in the Autumn of 1970. It never surfaced either.

What did take place at the Aldwych on October 19th, 1965, was a late-night reading of Peter Weiss's 'The Investigation'. It took place simultaneously with first night performances in thirteen theatres in Germany. In a review of continental documentary drama, the play, and Weiss's work generally, would bulk large, but the ascetic and uncompromising style of his writing has made little impression on British theatre and we have no comparable playwrights.

'The Investigation' is based on records of the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt, and Weiss's effort has been to edit and recast the language in a poetic form which nevertheless is still very close to the original. Whole sentences remain intact, but Weiss's line structure emphasises words such as 'naturally' or phrases like 'it was normal' for ironic effect.[27] He substitutes more harmoniously sounding words and smoothes out awkward phrasing to create an 'Oratorio in Eleven Cantos'. In this way, the form recalls Dante's 'Inferno' and each Canto marks a further descent into bestiality, finally reaching Canto 11, 'The Fire-Ovens'. The contrast between the measured clarity of the prose and the horror of the descriptions themselves becomes more and more marked. It arouses a Brechtian detachment. It has been claimed [28] that Weiss's descriptions of, for example, the use of Phenol injections or the gas chambers, are prurient, but the language is as closely authenticated as elsewhere: we sense this in reading, and it can be confirmed by comparison with the trial records.[29] Furthermore, the harmony of of the form contains the bestiality: it allows us to peer closely but prevents us from falling into its trap.

Unlike 'The Representative' with which it is often paired, Weiss's play documents the very heart of its argument: it does in fact dramatise by the reflection in the testimonies, what Hochhuth in his stage directions states can 'by no power of invention' be brought 'before our eyes'.[30] In fact, Hochhuth attempts it, or expects his designer to, while in Weiss's play we are

confronted only with a group of speakers. 'No attempt should be made to reconstruct the courtroom'[31] What we 'see' is the picture of Auschwitz mentally conjured up by the minute detail of the witnesses' descriptions. We people Auschwitz in our minds just as we do when watching Resnais's slow tracking shots over the now silent museum in 'Nuit et Brouillard' (1955). But Weiss's purpose is not solely to use documentation to recreate an image of the event: he arranges his material - with great skill - to implicate his audience in the events which at the same time they are forced to censure. We cannot escape, as we can in watching 'The Representative' by denying the authenticity of the central confrontation.

It is more than a pity that Weiss's work is too searching for British audiences. Indeed, its director, Peter Brook, found 'The Investigation' boring.[32] He failed to perceive how Weiss had perfected a dramatic structure towards which his own 'US' only began to grope. This play, based on the US's involvement in Vietnam and the attitudes of 'us' towards it, aroused a great deal of critical attention reminiscent of the storm over 'The Representative'. This, coupled with the manner in which it was created and the issues which it raised, make it worth an extended consideration here.

The published version of 'US'[33] not only contains the final script, but notes on how each section was derived from source material; retrospective accounts of rehearsal processes by Albert Hunt and Michael Kustow, two of the production team; an introduction by Peter Brook, and a selection of reviews and comments. The collection thus provides us with an important document in the evaluation of the play.

In his introduction, Peter Brook states, somewhat warily, that '"US" made no claims. It was work in progress'. We shall see how the work seems to have gone round in circles with a guarded respect for establishment politics chasing the tail of a half-hearted commitment. Most revealing is Brook's remark that 'US' was 'turned up by a series of attempts to probe a certain problem... - how can current events enter the theatre?' Brook, then, at least in retrospect seems to suggest that 'US' was exploring, not so much the war in Vietnam as a problem in communication. It was not concerned in the first place with a war-suffering people, or with the rights and wrongs of such a war, but with a cerebral attempt to grapple with dramaturgy. Brook sums up, 'We were not interested in Theatre of Fact'. Now it is difficult to reconcile this position with Brook's starting point expressed at a preliminary meeting with associate directors Geoffrey Reeves and Albert Hunt, and recorded by the latter. He outlined the difficulty of English people in relating to the war in Vietnam and expressing a response. The problem was summed up for Brook in a question from, of all places, the

Bhagavad Gita, 'Shall I fight?' The distance between his two viewpoints of 'US' is considerable. The reason is not hard to find. For a top director of the RSC, the play's content makes it too much of a political hot potato. We shall come across some of the pressures which operated on Brook. That the experience must have been a painful one is suggested by the absence of all but one small reference to 'US' in his book, 'The Empty Space', published less than two years later.

From the outset, 'US' was planned as a collaborative effort. Adrian Mitchell was invited to write the songs, as he had done for the earlier 'Marat/Sade'. It was the intention that a playwright should be closely involved: the result was not to be a scripted improvisation. Charles Wood had been hoped for, but in the event was replaced by Dennis Cannan, who only arrived after Act One had taken shape. The considerable difference in style between the two halves[34] is one result of this changeover. The group had a number of desultory meetings and had prepared only a small quantity of source material before they 'met the actors' in July. Hunt describes how the meeting must have seemed threatening, and indeed one senses that throughout the production there were two areas of exploration and interest. There were the researchers throwing up quantities of contradictory documents, and there were the actors, flummoxed and frustrated by being asked to respond to a situation they had been told was almost beyond comprehension. We might contrast this approach with that at Stoke, where, in the small company, if there is a division of labour, all the actors are involved in the process of research, and some of them are on the 'steering committee'. In the RSC, the absolute distinction between performers and researchers could be seen as self-defeating: the script would be whatever the production team made it, and any emotional or intellectual confusion amongst the acting company become more grist to the mill. The contradictions inherent in 'US' are as much a result of the group's dynamics as of the welter of documentation. A coherent group along Stoke lines could probably have created a coherent statement.[35]

The rehearsal process appears to have compounded the confusion. As described by Hunt, the actors were asked to explore all kinds of formal exercises. One such was to play out situations while in character as an American filmstar of legendary status. When they were asked to improvise Vietnamese under a bombing attack, Brook was apparently surprised at the cliché response, although the amount of detailed information fed in about peasant life appears to have been minimal. Later improvisations were based on primary source material and unsurprisingly, the results then seem to have been more impressive. Finally, as part of the discovery of a 'new language of acting', the company spent ten days working under Grotowski, who had been invited to

demonstrate his approach based on physical and vocal exercises practised with 'monastic dedication'. After this melting-pot, the last eight of the fourteen rehearsal weeks were devoted to assembling and shaping the dramatic material so far obtained, focussed on the act of burning which Brook had seized as a central image. It could relate both to the napalmed Vietnamese or to those who poured petrol over themselves and ignited it in protest at the war. Perhaps unintentionally the play dealt only with the latter, and the second half became an exploration of attitudes which could lead a person to self-immolation.

As evolved, the first half of 'US' was a Living Newspaper on the American war in Vietnam. It began with emblematic tableaux representing stages in Vietnamese history, and, arriving at the present day, Vietnam was personified by an actor, and the partitioning into Communist North and American-supported South done with paint on his body. Then a whole array of attitudes to the war were presented, and left to speak for themselves. In one of the most telling sequences, GI's are shown in action, torturing and 'zapping the Cong', and this is followed by expressions of anguish from a number of reporters. The climax of this half is the Quaker, Norman Morrison's self-immolation on the steps of the Pentagon. It was dramatised simply by the actor miming, while surrounded by a semicircle of actors who, forming a Quaker meeting, reflected upon the action. The intensely personal cuts suddenly to the political arena with a series of statistics and diplomatic statements depicting the escalation of fighting and the commencement of the American bombing of the North. To underscore the point, a huge doll, suspended in the auditorium over the forestage, descends. It is a grotesque and obscene soldier-corpse, and it fills the stage. Finally, there are songs sung in parallel, like the twin renditions of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' in 'Oh What a Lovely War', which apparently point to the contradictory nature of American involvement:

'We maim by night' - 'We heal by day'

But it simply becomes a 'cacophony'[36] of ambiguous lines:

'We know what we're doing... We've done it before'

contrasted with

'It was the landlord leech./ It was bulging with blood and its jaws were made of steel,'

so that the final statement is of confusion. On reflection, though, the <u>action</u> of the first half points to an implicit condemnation of US involvement.

A montage such as this first half needs its moments of summary. 'Oh What a Lovely War' had them, for example in the image of the French soldiers turning to sheep, and in 'Onward Christian Soldiers' which embodied all the scenes dealing with the class nature of the war. 'US' appears to have such moments, as in the 'Zapping the Cong' song, or 'Tell Me Lies about Vietnam', or in the speech of the artificial limb-maker appalled by the injuries to civilians, or in the Quaker service. But they are not arranged in any sequence or counterpoint which might reveal an underlying unity. If anything, each event is made to eclipse the previous in a different way. The politics of escalation swamp the Quaker ceremony; cacophonic song drowns the limb-maker's speech. The impression grows that the arrangement of the montage destroys the statement that is implicit in the choice of material. It suggests that the shaper of the material, presumably Brook, was in opposition to the orginators of the material, Reeves, Hunt and Mitchell. We can test this assertion in relation to two parts of the first half.

One is in the middle of the history of Vietnam. 'Road Number One' is an up-beat sequence which expresses the exhilaration of the Viet-Minh when, in the revolution of August 1945, they overthrew Bao Dai, a puppet 'Emperor' installed by the occupying Japanese forces, and declared the Republic of Vietnam. The sequence climaxes with Ho's declaration of independence which, tellingly, quotes the American Declaration. There is then a return to tableaux and the actor playing Ho is shown being crushed onto the actor representing Vietnam by actors carrying the Japanese and British flags. One of the actresses, as a tourist guide, comments:

> 'Gracey. The Big Three at Potsdam agreed that Vietnam should be in the British sphere of influence, and a British General, Douglas Gracey, was sent to Vietnam to restore law and order. General Gracey's British and Indian troops collaborated with the Japanese to re-impose French power in Saigon.'

Further tableaux follow, showing Dien Bien Phu, Partition, Land Reform, and growing resistance to American involvement.

Now, a note in the published script, presumably by Hunt, states,

> 'The point about Gracey was undoubtedly one of the most important to be made to a London audience. Until we began working on 'US' none of us had been fully aware of the extent of British involvement after the August Revolution. <u>We felt we wanted to call attention to this involvement.</u>' [37] (My emphasis)

If this intention had been strongly felt, then it seems unlikely either that so little weight would be given to the speech (it takes perhaps half a minute) or that it would be placed at the <u>beginning</u> of a new crescendo of episodes in the down-beat after the song of the revolution. It is almost hidden, and

although I had seen the play performed, I only recalled the point on reading the script; nor can I find any reference to it by critics. We can only conclude that the play's authors chose finally not to emphasise what can only appear as a most important reference to a British viewpoint on an apparently distant and American war.

The second sequence to examine begins after the tableaux, and it is, effectively, a condemnation of the form of US involvement (although not necessarily of intervention itself). Interviews with a number of GI's were recreated from a Newsweek article, and after experimentation with styles, were delivered in a flat objective tone, as though to a camera or across the bar of a court. The net effect is of a group of men doing a job they see to be necessary, and hindered by anti-Vietnam war demonstrators. Then two songs sum up the opposition: a record of one sung by Sergeant Barry Sadler, popular for his celebration of the soldiers' courage and valour, and one, invented by Mitchell which, in a kind of jerky ballad style, tells of 'another Barry', Barry Bondhus, who protested against the war by dumping shit in the files of a draft office. There then begins a sequence in which violent song or action alternates with interviews. A mimed and crude torture session which begins as a simulation of Vietcong methods and ends as a US interrogation of an NLF soldier, encapsulates a discussion which stresses the efficacy of torture and its relationship to indoctrination; the song 'Zapping the Cong' (Be spreading my jelly - i.e. napalm/ With a happy song/Cos I'm screwing all Asia/ When I'm zapping the cong) accompanies a mimed comic-strip abduction by 'Zapman' and encapsulates an interview with a fatalistic historian who seems to say that people's actions are determined by their place in 'a long stream of history'. The last word is with a general who, when interviewed, condones brutality with the analogy that to catch a tomcat you need another, but fiercer, one. The total result of this whole sequence is to suggest that war pursues its own logic. If it goes deeper, it is to say that Americans are caught up in their own myths, or that pre-supposed ends justify the means. An examination of individual components leads one to different conclusions, for example that the judgement of men who pursue war blindly is not be trusted, or that a man who napalms villagers without knowing whether they are friend or enemy is committing an atrocity.

A montage which attempted to create a viewpoint which rested on the evidence of each element would necessarily question the morality of American involvement, and require an investigation of motive and purpose. In practice, the existing montage suggests that involvement is inevitable, even tragic. What the play places at the end of the montage is a long speech recreated

from an article by the correspondent Nicholas Tomalin whose anguish at the war's cost forces him to doubt whether it should be continued. As Hunt summed up,

> 'Looking back, I feel that we spent far too much time agonising over the liberal conscience. We raced through Vietnamese history, skipped over land reform, said almost nothing about the NLF and then lingered over Nick Tomalin.' [38]

It seems clear that the montage failed to emphasise important points. Marowitz, London's regular critic of documentary, was forceful:

> '...it merely dumps the whole kaboodle of conflicting evidence into the audience's lap and demands they they sort out what the show's planners have not managed to think out.' [39]

Wesker was gentler:

> 'I can't understand how Peter permitted himself so much business to the degree of obscuring what was being said.' [40]

So far, I have avoided mentioning the play's second half. In part this is becauge of its quite separate style, and in part because it moved away from documentary sources and was a much more personal expression. Taking the self-burning of Norman Morrison as a key point, the act revolves around a young man of similar intent and a girl who tries to argue him out of it. At the climax, her speech becomes an attack on those young Londoners who play at being revolutionary, only to adopt such apparently middle-class symbols as a Mini, a stereo Hi-fi, an au-pair and a defrosting refrigerator. The banality is fundamental, but the language manages an Osborne-like ring, in 'I would like to see an English dog playing on an English lawn with part of a burned hand'. Neither at the time, nor in retrospect, did the speech justify itself in terms of its assault on the audience's values. Our complacency had been assumed throughout, but it had not been demonstrated; nor would horror in Britain necessarily have made us aware of suffering in Vietnam. It is too easy to set up a target and then shoot it down.

The second half emphasises the subjectivity that was latent in Brook's approach when he asked each actor to explore the contradiction between the horror of Vietnam and the normal life he was leading. Such introspection could only be heightened by Grotowski's training methods, and it is not surprising that after fourteen weeks of rehearsal the company expressed mystic or egotistic attitudes:

> 'My mind is a dark cave. There's something red and horrific in it.'
> 'I feel confused and helpless but happier.'
> 'I am much more concerned about the possible escalation and its effect on me than I am about the Vietnamese people.'

In the light of these remarks, it becomes clearer why one critic who found

the first half 'little better than superior Brecht' and full of 'intellectual dishonesty', could warm to the second.

> 'I was living the hereness and nowness of it with every agonising syllable...'and when the butterflies are to be burned, 'actually felt an urge to rise to my feet and shout "No! Don't do it!" '

His summing-up is final:

> 'Herein lies the only justification Theatre of Fact can have - that it involves its audience's emotions more deeply with events in the real world. If instead of trying to make people feel it tries to make them think and understand, it is doomed to failure: no historical events... can be comprehended in three hours of stage action without sweeping over-simplification at every level.' [41]

This is a slippery slope. Of course theatre can, and should, create strong feeling, but how is this to arise from a reaction to real events unless there is an attempt at thought and understanding? What is any television documentary, or any work of historical scholarship even, if not a tremendous concentration of facts? Whether it is 'sweeping oversimplification' depends, as in a stage play, on the quality of its insight. Arguably, the theatre, with the resources demonstrated by Biscator is a better arena for making human insights into historical documentary material.

The real issue seems to be cold feet on the part of the authors of 'US'. It is now common knowledge that the Theatrical Censor, Lord Cobbold, initially refused the play in entirety on the grounds that it was 'bestial, anti-American and communist.' [42] This attempt at open political censorship was only averted by a deputation from the RSC, and eventually performance was allowed, subject to some textual substitution. Even so, the Chairman of the RSC's Governors felt compelled to print a disclaimer in the programme. It ended by describing 'US' as

> 'an attempt by a body of dedicated people... to pass balanced comment in a responsible way...'

Even had there been no fear of suppression by the Censor, the composition of the Aldwych's audiences must have been in the minds of the authors of 'US'. As Albert Hunt saw at the outset 'a true communication could only take place inside a genuine community of interest' [43] and he did not believe (as who would?) that this could be found among the Aldwych audiences. Brook had replied that there was the weight of a major international company making a statement about Vietnam. In the end, Hunt has been proved right. Any 'statement' in 'US' was vitiated by the second-act appeal to the emotions. 'US' obfuscated a subject of world concern, 'at the expense of the burning Vietnamese'.[44]

Because of their audience, and, in 1966, because of their greater freedom from censorship, club theatres could afford to stage more uncompromising plays. It was at Hampstead, a few days after 'US' had opened, that 'In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer' received its British premiere.[45] It was the first of a short season of documentary plays at the Club, and had very nearly been stifled, in the first place because Oppenheimer had raised legal objections after the 1964 German production, and because, as with 'US', there had been difficulties with the Censor. The Hampstead Theatre went ahead, hoping for protection under its Club status.[46]

The play is edited, apparently with very little invention, from records of the proceedings against Oppenheimer by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission. In question is whether his security clearance should be continued when he is a self-acknowledged communist fellow-traveller and at a time when McCarthyism is in the air. The arrangement of the material highlights certain more general points, and these are emphasised by questions projected on a screen such as, 'Where does loyalty to a brother end, and where to the state?' or 'What is absolute loyalty?' Other projected material, film of the A-bomb, slides of Japanese cities and of key nuclear scientists, suggests the play is concerned with more than personal issues arising from Oppenheimer's case alone. In fact, Kipphardt, the playwright-editor, is concerned with a global dilemma: how far should a scientist pursue research he knows will be used to create an agent of destruction? Moreover, he suggests the dilemma is not the scientist's alone.

> 'The question is, what authority is independent and powerful enough to prevent nations or groups of nations, from committing suicide?'

The words are Oppenheimer's, but the sentiment is one Kipphardt shares and wishes to bring to his audience's attention. His play, like 'The Representative' and 'The Investigation', is concerned with exploring the degree to which an individual owes loyalty to the state. Where Weiss, however, indicts a nation, and Hochhuth sets out counterpoised arguments, Kipphardt uses Oppenheimer's investigation as a case study.

The physicist is shown as a pragmatic moralist. We hear how he was fascinated by the theoretical problem of the bomb and yet recoiled at its use. The crux of the 'matter' is whether his scruples prevented him from giving sufficiently whole-hearted support to the search for the H-bomb. A number of physicists are called as witnesses, and their own attitudes throw Oppenheimer's into relief. Teller, 'the father of the H-bomb', appears to be at the same stage of moral development as Oppenheimer before Hiroshima. Bethe is shown to have experienced a similar dilemma and been unable to resolve

it.

Oppenheimer's opponents, the security men, are also pragmatists. They operate a system according to the values of the day. If criteria change, old evidence of behaviour may take on a new significance. When Oppenheimer was the only man capable of leading the A-bomb project, his communist associations were disregarded; in 1954, the date of the hearing, they take on a new significance. McCarthyism is about to claim a victim.

The play, then, unlike 'The Representative', does not ring with the defence of polarised moral positions, but is a close-up of a low-key opposition between political expediency and an attempt to be morally pragmatic.

Kipphardt emphasises the conflict between the individual, attempting to define his moral position, and his role, as part of a state apparatus. The result is a kind of schizophrenia, as we are made aware by this revealing exchange:

> 'Robb You mean to say that having worked day and night for three or four years to produce the atomic bomb, you then argued it should not be used?
> Oppenheimer No. When I was asked by the Secretary of War I set forth the arguments both for and against. I expressed my uneasiness.
> ...
> Robb How many were killed?
> Oppenheimer Seventy thousand.
> Robb Did you have moral scruples about that?
> Oppenheimer I don't know anyone who would not have had terrible moral scruples after the dropping of the bomb.
> ...
> Robb ...Isn't that a trifle schizophrenic, Doctor?
> Oppenheimer Yes...It is the kind of schizophrenia we physicists have been living with for several years now.'

Slowly, through editing, Kipphardt builds up his own case, that the schizophrenia is society's which has in fact delegated its moral dilemma to the physicist. His play is really an attempt to make his audience, and therefore society, acknowledge that the dilemma is really their own. It is because of this purpose that he has chosen a contemporary setting, and so scrupulously keeps to his source. He might have chosen an allegorical equivalent, as Miller did in 'The Crucible', except that for Kipphardt, morality must be constantly redefined in terms of man's new capabilities. Appeals to 'honour' or 'integrity' are too vague and generalised. His documentation provides us with the detail to begin the work of redefining our moral position in relation to the H-bomb. We are sustained in this because Kipphardt's 'insights into the behaviour of well-known, living scientists' make the play 'compelling and alarming'.[47] We know that the dilemma, so carefully documented, requires an urgent solution: already seventy thousand have died.

Audiences were prepared to accept such an uncompromising play, and it transferred for a short run at the Fortune Theatre. It was followed at Hampstead by 'The Silence of Lee Harvey Oswald' on November 23rd, 1966. Michael Hastings's play, dealing with the presumed assassin of President Kennedy was also published as 'Lee Harvey Oswald'[48] and its subtitle, 'a far mean streak of indepence brought on by negleck(sic)', a quotation from Oswald's diary, suggests the interest in the man's character and psychology. Hastings is quite explicit:

> 'The play is an attempt to find Lee Harvey Oswald. There is no intended prejudice as to whether he killed Kennedy or not...'

The very disclaimer arouses misgivings. If Oswald did not kill Kennedy, then he becomes a figure of some insignificance. The comment is really disingenuous, for the form of the play does presume the strong probability that Oswald was the assassin, and its purpose is to probe and explore his motivation.

The play begins with a highly factual prologue which succinctly and with little colour details the sparse events of Oswald's life up to the crucial moments in Dallas. The bulk of the play consists of verbatim reconstructions of the testimonies of Oswald's mother and Russian wife to the Warren Commission, and these are intercut with scenes in which Hastings imagines the relationships between the three and shows Oswald as a developing psychopath. He is at pains to point out:

> 'I have not besmirched or played around with the stories Marina and Marguerite have told. In writing the dialogue I have tried to be faithful to the words of the women in their testimonies.' [49]

Thus, like the previous Hampstead play, this too is closely related to its sources, and if it had explored Oswald's motives as the former did Oppenheimer's, we might have had a comparable piece of work. Instead, we are left at the end with an enigmatic character. 'A human ink-blot test into which everyone is free to read just whatever his political convictions or private fantasy may dictate.' [50] But we are also offered, as the evidence suggested to Hastings, glimpses of a wider involvement. Oswald may have been a secret agent. He was involved, ambiguously, with refugees from Castro's Cuba; he made another assassination attempt just before the attack on Kennedy. What Hastings gives us is unsatisfactory. His characterisation of Oswald suggests enigma, but it seems perfectly possible, if the facts could ever be brought to light, perhaps from FBI or CIA files, that a consistent picture of Oswald could be constructed. It would very likely show him, not as the lone psychopath or the alienated Dostoievskian hero (two views which seem to have strongly influenced Hastings), but as the member

of a conspiracy. There is by contrast 'Welcome to Dallas, Mr Kennedy', mentioned earlier, which, by presenting conflicting interpretations of the assassination, managed to cast considerable doubt on the Warren Report, and suggested moreover that Oswald was only the fall-guy of a widespread and high-ranking conspiracy. Performed in 1967, years before Watergate, Himmelstrup's play now appears strangely prescient, while Hastings's answer to the question 'Who is Lee Harvey Oswald?' seems naive and circumscribed. He employs the tools of documentation but has no case of any dimension worth substantiating.

The autumn of 1966 was the high-water mark of documentary drama in London, and it was marked by one of the few essays on the subject, an article by David Wright in 'Plays and Players' [51] which referred briefly to agitprop and living newspaper, and made, surprisingly for such a magazine at the time, substantial reference to Cheeseman's views, and pointed to the need for documentary plays to be tailored to a specific audience. After this time, with one or two exceptions, those London plays which might, in subject matter or treatment, have been related to documentary theatre, were in fact very hybrid forms. Such a one is John Arden and Margaretta d'Arcy's ill-fated attempt to create a play around Nelson. First mentioned in the late autumn of 1967 it was to be a musical called 'Trafalgar'; a year later it surfaced at the Roundhouse as 'The Hero Rises Up', where it was 'a fiasco' [52]; and a year later still, was produced by Bill Hays at the Edinburgh Festival in a revised form and afterwards transferred to Nottingham Playhouse. Billed by the authors as a 'Romantic Melodrama', one drama critic retitled it 'Gilbrecht and Sullivan'. It operates, none too successfully, on a variety of levels, but principally it attempts through satire to debunk the legends surrounding the hero, and suggests that Nelson enjoyed playing the enfant terrible and thrived on the slaughter which accompanied his sea-battles. Although its incidents are based on real events, the play stays on the level of comic satire, and does not attempt to sustain a serious polemic through documentation. In a similar vein is Charles Wood's 'H or monologues in front of burning cities' which presents the seamy side of the putting-down of the Indian Mutiny. Although the play rings true in the manner of a satirical cartoon, and refers to real personages, cities and battles, it remains - and very successfully so - an imaginative distillation.

The National Theatre never staged a documentary play at the Old Vic, although at the time when the RSC were rehearsing 'US' it announced that one had been commissioned from Clancy Segal and Roger Smith on the Cuban Missile Crisis.[53] Nothing came of it, perhaps because of the high-level controversy 'US' aroused. The Young Vic did, however, stage 'Cato Street' by Robert

Shaw, which deals with a plot, hatched in 1820 in a stable off the Edgware Road, to assassinate the entire British Cabinet.

The play is based on a book published a decade earlier,[54] and has many similar emphases. It attempts to draw the characters of the plotters; it harps on the probability of there being a government agent who exposed the conspiracy; and it dwells rather too pruriently on the details of the execution, with the actors actually being dropped through traps. The play is better than the book in one important respect: it suggests a motivation for the conspirators. The play begins with the Peterloo massacre, staged at the Young Vic with a slow stroboscopic light which effectively, and memorably, froze tableaux of killing. Arrogantly reactionary speeches from the Home Secretary, Sidmouth, are contrasted with a meeting of London Radicals at which some of the conspirators are present. In this way, the play suggests the conspirators were the violent wing of a wider movement, but it overstates its case by assuming they were present at other major events including Peterloo. A montage of working-class conditions in London might have provided us with an insight into the justification of their action, rather than the more conventional psychological motivation. The end result is to focus on personalities at the expense of historical accuracy. This was most noticeable in the casting, where, presumably for the frisson to be experienced when a strongly radical actress would be 'hung' in front of the audience, the central character was, on scant justification, turned into his wife, and played by Vanessa Redgrave.

'Cato Street' suffers from being a one-off attempt to link, by implication, present-day left-wing groups with destructive violence such as that in Ireland. The production team were formed especially for the play and previously had had no particular experience in documentary theatre. There is a lack of awareness of the potential of documentation, and all quotation is absorbed into the script so that we are unable to distinguish it from invented passages. In consequence, there is no check on the play's authenticity, and any point of view it contains is concealed. In production, it was an average piece of theatre, and once it zoomed in on the conspirators to cut out the wider social framework (and this occured only a third of the way in) it was no more than an exposition of events private to the group. In any case, the play is fundamentally unsympathetic to their cause: its final image is of Sidmouth swaggering and pontificating, while behind him the conspirators' bodies dangle.

The RSC again came near to producing a documentary play when the company staged Arthur Kopit's 'Indians'. It uses the format of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and the production had a spectacularly

effective setting - a circus ring of coloured light-bulbs, into which could be flown a circular cage of the kind used to enclose lions at a circus. A similar device had been used in 'Hang Down Your Head and Die'and here again it was used for ironic effect. The audience were 'protected' from the'dangerous' Indians.. The glittering extravaganza of the Show emphasised its artificiality and the help it gave to creating the Wild West myth. Its larger-than-life acts were interleaved with, and created a framework for, realistic scenes in which Cody relived the events in which he had failed to save the Indians from the expropriation of their land and their life-source, the buffalo. The contrast, both visually and in the writing, worked for comment, as in 'Oh What a Lovely War': the ebullience and humour of the circus was suddenly undercut by a moment of serious intent. At the same time, the device moves us a long way from the historical Indian. It is almost Pirandellian to see actors playing Indians playing themselves as they used to be, but seen through European eyes. It is part of Kopit's purpose: he is exploring the use of myth to obscure and make palatable the genocidal reality; but despite the volume of research Kopit undertook originally, the play has moved a long way from its documentary sources and is much more the expression of the playwright's own feeling about his subject.

The autumn of 1968 saw 'Close the Coalhouse Door' in London at the Fortune Theatre and Hochhuth's 'Soldiers' opened at the New under Clifford Williams's direction. London was moving into a period which might be called 'post-documentary'. Both 'Indians' and 'Soldiers' owe a great deal to the upsurge of documentary drama, but documentation itself is not central to either. Both playwrights have an intimate knowledge of their subject, but they do not intend to create a polemic, a political platform for action. Rather they wish to express a strong personal opinion. Neither feels the need to substantiate the central thesis with documentation; they wish to sway us, individual to individual, by the strength of their images. It is a matter of debate rather than proof.

But documentary drama was by no means superseded, even if it was now mainly to be found outside London. At the Open Space Theatre, Charles Marowitz's natural interest in American affairs led him to stage 'The Chicago Conspiracy' on June 27th, 1970. He assisted John Burgess in scripting, and they based their work on an earlier version by Jonathan Cross which had been performed at Manchester University. All three are editors rather than authors, for both scripts are closely based on records of the trial which followed the Chicago Democratic Convention and which was made notorious by the chaining and gagging of Bobby Seale in open court. Jonathan Cross's was perhaps the most arduous task, in the initial sifting of clean lines

of action from four and a half months-worth of paper, while, from a comparison of the two versions,[55] it is possible to see the extra dramatic shaping that took place for the Open Space.

Both have as prologue a montage in which each defendant, accompanied by a projection of the real person, makes a final speech and is then sentenced over a louspeaker, so that we are left in no doubt as to the outcome. The first half of the play occupies itself with the case for the prosecution; the second half with the defence. The prosecution witnesses are shown as liars, fools or possible agent provocateurs. Their testimonies are interspersed with repeated outbursts from Bobby Seale who has not been allowed the lawyer of his choice. His pleas lead to his forcible restraint and finally his removal with a four year sentence for contempt of ccurt. These outbursts occur fairly close together in the early script, but Burgess and Marowitz have split them up and used them as an escalatory punctuation, so that coupled with the testimonies, the whole first half makes us sympathetic to the defendants' impotence and orchestrates our feelings in their favour. This would seem to leave little for the second half but reiteration, until we hear the testimony of one of the defendants. Abbie Hoffman has espoused 'alternative culture':

> 'Weinglass Where do you reside?
> Hoffman I live in Woodstock Nation... It is a nation of alienated young people. We carry it around with us as a state of mind... It is a nation dedicated to co-operation versus competition.' [56]

Hoffman's cross-examination is a supreme example of the cultural abyss between the U.S establishment and the radical movement. Incomprehension faces alienation. In Hoffman there is mockery, humour and anarchy. So is there in the next witness, Ginsberg. But when the defence counsel tries to take the trial into the establishment camp and question the sub-poenaed Mayor Daley, he is forced by objection upon objection to a point where, after further key witnesses are debarred, he must denounce the court, and end in dock with the defendants.

Thus the second half, having aroused our anger at the trial itself, forces us to consider the whole judicial system in America and find it, at that point, not only wanting, but an active agent of repression.

'The Chicago Conspiracy' is a polemic. It arouses our sympathy for the defendants and attempts to prove its case, and largely succeeds, on the documentation of the court records. Characters defend - or condemn - themselves out of their own mouths, while projections of appropriate captions draw our attention to what is significant. Apart from the interest of its subject matter, 'The Chicago Conspiracy' is important for the way in which

its characters are created. Like those at Stoke and in 'In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer', they exist as exponents of social roles, rather than characters in any traditional, psychologically rounded sense. This is especially so in the triad of Judge and Counsels for prosecution and defence. They are mouthpieces for points of view: the first two are almost indistinguishable as the voice of a self-righteous Establishment. Just once, the role - or mask - of Judge slips, and the human being is compelled to defend himself:

> 'Come into my chambers and I will show you on the wall what one of the greatest newpapers of the city said about me...'

Even the Defence Counsel is only the voice of the liberal conscience, attempting to win fair play, but in the end the Judge's intransigence makes him step out of his role and align himself with the defendants. They too are, as Irving Wardle put it, 'actors; rebels who settle for role-playing as the most effective and enjoyable way of screwing the system.' [57] At a deeper level than the narrative of the trial, the play is about a similar schizophrenia to that suffered by Oppenheimer: often, against our will, we are forced into roles and then convicted for acting them.

John Burgess moved to Ipswich to work on 'Margaret Catchpole', but a few months later, the Open Space staged a play which is worth a brief mention as a kind of 'anti-documentary'. 'Palach' by Alan Burns and Charles Marowitz takes as a starting point Jan Palach's suicide by burning in protest at the Russian occupation of Prague, and then proceeds to bury it in a welter of music-hall routine, television advertisements, family relationships and play-quotations, all taking place more or less simultaneously on four stages. The play's purpose is to remind its audience of how readily significant events are forgotten, and in this it succeeds only too well.

There were a fair number of plays in the years after 1968 which nearly warrant attention. I do not intend to discuss Weiss's 'Song of the Lusitanian Bogey' about Angola, because although it could be seen briefly,[58] it was not a British production. Weiss really needs a discussion to himself, but this is beyond our scope. 'The Young Churchill' by David Aukin, John Gilbert and Robin Midgley,[59] is, unsurprisingly, more concerned with biographical detail than the wider effects of his actions; the first half of 'Poor Horace'[60] was considered by Michael Billington[61] authentically to document life at a Naval College, but the second part seems to have had melodramatic echoes of 'The Winslow Boy' (itself an interesting fore-runner because of its factual inspiration). 'Vincent' by W.Gordon Smith and directed by Robin Midgley at Hampstead,[62] was compiled from letters written by Van Gogh to his brother, but its concern, like 'The Young Churchill' is biographical, even if, in formal terms, it

might be considered 'a documentary'. Michael Almaz's 'documentary fantasy', 'The Anarchist'[63] scores off the private lives of Bakunin and his disciple Nechaev, with scant consideration for the events they shaped. In its attitude to the material it has much in common with Trevor Griffiths's 'Occupations',[64] a somewhat overpraised dramatisation which parallels a Russian agent, Kabuk's, private liaison and his negotiations with the Fiat bosses for a car-plant. There is a slight basis in fact and some irony arises from its backgrcund in the Turin factory occupations of 1920, but the best part of the play is a rendering of a speech by the revolutionary leader, Gramsci. The play attempts to moralise cn the practical politics of revolution, but its points would have more force if it were possible to substantiate them.[65] Both these last plays raise serious doubts about the use of real names and settings in plays which are, at best, highly free interpretations. It seems harmless enough to rework the relationship between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I as Robert Bolt does in 'Vivat!' Vivat Regina',[66] but any dealings with twentieth century history, especially its revolutions, need to be more circumspect: the events still reverberate and are difficult enough to interpret without obfuscation.

Also in 1971 was 'Corunna', in which Keith Dewhurst attempted to fuse a documentary about the Peninsular War in 1808-9 with songs by the 'modern' folk-group, Steeleye Span.[67] It largely did not come off, except for one scene where the soldiers returning to Manchester find it grown from a small village to a manufacturing town cleverly suggested by the group's electric guitar music. Steeleye Span were in fact the play's mainstay, and it is unfortunate for Mr Dewhurst that eighteen months before, he should have written:

> 'I am a playwright and I believe that the future of the theatre as an art-form depends upon the written word and not on any group or improvised documentary method...Peter Cheeseman's Stoke on Trent documentary 'The Burning Mountain', recently seen in London, proves my point because like most group theatre it has a vivid surface but no significant content.' [68]

Later in 1971, Ariane Mnouchkine's 'Théâtre du Soleil' visited the Roundhouse with '1789', and coiners of categories might like to speculate on the possibility of labelling it 'documentary melodrama'. Two plays which followed in the wake of 'In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer' and 'The Chicago Conspiracy' were David Illingworth's 'The Oz Trial', and 'The White House Tapes' edited by Larry Adler. 'The Oz Trial' was first performed in Bristol before its London production at The Place.[69] It uses the same kind of selective editing of trial records to make it abundantly and humorously clear that even in the dock, Oz is a match for the Establishment. The

play creates satire out of documentation, and it lacks the angry edge of 'The Chicago Conspiracy'. 'The White House Tapes' were readings from the Nixon transcripts, performed at the Royal Court on June 16th. 1974. The performance was a further example of the unvarnished (if abridged) truth being the most damning.

While documentary drama in London was becoming more hybrid, a small group, the Half Moon Theatre, were establishing themselves in an ex-synagogue in the no-man's-land between City and East End. They began to explore documentary drama with 'Will Wat, If Not, What Will?' performed May 27th. 1972.

Steve Gooch's script is a robust piece of writing which spends the first half detailing some of the causes of the 1381 Peasants' Uprising with a mixture of historical thoroughness and theatrical liveliness. We see how serfs attempt to escape from bondage and subsequent capture, in order to search for a better income. Later scenes show how the Uprising is triggered when bailiffs require villagers to account for and make good deficiencies in the earlier Poll tax. Intercut to make a montage of class-opposites are scenes at the courts of Edward III and the young Richard II. They are in the palm of the London merchants, and John of Gaunt's battles are forcing the imposition of heavy taxes. The second half is more of a narrative showing the growth of the peasant army, its march on London, and the negotiations with the King which end in the, for him, opportune murder of Tyler, and the subsequent dispersal and rout of the peasants.

The historical authenticity of the script is impressive, and Steve Gooch has obviously thoroughly acquainted himself with his sources. His method of writing is to create a montage not only of invented scenes, but one in which there is a framework of documents such as proclamations, roughly contemporary song, and modern paraphrases of legal documents like the 1351 Statute of Labourers. Moreover, the second-half narrative is heavily influenced by the Anonimalle Chronicle,[70] which offers the playwright considerable detail both of incident and dialogue. This documentary framework helps to authenticate the invented scenes, and their language is clearly influenced by it. In principle, these scenes are no more than the kind of dramatisation associated with radio history broadcasts, but Steve Gooch's sympathy for the material is such that he has made it his own, and the dialogue, while conveying a surprising amount of information in a compressed space of time, is nevertheless the robust language of real people talking:

> 'Journeyman Everyone's on the make now, see. It's a big scramble. Even the Old Man himself. He never comes in the shop himself these days. Off in the city, chatting up the big cloth merchants. Looking for a market abroad. It's not easy. The victualling guilds've got the run of London. Fishmongers and grocers. Give the King a rake-off

> and he's in the palm of your hand. Foreign trade's nothing to a victualler. And they don't employ people like the wool men, so they're more popular. Which gets up John of Gaunt's nose and don't make life easy for our old man.' [71]

Now, almost certainly, no medieval serf ever spoke like that, but the choice Gooch has made is clear. He has avoided any temptation to create an artificial 'medieval' dialogue of'thou' and'sire' and instead has solved the problem by translating his sources, where he quotes them, into modern idiom, so that they are homogeneous in style with his serfs who have speech that is everyday but vivid and politically conscious. It is as though the Peasant's Revolt is being waged by the Workers' Revolutionary Party, and the analogy does not seem too far-fetched. The result is compelling and in keeping with the play's demonstration that the mass uprising, in which perhaps 100,000 were involved, was no sudden eruption. It was rather the culmination of a long period of politicisation pinpointed in the scenes of the play's first half.

Gooch is, as Piscator and Lania attempted to do, using history to illuminate the present, and the documents are to authenticate his exposition of the particular event. He is not trying to inject a generalised moral standpoint into the situation as Griffiths and Almaz did, but explores it in its own right, if from a point of view sympathetic to the peasants. He wants to make a case history which is in the first place authenticated and believable in itself and is secondly an object lesson both to rouse and warn future revolutionaries. Even John Mortimer, writing for the Observer, found himself convinced:

> '"Will Wat" doesn't show you the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, it involves you in it...By the end of the evening I felt proud to have shared history with the peasants of Erith, Brentford and Romney Marsh; and ready to raise a bill-hook against all oppressors...'

Just over a year later, in July 1973, The Half Moon followed 'Will Wat' with 'Fall in and Follow Me' by Billy Colville and Dave Marson,[72] which encapsulated in the events at a single school a little-known pupils' strike of 1911 for shorter hours, better conditions and payment for monitors. Although factually based, it is scant on documentation, and the main impression was of the irrepressible liveliness of the East End schoolchildren who were brought into the theatre to play their counterparts of sixty years before.

'Get Off My Back' was a kind of revue-style history of dockland which the Half Moon staged a couple of months later. It covered an immense range of material at a breathless rate from fishing and smuggling in the fourteenth century to the contemporary battle with the developers of the disused St Katherine's Docks. Along with 'Fall In and Follow Me', the play was an attempt to reach a more local audience without alienating those who went

to the Half Moon primarily for its theatrical interest. The theatre's geographical position must have made it doubtful how much it could command an East End audience, but we shall see how the policy was later vindicated with 'George Davis Is Innocent, OK'.

Before that production, the theatre brought in an outside company for 'The Motor Show'.[73] They were a new group, originally called 'The Collective' and then renamed as the less political 'Community Theatre'. There was considerable interest in the team involved in creating the play. The director was Ron Daniels who had acted in, and helped create, 'The Knotty' at Stoke. For the writing, Steve Gooch who had now completed 'Female Transport' collaborated with Paul Thompson whose first play 'Captain Swing at the Penny Gaff' had been performed by Unity in 1971. It had been part of a return to the old Unity tradition and a naturalistic prologue and epilogue framed a living newspaper mixture of statistics, scenes and songs (what Unity calls a 'documentary') on the agricultural riots of the 1830's. Partly because of poor direction and acting, but also because of some slack writing, it had been a turgid production. Thompson had subsequently written two agit-prop plays one each for the farmworkers' Union and for NATKE, so that we could expect his writing to have become tauter.

It is easy to see the influence of 'Captain Swing' on 'The Motor Show'. It is a Living Newspaper in that it takes a 'problem', labour relations in the Ford plant at Dagenham, explores its history in a montage of scenes, and finally postulates a solution. It employs agitprop devices such as music-hall routines for satire, pointed songs, factual narrative, even the time-honoured boxing-match (fought between Wally the Worker and George the Foreman with such seconds as Lady Scanlon-Jones and 'Mr Big' whom we quickly learn to associate with Mr Ford Jnr), and all of them are interspersed with realistic shopfloor scenes which bring us down to reality as the trench sequences did in 'Oh What a Lovely War'. Indeed, apart from contemporary allusions, a factory audience of the 1930's accustomed to the Rebel Players would immediately have recognised the style.

The writing of the realistic scenes has a muscular quality which indicates Steve Gooch's hand, and the assembly line workers are close relatives of Wat Tyler's peasants. The production had an easy flow, and worked well in the Half Moon's arena, as we might expect from a director with experience at Stoke. But there were none of the possible Cheeseman influences such as acted transcripts of interviews, scrupulous documentation or carefully orchestrated sequences of fact, personal feeling and song: the play was brash and fast-moving, and understandably so when it was intended for

the Leys Hall, Dagenham, and an audience who might be difficult to win over. Nevertheless, we might well have expected the Stoke influence at least for a short while towards the middle, say, when the play had captured its audience. Instead, the production remained obstinately determined to milk every situation for humour, and its statistics and documentation are those of the work-process and labour relations.[74] Just occasionally, in some of the shop-floor sequences, especially the speed-up of scene seven, 'The Victimisation of the Seventeen', we glimpse the juxtaposed relationship of a worker's feelings with the statistical details of his job. Partly because of the continuous humour, the end is too pat and makes no more than the hardly novel suggestion that because the car industry is as vital as coal, the car workers should hold out for every penny they can get.

Had 'The Motor Show' more successfully integrated the traditions understood by its three creators, it would have made a conveniently rounded ending to this survey of London. Instead, we shall finish with 'George Davis is Innocent, OK' the Half Moon's piece of agitprop which turns the wheel full circle to the 1930's.

George Davis was the East End taxi driver who had been tried and convicted of taking part in an armed bank robbery. His case only achieved notoriety when the chief organisers of a campaign to prove his innocence dug up Leeds cricket pitch in the middle of a Test Match. Shane Connaughton's script set out to argue for Davis's innocence, and Pam Brighton's production was a further indication of the Half Moon's willingness to become involved in local issues, however controversial. The play got off to an enjoyably ironic start with two accounts of the bungled robbery. The first was as it must really have happened with furtive masked figures, and the second was a reconstruction according to police evidence which, if it were true, would have required raiders with no masks, walking conveniently backward for the purposes of identification. Further reconstructions of police and eye-witness accounts threw up any number of inconsistencies in the prosecution case. Any remaining sympathy with the police was dispelled first by dramatisations of two late-night raids in which a dazed black couple were threatened until the police realised they had got the wrong address, and in which Davis was arrested with the maxiumum of fuss at home in front of his asthmatic child; secondly by suggesting they delayed forensic reports favourable to Davis until they were too late for the trial.

The campaign for Davis's release occupied the second half, which showed the determination of his wife and his friend Pete Chappell, and swung our sympathies in their favour. The frustration of their many attempts to get a hearing seemed good enough reason for what newspapers called 'cricket pitch

vandalism'.

The play's last night in the small, packed auditorium was extremely moving, and the performance concluded with speeches of thanks from the stage by the real Rose Davis and Pete Chappell, and just to see the two for whom the play had made us feel so much sympathy was in itself a theatrical moment. When the audience filed out through the narrow, tatty foyer, most signed the petition which had been set out, and one of the actors holding an upturned police helmet soon had it filled with pound notes for the campaign.

The agitprop performance succeeded in winning over its audience and obtaining a pledge of support. It used simple and direct means of staging with only a few chairs and a table, and characters indicated with hats or hand-props. The actors remained visible on-stage all the time. The reconstructions of different points of view were a text-book reworking of Brecht's essay 'The Street Scene' and the factual nature of the events and the substantiation arising from the intimate links between the campaigners and the company was a demonstrative authentication of the play's final conclusions.[75] The play was not only agit-prop in style but in the conditions of performance. It expected an audience willing to be swayed, convinced them by its demonstrations, and converted them by its orchestration. It ended by achieving a great sense of solidarity so that by the end of the evening everyone felt able to support the campaign's comparatively moderate request for a reinvestigation of the evidence.[76]

The record of documentary theatre in London is an interesting one, and it has two main aspects. In terms of construction, many of the plays have demonstrated their origins in documentary sources. The 'trial' plays such as 'In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer' are obviously edited versions of the actual events and we accept them as attempts to draw certain wider conclusions. It is a pity 'The Investigation' has not had a wider showing in this country because it is an extreme example of how language can be so worked upon as to create a texture which goes far beyond the original material in the implications it casts. The process is a much more subtle one than the editing and juxtaposition of, say, 'The Chicago Conspiracy'. 'US' and 'Will Wat' are both examples of plays which mix quotations with factually based dramatisation, and the purpose of the documentation, even in these two widely different plays is to convince us that we are watching a genuine consideration of events that have really taken place. Moving further along a spectrum we come to 'The Representative' and 'Cato Street'. For all the difference in their levels of seriousness both plays are the result of their authors having assimilated source material and then set out

to express an opinion in relation to it. In Shaw's case, the opinion is implicit, whereas Hochhuth debates openly, with the Pope through Fontana, and at one remove, with his audience. In both cases the source material is only a jumping-off point. The playwright wishes to make a general moral point, and he fits his material to it. It is playwriting of a conventional kind, if in Hochhuth's case of a high standard. The contrast is with a playwright such as Kipphardt who acknowledges the difficult moral dilemmas in his material and sets out his evidence so that he and his audience in effect explore it together. The playwright indicates the direction his thinking takes him, but his questioning approach allows us room to form our own conclusions. It is because of this that plays such as Kipphardt's, and I include 'The Chicago Conspiracy' and 'Will Wat', are heirs to the tradition we traced from agit-prop through Living Newspaper.[77] They are concerned to question the modern world and, if necessary, redefine moral and political considerations to take account of social and technological change.

It is because of this tradition that I have chosen to skim over the biographical compilations from relatively personal documents such as 'Foot on the Stairs', 'The Brontës' and 'Vincent'. Formally they are related, but it is a matter of surface appearance. Their concern, however amusing and theatrically successful, is intentionally narrow. The point of documentation, and the research it involves and the abnegation of the playwright (not, as Dewhurst seems to think, his abdication) is justified when the subject is one of common, even global, concern.

This is where the second important aspect of documentary drama in London arises: the difficulty of carrying its audience along with it. The problem is most clearly seen in relation to 'US', and put simply, is that, because of its origins and its concern, documentary drama is too politically radical for theatrical managers, London audiences (more precisely those in London who can afford to be an audience) and particularly the Censor, when he existed. It is no accident that at the time of 'US' the phrase 'Theatre of Fact' became commonplace. It is a conveniently neutral term implying matter-of-fact, truthful. Certainly it does not suggest revolutionary ardour. The result is plays that refrain from making any very clear statement, so that after 'Lee Harvey Oswald' for example, we are not much better off; or plays which condemn actions of those who, like Pope Pius XII or McCarthy, are safely historical; or, like 'US', plays which agonise and end up obfuscating the subject of their agony. Typically, documentary drama in London has shied away from the political lessons its material contains. It is no accident that the more penetrating plays have been staged at the

Hampstead Theatre Club and The Open Space.

The Half Moon Theatre is a refreshing exception. It has survived both as a fringe theatre by exciting productions of little known plays, and as a community theatre appealing to an audience of East Enders. By its recent policy it has proved Albert Hunt's dictum, and with 'George Davis Is Innocent, OK' has created an exact equivalent, if on a smaller scale, of Stoke's 'Fight for Shelton Bar'. Both are agitprop pieces determined to exhibit the theatre's solidarity with its chosen cause and to convert more of its audience to the same way of thinking.

We should not leave London without a mention of the many small theatre groups which have sprung up in the wake of the political awareness which crystallised, if only briefly, in 1968. 7:84 Theatre has performed several times at Unity and 'Lay-Off' was an agit-prop piece about multi-nationals. It was laboured and lacked the sparkle of 'The Motor Show' which it resembled, and the company appears to be happier in more naturalistic pieces, or the Brechtian 'Man Friday' by Adrian Mitchell. The same is true of Belt and Braces, whose own very good piece, 'Weight' could be seen for a brief while at the Jeanetta Cochrane. It is the chronicle of a a Kent miner who becomes politicised during the wartime Betteshanger strike, and tries to preserve his Socialism in the face of Labour governments and his wife's apparent lack of understanding. The character is fictitious, but the events he responds to are real. Joint Stock's 'Fanshen' at Hampstead was based on William Hinton's book, and demonstrated in the style of a Brecht lehrstuck how a single Chinese village experienced the Revolution. It might have been a play for intending British revolutionaries. Joint Stock's 'Light Shining in Buckinghamshire' was a moving and imaginative penetration of the attitudes of the left-wing of the English Civil War, the source of so many documentary plays. It had originated in documentary source material but eventually, like scaffolding, threw most of it away.[78]

These small companies have solved the dilemma of committed theatre in London by choosing political subjects or themes of general rather than local interest, and by looking for support to the audiences of fringe theatre. What seems clear, and might be the subject for further investigation, is their debt to a documentary theatre which they seem largely to have supplanted.

CHAPTER 6

Stoke-on-Trent

Of all the documentary work in this country, that at Stoke-on-Trent has been most consistently interesting. The Victoria theatre was the first in the field of locally-rooted plays, and was the inspiration of many other regional theatre companies' documentaries, notably, 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night'. [1] The work has spanned ten years, and although the rate has slowed down, it does not yet appear to have finished. Of further interest is a considerable body of critical writings and public heartsearchings about the form by the director, Peter Cheeseman, which have led him to harden his theoretical position. There has resulted a consistent artistic growth, and we shall see how the continuity of the documentary tradition at Stoke and the stance of its director have created a theatre form which is historically unique, and as yet, unparallelled. It gives artistic representation to people who have not themselves achieved high social status or acted in an individually heroic sense. It is the drama of a class of people in Stoke, who are largely working-class, or closely connected to it. But because it deliberately draws on the experiences of particular persons, the plays' characters are not only representatives of a class, but also recognisable individuals.

The plays need to be understood in the context of the Victoria Theatre's unique history. Initially, it was to be a permanent home for Stephen Joseph's Studio Theatre, a small touring company committed by its director to a policy of staging in-the-round.[2] Joseph expended a great deal of energy in attempting to find a permanent home and eventually took over, and himself helped to convert, the cinema which is now the Vic. For a mixture of reasons, bad health being one, Joseph withdrew from the daily running of the theatre, and Peter Cheeseman, until then manager, was appointed artistic director. His most important step was to follow Joseph's policy of encouraging new writers who were to be closely involved in the theatre's work, and several, such as David Campton and Alan Ayckbourn, acted as well. The result of this policy has been that over a third of all plays presented at the Vic have been newly written. Moreover, Cheeseman's influence as a director early on encouraged his writers to move away from the three-act box-set formula. Peter Terson, in particular, has written long episodic plays which explore characters' psychology while ranging cinematically over a wide geographic terrain. His later plays show the effect of the Vic's documentaries, for he was involved in research for the third, 'The Knotty'. His method of writing, which he has described as compiling unfinished fragments rummaged from a drawer-full, bears some relationship to the manner in which the documentaries have been compiled.

Alan Plater, since responsible for a number of documentary plays, wrote first for the Vic.

Peter Cheeseman fully appreciated the significance that Joseph attached to staging in-the-round, and its importance to the development of the documentary plays at Stoke will be argued in a later chapter. Indeed, much of the work at Stoke might have been the same with Joseph in direct control, had not Cheeseman felt a commitment to the local community strongly enough to put it into practice. This is not to suggest that Joseph would have disowned such an aim, but that his was a more theoretical interest. (In 1964, when 'The Jolly Potters' was being planned, Joseph, at Manchester University, was designing a 'Fish and Chip Theatre', intended to be attractive to working-class audiences.) These and other differences related to the theatre's financial basis finally led to its municipalisation with Cheeseman as artistic director. Fortunately, his strongly local policy has prevailed and, besides the documentaries, has included, for example, dramatisations of Arnold Bennett's novels about the Potteries.

There is thus at Stoke a strongly creative ambience. It has been criticised as not being genuinely 'avant-garde',[3] but this misses the mark. The Vic is attempting work that breaks new ground in its audience's own terms. It cannot be measured against experimentation in theatrical form, when Cheeseman's achievement is to be measured in the relevance of his subject material to the local audience. Such criticism is, indeed, the obverse of that which values Piscator only as a theatrical innovator. Both views betray themselves as belonging to the tradition of art for art's sake.

The Vic's reputation for documentaries is built on seven plays. They are,

'The Jolly Potters', first performed July 14th. 1964;
'The Staffordshire Rebels', July 13th. 1965;
'The Knotty', July 12th. 1966, revived Sept. 12th. 1967 and April 8th. 1969;
'Six into One', July 16th. 1968;
'The Burning Mountain', Jan. 13th. 1970;
'Hands Up - For You The War Is Ended!', May 18th. 1971;
'Fight for Shelton Bar', Jan. 22nd. 1974.[4]

The first arose, according to Cheeseman,[5] from the sudden absence of any writer in the company, coupled with the wish to give expression to his intention of creating a 'group' theatre. He tells the story of how the landlord of a local public house of the name, said to the company as they entered for a late-night drink, 'And the title of your next play is "The Jolly Potters"'. While these may be immediate reasons, the underlying causes can be traced back earlier. The theatrical antecedents were a performance of 'Joe Hill' at Liverpool Unity Theatre which had made a strong impression on Cheeseman, and Joan Littlewood's 'Oh What a Lovely War' which he had seen a year earlier .

His historical interest had been nurtured by a headmaster who was a Cromwell enthusiast and insisted on the importance of primary sources, and a second influence was a university tutor who stressed the importance of teaching local history as a means of reaching the general through the particular. A later influence was to be Charles Parker at the BBC in Birmingham.[6]

From the outset, Cheeseman intended the documentaries to be group creations, and this decision was crucial to the style that evolved. The Vic was particularly well placed for such an approach, for from its earliest days there had been a policy of virtual equality in the actors' pay, and ensemble playing had been promoted. However, with each new documentary, the quantity of research appears to have increased to a point where preparations now begin some six months earlier, and the consequent strain on human resources has meant a partial abandonment of corporate research. Instead, the ground is initially covered by Cheeseman and an assistant, usually the resident playwright, who, as Cheeseman emphasises, is constrained to research and <u>not</u> to write. The production schedule is arranged so that the size of cast in the plays immediately preceding the documentary drops successively, to release as many of the company as possible for full-time work on it. The pattern that has developed is for Cheeseman and the playwright-researcher to be augmented initially by a small research committee.

Cheeseman is proud of the thoroughness with which research is carried out, and the local libraries and newspaper archives are searched extensively. Local historians and private sources are used, and in the more recent documentary plays, the tape-recorder has been important as a means of collecting material. Abstract summaries are made of most - and lately, all - of the tapes, and transcripts taken of the more promising. There results a great bulk of primary and secondary source material indexed for location. The index number frequently occurs against speeches in early versions of a script, so that their origin may be traced. Alongside this research, songs and music of the period are also being traced.

When the research is well under way, the steering committee discusses possible forms that the play could take. At first the scope is argued, and decisions taken, such as that which caused 'Hands Up - For You The War Is Ended' to ignore almost entirely the large-scale events of World War Two. Inevitably, such decisions require large quantities of research to be discarded. In 'The Knotty', between Parts One and Two there is a jump of fifty years, which period Cheeseman claims was researched as thoroughly as those included.[7] Naturally, the scope chosen may decide new avenues of research.

The next step is for the committee to attempt to make an outline story, and according to Cheeseman, it may well be one of the members who will suggest

a 'chart', or shape for the play. Thus, some significant overall aspects of the documentary plays are the result of group decisions, and depend on the composition of the research committee. Nevertheless, it will be argued that a 'house style' is readily apparent, suggesting that Cheeseman is able to ensure the limits within which the committee operates.

Thus, by the time rehearsals begin, there exists an outline for the play, and a vast bulk of (largely primary) source material. Such is the effort necessary to dramatise it that the rehearsal period has been extended from the normal three, to five, weeks, but it still manages to be an extremely hectic time. For the actor, it is exhausting, and an added burden is that the script is rarely totally complete on the opening night, so that the first week of a run is attended by cutting and alteration. Even so, the plays frequently last for 2½ or 3 hours.

In the course of his work at Stoke, Cheeseman has formulated a number of rules which, he claims, govern his approach. They have been stated on various occasions, and it is worth collecting them together as a basis for our later analysis of the plays themselves.

Summary of Peter Cheeseman's theoretical rules.

1. 'The material used on the stage must be primary source material... If there is no primary source material available on a particular topic, no scene can be made about it.' [8]

2. 'It (i.e. No.1) is a rule that ensures that a multiplicity of voices are (sic) heard in the documentary, as opposed to the play, in which all the characters really speak with the voice of the dramatist.' [9]

3. 'The documentary material itself will determine the way in which we select the pieces to be used and the way in which we present each piece of material.' [10]

4. 'The selective process is not an academic one, but a theatrical one... Your yardstick' (he is addressing his company)'as you select your material is - can I make this work, can I come on the stage and do this effectively, can I make a show out of this?' [11]

5. 'The documentaries at 'Stoke-on-Trent are not <u>improvised</u> in the accepted theatrical sense of that word, that is, the dialogue is not made by the actors (or myself) during rehearsals or performances. With the exception of about half a dozen phrases or sentences the dialogue is created by a process of <u>editing</u> the utterances of the people actually involved in the events which the show deals with. [12]

6. 'Music (is) essential to provide an emotional momentum in a theatrical situation packed with heterogeneous factual material.' [13]

The rules collected here have arisen in two situations, first when Cheeseman addresses the company at the beginning of rehearsals, and secondly, when he is writing critically afterwards. The empiricism of the former ('Can I make this work?) we shall see to be, at times, at odds with the overall concepts expressed by the latter. However, it is not such minor discrepancies

that are to be the burden of the argument: it is that the interest lies in how the 'multiplicity of voices' is organised to sustain the Vic's 'house style'. It is because the process is common, as will be shown, to at least part of the playwright's function, that I propose not to follow Cheeseman in distinguishing between 'documentary' and 'play' but to use, as elsewhere, 'documentary play'.

We shall now look at each documentary play in turn, bearing in mind that the rules stated above were themselves formulated over a period of time, beginning with rehearsals for 'The Staffordshire Rebels', and ending with the publication in 1970 of 'The Knotty'.

The performance of 'The Jolly Potters' can be recreated from the director's copy and from a BBC transcript of a filmed rehearsal. In addition, there is a brochure which was sold along with the programme which sets out the play's songs, excerpts from the script, and notes on the documentary origins. This not only confirms the play's basis in real events, but serves as an impressionistic reminder afterwards. Such brochures were to be produced, usually by the resident playwright, for all the subsequent documentary plays.

The title is deliberately ironic, and the play describes in narration and shows by scene the hardships of the Stafford Potters in the early 1840's. The use of Readers and Announcers to communicate facts and link scenes gives the play a static, literary quality, which perhaps reflects Cheeseman's English degree background. Their use is somewhat laboured, and they make the play seem wooden in just those aspects that the later documentaries come to handle so well. The irony, particularly in the early sections, is often coy:

> 'Narrator Now here comes the Maker, the lord of this little workshop; a jolly potter if ever I saw one...
> (Maker strikes boy)
> Narrator See how he remonstrates with the lad...'

The play's strength lies in its simple, bold actions. We are introduced to the craftsman potter on the 'pot-bank', and to the manufacturer who intends to install a machine capable of turning out huge quantities of cups and saucers. By coincidence, the machine was, apparently, known as a 'Jolly' machine, and the name is a further source of irony. The unemployment which results from its installation is suggested in song and by scenes in the local workshop at Chell. The second half is taken up with Chartist meetings, climaxing in the riots of 1842. They are dramatised through spoken reports, records, and eye-witness accounts intercut with short, invented scenes showing the ineffectual response of the Major in charge of the Hanley dragoons. The climax of the first wave of rioting makes great use of tape loops of angry crowds that fill the arena with sound in contrast to the Reader's voice. The main climax, the battle of Burslem, is recounted by a group of actors playing participants who

meet shortly afterwards. At the climax, the group account cuts to that of a single eyewitness, and the sudden contrast enforces the reality of the historical occasion. The trial of a leading Chartist, Joseph Capper, follows, and the play ends with the life of emigrant potters in America rounded off by factual updating from a chorus of readers.

There is a clarity of argument in this action that surpasses the clumsiness of the narrations. The introduction of the Jolly machine presents a choice to the potters: Chartist organisation or the workhouse. We recall this choice when Capper is sentenced for leading the rioting, and it colours our attitude to him. In this way, we are presented with, not simply told about, historical cause and effect. It is crucial to the play's ability to do this that the workhouse sequence stands comparable, in dramatic terms, to the more obviously'dramatic' Chartist meetings and riots. How this was achieved is an early example of the importance of the original source material Cheeseman was so insistent upon.

The sequence sets out to demonstrate the stark brutality and impersonal horror of the workhouse. In part this is achieved by mute actors responding, in character, to the spoken documents:

> 'Enter the family, with a couple of bundles - Father, Mother, Grandfather, daughter. They sit and wait.)
> Announcer As soon as the pauper is admitted he shall be placed in some room to be exclusively appropriated for the purpose of reception of paupers on admission, to be termed the "receiving ward", and shall there remain until examined by the medical officer.
> (The family stares at the regulations on the wall)...
> Announcer ...Every pauper shall upon his admittance into the workhouse be searched by or under the inspection of the proper officer, and all articles prohibited by any Act of Parliament or by this order which may be found upon his person shall be taken from him.
> (Master and Matron search them. Grandfather's pipe is removed.)'

This method, of announcement and concurrent enactment, continues to build the emotional intensity after the moment of pathos when the pipe is confiscated. We see the family embrace, and then the sexes are segregated into separate wards. The scene is broken, but not the mood, by the sorrowful 'Workhouse Song':

> Oh life is hard to bear,
> The workhouse is our share,
> My husband, children and myself,
> Are captives full of care,
> Are captives full of care.

Following the song, the sequence is brought to a climax with the punishment of a boy. The method of dramatisation is again to set the spoken document against its enactment, until the moment when punishment is inflicted, whereupon the voice changes to an eyewitness account:

'(A boy, stripped to the waist, is brought in by two men. Four men hold his arms and legs.)
Announcer ...No corporal punishment shall be inflicted on any male child except with a rod or other instrument such as shall be seen and approved by the Board of Guardians or the visiting committee.
Voice (Quietly) The boy was lifted upon the table and four of the biggest boys were called out to hold each a leg, or an arm, his breeches well pushed down so as to have as much play as possible for the birch rod.
(Lights fade to blackout. The sound of flogging is heard)
Live voice (Quietly) Thin red stripes were delivered across the poor lad's back after the first stroke... Ultimately his back was a red inflamed surface. How long the flogging went on I cannot say, but screaming became less piercing, and at last the boy was taken out, giving vent only to heavy sobs at intervals...'

Such a punishment was for no more than running away from the Workhouse, and the voice continues with the eyewitness's subsequent reaction, which contains its own generalisation from the particular:

'Live Voice I saw that poor lad with red rivulets down his back and sides, and I see it all again even yet... all this when our gracious Queen Victoria was a young queen. The spirit of the new poor laws was present in that torture room at Chell that night.'

The total sequence, of which this is the climax, can be set out as follows:

1.	Admittance of the family to the Workhouse.	Spoken rules; wordless action to accompany.
2.	The Workhouse Song.	Unaccompanied voice.
3.	The case of discipline.	a) Spoken rules with accompanying action. b) Enactment of account as it is spoken, with sound effect (of flogging). c) Spoken reaction.
4.	Comment by a Guardian upon the efficacy of the Workhouse rules.	Spoken commentary.
5.	The Potters' Song. Two verses express hope for the future in concerted action.	Unaccompanied. The whole song, in chorus, will open the second half.

End of first half

In this sequence, the silence of the actors playing the workhouse inmates engages our sympathy for the characters they play. It points to the absence of any adequate answer to the Workhouse Rules from those who suffer them. The feeling is heightened since the Family do not, strictly speaking, enact the rules: the rules are acted out upon them. Thus they could be typical of any family entering the Workhouse. When the eyewitness shifts from narrative to evaluation, the very understatement of the shift subtly begins to change our sympathy for the family to anger at 'the spirit of the new poor laws'. The change is reinforced by the difference of the two songs. Here is the verse that ends the play's first half:

In days to come we must stand firm
Oppressed we'll be no longer
We'll rise as one and overcome:
The Potters will be stronger.

From the synopsis of the Workhouse sequence, we can see how the five parts are edited to encourage the audience to share in the Chartists' anger. We have been made to see that the workhouse, despite the decorum of its rules, did violence to persons. Because of this preparation, when we see the Chartists rioting in the play's second half, our sympathy for them, to some extent, still remains.

In creating a sequence as effective as this one, Cheeseman demonstrates the importance of his first two rules. His primary sources have enabled him to create a believable multitude of voices. In particular, he has restored voices - if sometimes muted ones - to all those poor and unemployed whom historians, until recently at least, have tended to ignore.

Important in this respect was song. Cheeseman was fortunate in having the collaboration of a local group, the Keele Row, and their leader, Jeff Parton, was to work on all of the documentary plays except 'Six into One' and 'The Burning Mountain'. Of the twenty-odd songs in 'The Jolly Potters', a great many were original folk-songs. They express the pottery workers' hard-ships, their anger, and their hope for a new future. Frequently, they are used to contrast official documents and descriptions. In this way, and through their humanity, the songs encourage our sympathy for the Chartist cause.

It should not be thought that all our sympathies are directed in the potters' favour. Much of the rioting is shown from the dragoon commander's point of view, and the middle classes are also given their say:

> 'Mrs Vale stated that... a considerable mob came to the front door of the house... While she was talking to them she heard some panes of glass breaking and in a little time the mob forced their way into the house... The rioters set fire to (it) in two places and heaped upon it every combustible article they could meet with.'

For all that the play contains a 'multiplicity of voices', a single coherent statement does begin to emerge. Overall, there is a fundamentally serious tone which derives from the documentary sources. In places, the play tries to be funny in a kind of music-hall manner at the expense of, for example, two manufacturers discussing the Jolly machine, or the dragoon Major. Elsewhere there are flashes of a bitter working-class humour, but it is the sympathetic anger, such as we have been made to feel at the Chell Workhouse sequence, which prevails. Above all, the play succeeds in winning our sympathies for the plight of the potters and makes some justification for the Chartist Riots. It does so by the orchestration of its first half. In this sure organisation

of the play's material, the single-minded intention becomes apparent. It is one voice, the synthesis of the many we have heard, and it could be expected to find many a sympathetic ear in a Potteries audience. It is a voice which denounces institutionalised oppression and affirms the need to take a stand against it, although not, perhaps, to such an extent as the riots. It is not, as Cheeseman sometimes implies, an objective voice, and nor would we wish it to be. The theatre is not the place for uncoloured catalogues of facts and events. Cheeseman's strength is that he has interpreted events in a way which his audience were glad to hear. 'Received with acclamation', said the local Evening Sentinel.[14]

'The Jolly Potters' is a clear pointer to the success of the later plays. Such inconsistencies of style as it contains, arise from scenes where a narration displays an attitude to the material presented, as in the coyness of the comment on the 'remonstrating' master, or where the dialogue has been invented. For example, the two businessmen who discuss the Jolly machine, also explain its workings to the audience. Although funny in a music-hall fashion, the effect is to belittle the subject matter:

> '1st Businessman — You want to know how many men it takes to operate this machine of mine?
> 2nd Businessman — Yes, how many men does it take to operate this machine?
> 1st — I'll tell you.
> 2nd — Tell me.
> 1st — I will. One!
> 2nd — One?
> 1st — One! They call him a Spattler.
> 2nd — A what?
> 1st — A Spattler.
> 2nd — That's a mucky word.
> 1st — It's a mucky job.'

Failings such as these led to Cheeseman's insistence on the use of original utterances.[15] In the next documentary play, however, he seems to have been aware of this need, but as yet unable to carry it out fully.

In terms of audiences, 'The Jolly Potters' was a success, and as a result, Cheeseman decided the create 'The Staffordshire Rebels'. It opened a year later, almost to the day. In it, the company were to delve their earliest into local history, and it deals, like the Octagon's 'Bolton Massacre' four years later,[16] with some events of the English Civil War. At Bolton, the siege of Latham House provided an obvious intersection of national and local events, but In'The Staffordshire Rebels', Cheeseman seems to have found it a continual struggle to retain a local focus:.

> 'The national material is so copious and so dramatic that one is constantly led away from consideration of what went on here in Staffordshire.' [17]

As well as the final script, which contains virtually no stage directions

and is therefore mainly an apportionment of dialogue,[18] an extensive 'Production Casebook' has been published.[19] It contains transcripts of Cheeseman at work with the company, a detailed synopsis of the whole play, excerpts from scenes transcribed from a BBC film of rehearsals, and retrospective comment by Cheeseman on the whole process.

The play opens with Charles I at a Court masque, and dry comment upon its elaboration is made by a narration which lists the King's debts of over a million pounds. There follow a number of short scenes in which local villagers express grievances against Charles and the Catholics. Cromwell is then introduced in a scene where he responds on behalf of the Commons to an event being simultaneously acted, Charles's arrest of five members of Parliament. Speeches from Charles and Cromwell, reactions from local people, and a song about the war's miseries lead to the symbolic re-enactment of the Battle of Edgehill. The path of the war is traced in announcements, spoken letters and songs which are intercut with scenes focussing on individual reactions: Court ladies who discuss the war's progress; the Uttoxeter Church Warden who works out the monies received first for billeting the rebels and later the Royalists; several gentlemen who thank the King for the relief of Lichfield. The first half ends with the climax of the battles of Marston Moor and Naseby.

The second half opens with the Diggers' Song about the Social Levellers. It is used to express the disagreement among Parliamentarians about how democratic they should be. Their differing views are disputed in a heavily edited version of the Putney Debates and there follows the establishment of Cromwell's dictatorship. A strong climax is reached (in theatrical terms) with the trial and execution of Charles I. The years of the Commonwealth are briefly treated, and then we see the escape and wanderings of Charles II prior to his restoration. The final song, 'Here's a Health unto his Majesty' is intercut with gruesome accounts of the principal rebels' deaths, and the play ends with the repeat of a speech from the Putney Debates in favour of democracy.

In his initial briefing of the company, at the stage when he and Ron Daniels had amassed a quantity of documentary material and rehearsals were to begin, Cheeseman outlined the principal national events that he felt were unavoidable as a basis. From the outset, it appears that he was expecting the local material at most to clothe an already agreed framework.

> '...the national events give us a good structure on which to build the flesh of the show.' [20]

In contrast, as we shall see, the Octagon company had an almost ready-made story with a heroine, Lady Derby, a climax in her struggle with the Roundheads, and a resolution in the massacre which gave the play its title. In the absence at Stoke of such tractable material, Cheeseman made his decision about the

prominence to be given the national material. Only about one quarter of the play's episodes are local, and even these are local to Staffordshire rather than to Stoke. They are short episodes and half of them were created by two actors and two actresses improvising and writing from a basis of historical sources. These invented scenes show how common people fared during the Civil War and are juxtaposed with the large-scale events. That Cheeseman was prepared to accept such invention is an indication of the importance he attached to emphasising the common person's point of view. His overall intention seems to have been to present the whole of the Civil War, concentrating on its major events (and not solely the battles) as seen from a Stoke viewpoint.

Cheeseman's technique for realising his intention was to intercut episodes so that each viewpoint or set of facts might comment on the next and in turn be commented upon. This happens with the Masque and the list of debts. The local view of national events is similarly realised, as when the episode of 'War Preparations', with its nationally addressed speeches, is followed by 'The King at Uttoxeter' which shows the opening movements of the King's armies from Staffordshire to Shrewsbury. This kind of cutting is not regular or repetitive; it could not be, given the apparent paucity of local material related to commoners; but it occurs sufficiently frequently to remind the audience of the Civil War's local repercussions.

A refinement of the technique is when cutting is used <u>within</u> scenes to create a local emphasis. This is particularly noticeable in 'The Trial of Charles I'. When the King is arrested, a recorded voice announces that his escort is to be Thomas Harrison, a local man, and the meeting between Charles and Harrison is enacted. At the trial itself, the recorder John Bradshaw, is a local man, and this point is emphasised by holding up the action to announce him, while a ballad is sung expressing popular hatred for him.

We can see that, in general, the construction of 'The Staffordshire Rebels' is more complex than that of 'The Jolly Potters'. In the first play, episodes were, on the whole, fairly self-contained. It is simple, in the script, to identify and name them. Songs, similarly, are as distinct as the dramatised episodes. Its structure is a straightforward montage of readings, narrations, and songs used as links. 'The Staffordshire Rebels' has what can best be described as a 'texture' created by adding and overlaying dramatic material from different kinds of sources. The episode of 'The Battle of Marston Moor' will illustrate the point.

Some seven actors took part in the battle, three on the Royalist side, four on the other, and each carried a large stiff banner on top of a pole. The battle itself was represented formally by comparatively rigid moves as the actors changed their positions relative to one another, while a factual account,

edited from historical records, could be heard from loudspeakers over the stage.

> 'It provided a dry factual commentary to the major movements of the battle which were prepared for like a football line-up or chess game, with all seven actors standing facing one another, representing the principal sections of the respective armies. The distant rumble of horses backed the whole action, like a kind of machine in motion. As each development occurred, the appropriate actor would move forward and engage with an opponent simply by crossing banners with him. All movements were slow, but not draggy. Just formal.' [21]

Here are three levels: the formalised stage picture, the factual commentary, and the naturalistic sound effect. As the battle ends, the levels are replaced by equivalent ones:

> 'Voice over ...The battle ended by midnight leaving over 4,000 Royalist corpses lying on the field. Parliamentary dead 300. Duration of the battle two hours.
> (Enter Parliamentary soldier with lantern)
> 1st Soldier Where are you?
> 2nd Soldier Over here.
> 1st I'm falling over them all the time. (Enters)
> 2nd (Moves up left)
> 1st Any more over there?
> 2nd No. They 're all dead, this lot.
> 1st Corporal. (Indicates Cromwell, sitting nearby)
> 2nd I beg your pardon, sir, for disturbing you.
> (Cromwell acknowledges with a gesture)
> Cromwell Goodnight.
> 2nd Goodnight, sir.
> (Enter a soldier/secretary with writing materials)
> Cromwell To my loving Brother, Colonel Valentine Walton...'

It is the continuity of the several different threads that is important. The two soldiers have left their banners offstage and are now relaxed: not so much soldiers as ordinary men. The black humour of the scene (reminiscent of 'Oh What a Lovely War') picks up in its realism the naturalism of the horses' sound effect. Even Cromwell does not enter, but is discovered, and by his stillness is a reminder of the formalised battle he had instigated. It is important to notice that although soldier and leader address each other, they belong to quite different areas of the play. The point is reinforced when Cromwell begins to dictate.a description of the events. Already the battle is at one remove.

This layered texture recalls Piscator's visually simultaneous presentation of different elements; what we called, in relation to 'Hoppla, such is life' and'Rasputin', theatrical 'collage'. It is as though the two soldiers and Cromwell are in different 'rooms'. Each has his own quite different perspective on events. The voice over gives us yet another, that of the neutral statistician. The effect of this textural collage is to encourage us to bear

in mind many different factors at once; it recreates for us the complexity of actual events. We watch simultaneously from a number of viewpoints, as historians, as judges, and perhaps as potential participants. Although we are aware of the narrative flow of events, we are encouraged to look beyond them.

At the first rehearsal, Cheeseman had said, 'The documentary material itself will determine the way in which we select the pieces to be used, and the way in which we present each piece of material.'[22] In a general sense, this was to be so, and the material runs in the correct temporal order. But in detail it seems impossible to support. For instance, much could have been said about life in Cromwell's England as a comparison with the hardships under Charles I, and the Putney Debates omitted. They were included because Cheeseman and the company at Stoke thought they went some way to explaining the underlying issues of the Civil War, and because they had something important to say about democracy. At Bolton, the great quantity of local material led to an emphasis on Lady Derby's adventure; at Stoke there was a desire to go deeper.

If the selection of material is much more the result of conscious decision than Cheeseman's assertion would suggest, so too is the manner of presentation. There is no reason <u>implicit</u> in the material that should lead to the battles being represented formalistically, although we can sense the theatrical reason, and recognise its indebtedness to Brecht's experiments in his didactic plays.[23] Another director might well have made from the battles scenes of great violence. What is clear is that, just as the editing of episodes is used by Cheeseman to contrast differing viewpoints, the layered penetration of the material within episodes achieves the same result at a much more personal level. The soldiers' and the general's view of the battle is contrasted in the stage collage just as much as the montage of intercut episodes contrasts the attitudes of different social groups.

There can be no doubt that, much more than in 'The Jolly Potters', Cheeseman enables us to hear a multiplicity of viewpoints. Nevertheless, there is a clear overall statement and commitment, as there was in the earlier play. Where the play falters, it is in those improvised scenes that attempt to remedy the largest gap in the source material, the absence of records revealing, in their own language, how commoners and ordinary villagers felt during the Civil War. The complex statement that in 'The Staffordshire Rebels' is only occasionally sketched, is fully realised in the later plays, when it will be argued that Cheeseman is attempting a documentation of feeling rather than fact.

In order to find an authentic source for the language of common people, and thus to remdy the weakness of the earlier documentaries, Cheeseman, in 'The

Knotty' began to experiment with the portable tape recorder. In 'The Jolly Potters' the speech of ordinary people had been suggested by folk song and recreated from Chartist pamphlets. Now Cheeseman was to develop a new strength by interviewing on tape those people whose utterances previous generations of historians would not have thought worth noting.

Cheeseman had been alerted to the value of recording vernacular speech by Charles Parker, the producer of the Radio Ballads. Cheeseman was not the first to use recorded actuality in the theatre ('Hang Down Your Head and Die' preceded 'The Knotty' by two years) but his has been the only consistent exploration and development of its potential.

As well as suggesting a method of working, 'The Ballad of John Axon' may have prompted Cheeseman to consider railways and railwaymen as subject matter. He had a railwayman grandfather, and on the staff at the Victoria Theatre was a retired driver, whose reminiscences were to provide one of the starting points for 'The Knotty'. The title is the nickname given to the loop line connecting the Potteries towns. The first half of the play derives from the more conventionally historic sources of company records, newspapers, posters and other written documentary materials. The second part is built around the recorded speeches of the railwaymen whom the actors interviewed as part of the research process. The prominence of this kind of source material, new to the Vic, was emphasised by a cluster of loudspeakers, visible over the acting area, that served both for the recordings and as the announcement loudspeakers of Stoke railway station.

The play spans the period from the line's survey to its amalgamation into the LMS Railway. The title is deceptive, for the play only ostensibly tells the railway's history. Although the important events are dramatised, the process we saw beginning in 'The Staffordshire Rebels' has reached the point where, certainly in 'The Knotty's' second half, events have been totally subordinated to human response. The Evening Sentinel's critic wrote,

> '...it concentrates on the human incidents around the historical facts of a continuous thread of events, rather than merely reciting them.' [24]

The play can best be described as a montage of fragments from many men's lives. Incident and event are important only so far as they create a framework for human behaviour to be examined. The picture thus built up is of a social organisation as it is evaulated by its many participants.

Two quotations will help establish the flavour of the second half. In both of them an actor responds to the voice of the loudspeaker. It is reminiscent of the technique used in the Chell Workhouse sequence, but the relationship here is rather different. In this first example, the onstage character - a new lad - hears the voice just as we do. He - and we - are acquiring a mixture of

railway lore and wisdom.

> 'Loudspeaker Voice (Frank Oakes) It's not unknown for a man to get sandwiched between two trains - in that case, of course, the rule was that you must drop down flat, you drop down flat on your stomach.
> (The lad listens to this)' [25]

In the second, the actor is playing the person whose voice is heard, so that the tape-recording becomes his thoughts:

> 'Loudspeaker Voice (Fred Adams) The people that was good to us in the Potteries was Bamfords of Uttoxeter, they was a golden sovereign; Royce, Mrs Royce, Rolls-Royce of Derby, they was a golden sovereign; Francis Joseph, Joseph of Alsager, Settles, he was a golden sovereign; and Lady Torrington, the race-horse owner, if you got her, that was a golden sovereign... But there was lots more and, if you got a golden sovereign, it was a lot in them days, you know.
> (The porter gazes lovingly at the sovereign)' [26]

While remembering the narrative line of the play is not of first importance, we should perhaps set out briefly the order of events as a context for the subsequent discussion. After an opening song, a stage coach scene dramatises the dangers of early road travel and is followed by comments on the newly invented railways. A meeting of the Potteries Railway Committee is enacted from the minutes, and we are immediately, if indirectly, informed of the Committee's eventual success by a short scene that cuts across the temporal sequence, the enactment of a story recorded by a local man, about his grandad navvying on the line. We then see George Stephenson employed to survey the route. A song links the next scene, the only one of any importance that was invented. In melodramatic style, the story is told of a villain company lawyer who buys cheaply, from a poor farmer and his wife, the land on which Crewe Junction would stand. In a pole-dance reminiscent in style of the Civil War battles of 'The Staffordshire Rebels', the rivalry between the many Midlands railway companies is shown, followed by the opposition of local landowners to the Knotty. Scenes and songs dramatise the building of the railway by the navvies. The Knotty's opening, seen through the eyes of a local Chartist, is contrasted with the optimism of local manufacturers, and the final song of the first half pinpoints the play's focus. It was sung unaccompanied.

> Railway lines; railway lines,
> Roads of steel
> Which join and part and bend
> And then rush away
> To meet again somewhere
> Sometimes;
> Like the lives of men.

Peter Cheeseman describes how the quality of this song, commenting upon, and summing up the previous action, 'brought the theatre to a reverent standstill'.[27]

Cut through much of the second half, and acting as one of the unifying forces, are numerous short episodes, many of them dramatisations of well-worn anecdotes. They create a picture of the legendary W.D. Phillips, one of the line's general managers, who had the knack of unexpectedly catching out railwaymen in some petty infringement of the rules. One such anecdote is the 'Courtesy Tale':

> '(W.D. enters, the lad sees him and hurriedly tries to avoid meeting him.)
> W.D. Boy, come here!
> Lad Yes sir.
> W.D Where were you going just then, boy? (Pause) Wherever he may be, whatever he may be doing - a railwayman will always observe the courtesies to other railwaymen. Have you got that? Don't cross the road when you see me coming again.
> Lad Yes, Sir.
> W.D Right! Good day. (W.D. goes off.)'[28]

The lad's first day on the Knotty and all that happens to him organises the first part of the second half. A long shunting sequence holds together a number of scenes dramatising the growth of a militancy which led to strikes for Union recognition. An overlong sequence details how a Knotty driver in the Great War passed all the tests of the Railway Operating Division of the Royal Engineers and was involved in running ambulance trains. It occupies over a quarter of the second half, and although by a kind of reflection, we learn more about the Knotty and its drivers, it is easy to sympathise with the Guardian reviewer, who said of the sequence, it 'hardly relates at all'.[29] After a further strike, the play ends nostalgically with the Amalgamation told through the words of men and management, culminating in the specially composed song 'Farewell to the world of W.D.'.

As with the previous plays, songs are particularly important, and there is great variety. They range from traditional folk songs, through songs composed in the folk idiom, to navvy songs of the period, themselves derived from earlier rural songs. There is even an Edwardian ballad which two drivers recalled singing on the footplate while shunting at night. Of the songs, over half were original compositions, suggesting that here, Cheeseman felt able to diverge from his primary source rule. These fall into roughly three categories, those that are railwaymen's poems set to music, such as the 'Driver and Fireman Song', those written in the folk idiom by Jeff Parton, such as 'The Navvy Song', and those that are a poetic response to the railway by a member of the company, particularly Peter Terson's 'Towns upon a Hill' and Gillian Brown's 'Railway Lines'. As many as half the company, six people, were involved in creating the new songs.

For the rest of the play, the primary source rule is largely adhered to, and since the material is much less well-known than that for 'The Staffordshire

Rebels', there is a freshness and sense of originality pervading the whole play. There is a great deal more fun and humour than in the earlier documentaries (and the later ones, too), some of it, like the W.D. Phillips anecdotes dictated by the sources, and some deriving from a sheer delight in the material. The purchase of Crewe Station's land, for example, was developed into 'a kind of cabaret turn'.[30] The company appears to have been a particularly happy one in the variety of its contributions, from Peter King's 'comic talent', to the musical ability of Jeff Parton, Gillian Brown and Anne Raitt. Ron Daniels - the only one - had had experience of this method of working in 'The Staffordshire Rebels'. The result was a play that

> 'moves briskly with an often exhilarating verve: the company has really managed to prise life out of documented history.' [31]

For the local critic, it was

> 'a night of unashamed Potteries fervour, with something like the atmosphere at Stoke's first home match...' [32]

'The Knotty' was revived a year later, and again in April 1969 when the company toured it to the Florence International Theatre Festival. It is one of the few local documentary plays to have been published.

In looking more closely at 'The Knotty' to consider the reasons for its success, we can sense the confidence of Cheeseman and the company in their ability to sustain the chosen style. Whereas some sections of the play are very complex, such as the Shunting Sequence dealt with below, others are deceptive in their simplicity. One such is Stephenson's survey of the line. According to Cheeseman's notes, it was conflated from quoted speeches in various biographies of Stephenson.

> 'Stephenson The total length of the railway from Norton to near Harecastle is about fourteen miles, on no part of which the inclination exceeds sixteen feet per mile, and that is a descent in favour of the load in passing down from the Potteries.
> (Murmurs of approval from the manufacturers)
> My advice to you in forming this branch is this: to buy land and build bridges for a double line of railway, but, in the first instance, to lay a single one only, as I imagine that two powerful engines will do all the business, both of passengers and goods of heavy merchandise that you can require at first.' [33]

The 'Stephenson Report' scene is, in the published script, nearly three pages of prose in length, and entirely factual, in the manner quoted. Stephenson speaks for about nine-tenths of the whole passage, and such a long speech would perhaps attract the attention of a critic attempting to demolish documentary drama. Cheeseman himself had had doubts, but in the event they were dispelled:

> '...a scene that was watched in a concentrated silence which surprised us in Stoke at first...' [34]

The critic might ask, in what sense can a scene be dramatic which contains no interchange, no 'cut and thrust' of dialogue, where indeed the manufacturers nod assent to all Stephenson has to say? The presence of the manufacturers gives us a clue. It is difficult to imagine the scene working without them, for it would become a kind of lecture-demonstration. It is their silent, attentive concentration that causes the audience to listen. We may not be entirely aware of the consequences arising from what Stephenson has to say, but we can take a cue from the manufacturers. It is especially easy for the Vic audience to do this, for whereas on a proscenium stage the listening actor is tucked away to one side, or is facing partly upstage, in the round he is as prominent as the actor speaking. The quality of the acted response can therefore help us to listen to the speech as though we were railway speculators, and Stephenson's appeal to us to see the plan in his own cost-conscious terms is a step in this direction. We listen to the speech aware that the future can be changed. In this way, the long scene creates a suspense, and it is this that is responsible for the silence Cheeseman describes. We do not speculate as to the outcome of a struggle between two characters, but as to which choice the manufacturers, the other members of the Committee of which we now feel a part, will make in the face of Stephenson's disinterested advice. Will they see the plain sense that we, the audience, are beginning to see? But of course we know the outcome, the Knotty was built, and follows the route Stephenson has described. Instead of a response from the Committee, the suspense is discharged by the guitar beginning its accompaniment to a song, which tells us these railway will come, but comments on our involvement by reminding us of the damage that 'our' decision will cause:

'Hanley and Burslem were towns upon a hill,
Fowlea Brook ran down from Goldenhill,
And the valley it was green
And the hills they were serene,
But the coming of machine
Takes the life from out the green
And the coming of the rail
Will drive the deadly nail
In the coffin of the day
When the green turns into grey.
Hanley and Burslem were towns upon a hill.'

The point of discussing the Stephenson scene is that we should not look for the dramatic solely <u>within</u> a scene. The Stephenson Survey is in total one voice, one protagonist. Its dramatic quality derives from the relationship, pointed to by the song, which the scene bears to the dramatised events that have gone before, and to those that will follow. In this context, the listening manufacturers are a reminder of that relationship, and in a similar way, so are the actors who respond to the recorded voices quoted earlier. Cheeseman

is developing in his own way a theatrical montage which bears many resemblances to the precedents we have already discussed. His montage, however, is not for the purposes of political polemic, so much as to juxtapose points of view across time, to show us how actions have social consequences with repercussions decades, even a century, later. His montage allows, in effect, for actions to be understood in a sympathetic context - we share the Committee's excitement - and yet to be judged in a historical light.

In attempting to create a reality which bridges past and present, Cheeseman frequently relates different kinds of material in a way that can appear, at first sight, incongruous. In part, it is a development of the technique of linking short unconnected episodes with an underlying song; in part, too, it is a search for means to formalise a statement, in the manner of the Civil War battles. 'Shunting Sequence' relates the growth of railway Unionism to the work of men shunting. It does so in a manner that has a rhythmic, almost dance-like, quality.

In a stage-direction, the script describes rather extensively the mime which was developed as a means of showing an important part of the railwaymen's job. I quote it in full, but I have split it into two columns in order to show something of the process which has occurred. The original direction can be understood by reading across both columns.

(The sound effect of a steam hiss, as from a locomotive, is already heard when the sequence begins)

	'The stage is very dark
The shunter stands...	...in a tight shaft of light by the wide central entrance...
...holding his shunting pole in one hand and signal lantern in the other. After each whistle signal (to the...	...unseen...
signalman in his box) he...	...turns to face up the entrance and...
shouts to the driver the name of the section they are shunting onto. Then he brings the engine on by showing a green light.	The hiss is replaced by the sound of...
...the engine slowly approaching.	Driver and fireman ultimately appear, only their faces lit as though peering out of either side of the cab.
The shunter flicks his lamp to red to stop the engine.	There is a clank as...
...the wagons are unhooked, the shunter levering his pole...	into the darkness...
Then he hurries...	...across the stage...
following the ...	...sound of rumbling...
wagons till they hit the others on that track...	...with a crash. The Union Secretary's spotlight comes on, the light steam hiss takes over....,
the shunter sends the engine slowly back for another shunt	

by flicking his light to white...,	...moving into his first position during each of the Union Secretary's speeches. The sequence occurs three times.)' [35]

The left-hand column reads like a manual of instruction and might be useful to a railway shunter. How the material has been treated theatrically is apparent in the right-hand column.

The initial concern of a director in a sequence like this must be how to avoid a charade-like sense of embarrassment, and to preserve the audience's involvement in the reality of the situation. It could be all too reminiscent of boys pistoning their arms as they play trains. The first part of the solution is the authenticity of the costume and properties, particularly the shunter's signal lantern. Secondly there is the authenticity of their use. The actor-shunter, for example, had learnt the whistle-code which communicates with the signalman. Over and above these important details is the strong contribution of lighting and sound that the second column emphasises. The railway effects were all recorded live, while the lighting, we note, was a 'tight shaft' on the shunter, and such as to frame the driver's and fireman's faces. The result was thus highly atmospheric, a series of brief impressions, but which nevertheless focussed on the actors. Such staging reminds us that it is not the mechanical adjuncts of a job that are important, but the human skill involved. Having wooed us with his stage illusion, Cheeseman forces us to consider how even an 'ordinary' shunter possesses an extraordinary skill. We see 'The Knotty's' shunters in a new light, like Grierson's fishermen.

Cheeseman, however, goes further than Grierson in showing the railwaymen's own social consciousness. He does this by using the shunting as a framework for a number of Union scenes culminating in a strike. The complete sequence begins after two railwaymen have sung the sentimental 'Moon Song'. The shunter crosses, cueing a loudspeaker announcement of the first Union meeting at Stoke in 1904. The Union Secretary, picked out in a spotlight, reads the minutes: the meeting is already past. Immediately, there is the sound of a blast of steam, and after a brief conversation about the Union, Shunter, Fireman and Driver commence the action described above.

On its completion, the spotlight fades up again on the Secretary and he reads a resolution of a year later, instructing him to express the Branch's feelings to the Company about poor conditions of service. The shunting action then repeats; again the spotlight picks out the Secretary, this time to read a resolution of 1908 to the effect that a member in dispute with the Company shall be supported by a deputation. The light goes out and there is a third shunting sequence. When it ends, in case we should expect the Union Secretary, instead, and characteristically, W.D. Phillips pops up:

'Shunter (Shouts) Come on, bang the bastards up!
W.D. Shunter! Those waggons may have no father, but I am their rich uncle.' [36]

The Secretary appears, this time to read a resolution of 1909, setting up a debating class, and when he goes, Driver, Fireman and Shunter meet for a cup of tea, and the scene (largely invented by Ron Daniels, but closely derived from contemporary sources) expresses their different views about the value of the class and the Union. These three are now to form the basis of the continuity in the remaining part of the sequence.

At the end of their scene, 'Lights illuminate long signboards high up in the auditorium saying "Staffordshire Advertiser" and "Evening Sentinel",' and the loudspeaker, using reports from these newspapers, punctuates a sequence starting with the Company Chairman's gloomy report which blames 'labour troubles'.for the poor dividend. Two W.D. Phillips stories and a two-part song between a striker's and a blackleg's wife lead into the strike, where the men's different attitudes are embodied in Driver, Fireman and Shunter.

What needs to be asked is, what is the theatrical logic behind this apparent hotchpotch of scenes? Is it simply a rather poor attempt to dramatise a historical sequence, or does it make some more coherent statement? If we take the focus on the men's faces by the spotlights in the shunting sequence as a starting-point, we can begin to answer the question. At one level, the intercut shunts allow the play to cope with the passage of time required by the narrative of the Union's growth, but the overall effect is to set up a dialectic between the two. What emerges is an attitude on the part of the men, one of earnestness and concentration, which derives from the requirements of their potentially dangerous work (we remember Frank Oakes's voice, 'It's not unknown for a man to get sandwiched between two trains...'). We see them applying this attitude first to self-education, and then to the creation of a Union. What is dramatised is a portrait of men whose self-esteem derives from their work, and who are capable of going farther to create a social organisation which will articulate and defend their sense of personal worth. The middle scenes contrast two attitudes, that of the patronising W.D. Phillips, tempering his absolute authority with a condescending humour that was to be remembered fifty years later, and that of the impersonal Chairman, for whom the men were obstacles to an expected monetary return. In this context, we are prepared to see the culminating scenes as not solely an economic confrontation between workers and management, but an attempt by the men to legitimise their desire to be treated as the responsible people their work demands them to be. It is a theme Cheeseman was to return to more single-mindedly in 'Fight for Shelton Bar'.

This is the central preoccupation of 'The Knotty'. The stature derived from

their work links the men of the second half not only to the navvies of the first half, but also to Stephenson. 'The Knotty' is one of a few plays, of which Miles Malleson's 'D Company'[37] is an early example, that treat working men not as clowns in a tradition dating back at least to Shakespeare, nor as moral symbols as Galsworthy does in 'Strife', but as persons whose work-derived responsibility fits them to be central to an audience's attention. It does this, as we have seen, in its construction and staging, but above all by letting the voices of working men be heard either on the theatre loudspeakers or as transcripts spoken by actors. 'Verbatim transcripts of tape recordings make amazingly vigorous and speakable theatre:dialogue' notes Cheeseman in an apparent surprise which recalls MacColl's earlier perception.[38]

The technique is virtually without precedent in the theatre. As a decision to record local people, it arose from the need, in accordance with Cheeseman's rule on primary sources, to find material for a particular kind of scene that in 'The Jolly Potters' and 'The Staffordshire Rebels' had to be invented. In accumulating such source material, the company at Stoke took a step of some significance. In the earlier plays, and in those at other theatres, where reliance is placed on literary documents, newspaper accounts and so on, the result is, in substance, a montage of objets trouvés. By interviewing, the actors are, in effect, creating their own source material, and this is a considerable step in a new direction. The point is that any such attempt must be preceded by decisions as to what kind of material to obtain. The method gives the authors of a documentary play much greater control over the creative process. It becomes a much more conscious matter than simply selecting from an array of available sources, and it is more open to the authors to attempt to make their own statement through the material. An interaction is set up with it that is closely analagous to the process of shooting documentary film.

Such interaction led to a further significant change in the work at Stoke, although after 'The Knotty' it was not to reappear until the two most recent documentaries. In creating the Shunting Sequence, for example, the actors rehearsed with railwaymen present. In this way, the whole company was brought into contact not with 'material', but with knowledgeable, skilled human beings, and the function of the actor began to change from one of interpretation to one of description. The actor playing the Shunter portrays the character in such a way as to say, 'Don't be concerned with this man's personality, but concentrate on how he does his job!. This is more than a stylistic matter. The personal contact creates in the members of the company a respect and sympathy which is apparent in their presentation of the play. We shall see this most clearly when we come to discuss 'Fight for Shelton Bar'.

The preoccupation of 'The Knotty' with the way in which men can derive

stature from their work is entirely consonant with the 'voice' or statement that the two earlier documentaries were making. In all three, the concern is with groups of people trying to assert themselves in the face of wider events set in motion by others in more powerful positions. While a similar concern can be traced in 'Six into One', this documentary play is conspicuously different in its lack of a consistent working-class or'ordinary person's' point of view.

Between 'The Knotty' and 'Six into One' is a gap of two years, occasioned by an internal struggle over the management of the Vic, that led at one point to Cheeseman being barred from the theatre. The gap was partly filled by the revival of'The Knotty'. 'Six into One' was inspired by the publication of the Maud report on local government reorganisation, and took for its subject, as a kind of parable, the political events leading to the federation of the six Potteries towns in 1910. The title's implication, six into one won't go, comes true in the first half, when federation is rejected, but the decision is reversed by the end of the play.

Like 'The Knotty', the play's impressionistic quality makes it difficult to describe adequately. In the first half, linked by song, are enquiries into the sanitation of the six towns and its effect on infant mortality. A tram-ride tour links numerous reminiscences which build up a picture of the Potteries. We are introduced to Alderman Geen who was the main architect of federation, and we watch the many meetings that lead to its rejection. In the second half, Geen's plan is resurrected at an enquiry and eventually finds acceptance, but weakened by the struggle, Geen collapses and later dies. A final scene draws a parallel with an enquiry that had happened a few weeks before 'Six into One' was staged, in which Stoke council's plans to demolish a small community, Brindley Ford, were opposed.

The script that I had access to shows evidence of many cuts and amendments, giving the impression of a play never quite finished and rushed into the repertoire. Its source materials were newspaper accounts, published letters, minutes of council meetings and local enquiries, conference addresses, and propaganda pamphlets, as well as a comparatively small number of tape-recorded reminiscenses. Perhaps this quantity of overwhelmingly literary material was too much for the company to handle.

> 'I had the feeling... that the company were being swamped by their source material, and this impression became a conviction in the second half of the show.' [39]

The Evening Sentinel entitled the review, 'Six Towns tour play goes astray'. Perhaps it is difficult to find relevance in local political arguments of sixty years previously, or perhaps the material led too obviously to a straight-

forward re-creation of committee scenes. In any case, 'Six into One' lacks the interplay of levels, the texture, of 'The Knotty'. The Guardian reviewer accurately summed up the difficulty:

> 'It is too wordy by half, and the words, being mostly those of pedantic councillors, are not noticeably stage worthy.' [40]

The tram ride is one of the few memorable sequences. It describes the Potteries impressionistically, linking statistics of population and services with individual memories. The whole is given shape by the framework of a queue forming as we hear the taped voices over the stage loudspeakers, followed by the ride itself, when the actors speak from tape transcripts. At each stop, the conductor acts as guide, and supplies statistics:

> 'Conductor Longton! including Dresden, Florence and Normacot. Population 37,000, has potbanks, mines, brick and tile works. Town Hall, Public Baths, Queen's Theatre, Anglican Church, Catholic, Baptist, Congregational, Wesleyan, United and Primitive Methodist and Unitarian chapels.
> Sue T. Why do they call it Neck End?
> Conductor I suppose it's the last place anyone ud think of going to.
> Geoff (from transcript) Longton has always been one of the dirtiest towns - smoke and grime.
> Conductor I live here.
> Sue T. (from transcript) Longton Park's the best of the lot, 'ast never been to Longton Park?
> Chris (from transcript) Longton wasn't too clever, has always been a working class district - it's always been a poorly paid area and it's through that people grew up in that atmosphere of never expecting too much and satisfied with what they got.
> Ellis I must say a word or two for Longton. It is pleasantly situated. It enjoys the early morning sun and the sweet refreshing breezes of the south and has a landscape of thousands of acres to look out on.
> Janet (from transcript) I worked in Longton in a factory and that's what Longton means to me.
> Conductor Fenton! '

Sewers are a preoccupation of the first half, and while perhaps an unusual subject in the theatre, they might possibly have been the core of an exploration of attitudes, as the railway was to 'The Knotty'. Instead, the sewers become matter for debate and enquiry, except for a nicely satirical scene where the Duchess of Sutherland, admiring the River Trent, running below her country hall at Trentham wonders why its smell (represented in typical Stoke fashion by a swanee whistle) should be so obnoxious.

One song manages successfully a style which gives human substance to child mortality statistics. The Song of Longton was sung antiphonally:

Sue	Longton
Gill	Neck End
S & G	Longton
S & G	A name which stands for many things
S & G	A name which brings to mind

G	A town deprived of everything but need
S	A town renowned
G	A town defiled by excrement and filth
S	A town of craftsmanship
G	A town whose face is black
S	A town whose stamp is guarantee
G	A town diseased
S	A town whose name is quality and pride
S	Longton
G	Neck End
S & G	Longton
S & G	A name which stands for many things
S	A name which brings to mind
G	A cup of finest porcelain made there
S & G	A dead child killed there
	Longton.

The words and music were composed by Gillian Brown who sang the black response, and the style clearly echoes here earlier work for 'The Knotty'. Jeff Parton, whose compositions and arrangements had been so important to the first three documentaries was unavailable, and in comparison with the earlier documentary plays, there is a poverty of song.

'Six into One' was not a box-office success, and it is significant that the documentary chosen for the Florence festival the following April was a revival of 'The Knotty'. We have seen how that play succeeded in finding humour in its source material. The sources for 'Six into One' were more intractable.

'The Burning Mountain' re-established the Vic's use of working men's speech as an element of the play comparable in importance with the narrative and with the central figure of Hugh Bourne. The tapes themselves were not used, perhaps because there had been adverse comment on the quality of those for 'Six into One',[41] but also because the modern voices were to be integrated into the script in a very distinctive manner. Instead of the taped voices, the transcripts are acted throughout, and they are handled as part of the play's construction with an assurance equal to that in 'The Knotty'. It is a shock when we first hear these modern voices, so different in their language, in a play which is apparently setting out to tell the story of a Primitive Methodist preacher. The shock, like the coaching scene in 'The Knotty' which prepares us for the simple physical enactment of documentation,[42] here asks us to see beyond the play's overt story. It is worth looking closely at the opening sequence so that we may be aware of the 'texture' peculiar to the whole play.

As the houselights go out, we hear the sound of an ambulance, followed in the darkness by a baby crying. With this suggestion of modern birth, the stage lights pick out an actor in period costume who speaks three verses from the Book of Corinthians, and then the actor playing the preacher, Hugh Bourne, enters to a double cymbal beat, and quotes from the autobiography a description

of his birthplace. A procession, centred on a mother carrying her baby, enters singing a hymn, and the child is baptised. A link has been made between the modern birth of a child, the traditional, and the birth of Hugh Bourne. After a further hymn, the congregation kneel to pray. Wherupon three of the men who, during the hymn, repeated some of its phrases questioningly, 'Steals my senses?', 'Drowns my spirit?', move to one side on their knees, light up cigarettes, and re-enact from a transcript, a contemporary pub conversation:

> 'Ted I... I think this is probably the answer, that... er the super-natural should be left alone. If you leave them alone they're quite alright (sic) if there is such a thing as the supernatural. Never bothered with it.
> Alan That's a good policy, that is, don't delve into something you know nothing about. Which is... what a lot of people are doing in my opinion. They're delving into things they haven't got a clue about.
> Chris That's very true...'

The conversation continues for nineteen more lines, when the priest interjects his 'amen' to the prayer that has been silently continuing. A third hymn is sung antiphonally, as the company circles round, and in this context it is comic when one of the actors from the pub conversation interpolates, 'You can't join in, you know!. It also expresses a popular view of religion which is explored during the rest of the play.

With this indication of the play's style, we can look briefly at its outline. Hugh Bourne's childhood is dramatised in one significant incident in which he makes a promise that eventually leads him to become a preacher. A further pub conversation on superstition leads into a dramatisation of a story that Bourne heard, of some sailors visiting Mount Stromboli, the 'burning mountain' of the title. They had a vision of a man they knew, Old Booty, being chased into the volcano's fire by the devil; upon their return home, they found the vision had coincided to the minute with the man's death. Modern accounts in Stoke of death tokens that had been subsequently verified are compared with Hugh Bourne's meditations on the vision of Old Booty. His growing conviction of hell-fire leads him to join the Methodists.

Three separate sequences complete the first half. In the first, miners' accounts of ghosts are a preamble to Bourne's conversion of his cousin Dan Shubotham, himself a miner renowned for his poaching and swearing. We see Bourne preach gently to his cousin, but we do not know the outcome until the the next scene when Dan enters upon a Christmas gambling party. The actors taking part in it are the three who stepped aside from the opening baptismal ceremony, who played the miners, and who have become associated with the voices of modern Stoke men. Their dialogue for the party is from transcripts, 'Got to have a bit of fun... we only play among friends... Everybody can have a friendly game'. Dan speaks to them in the language of the Bible, 'Plead my cause, O

Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me...' and overturns the card table. In the second sequence, we see the preparations for a great open-air meeting of Methodists which takes place on Mow Cop, a hill nearby, despite the objections of the local Methodist superintendant. In the final sequence, Bourne learns of his exclusion from the Wesleyan Methodists for preaching in the open air.

The second half of the play opens with the formation of the Primitive Methodist Connection, and their evangelistic travels. Short scenes deal with such organisational matters as stipends for their preachers, which will later destroy the Connection's spontaneity. We see the multiplying Methodist schisms when Bourne and his fellows visit the 'Magic Methodists' a poor sect whose members have hysterical visions of heaven and of the symbolic ranking order of the Connection's members. Their presentation makes a moment of comic relief for the audience. In a climactic Carnival scene at Rocester Wakes, a kind of inverse of the Mow Cop scene in the first half, Bourne preaches to a group of licentious revellers who, when they unmask, are seen, some of them, to be Primitive Methodists. The final sequences of the play contrast the growing isolation of Hugh Bourne, and the transformation of the Primitive Connection by rules and regulations into an organisation not very different from the Wesleyan Methodists. Bourne retains his simplicity of outlook, as we see when he preaches to some children:

> '...I'm going to tell you about Heaven. Ah! it's grand. In flowing robes of spotless white see everyone arrayed, dwelling in everlasting light and joys... Now my childer (sic) you must all aim to get to that grand and happy place.'

After an account of his death, the modern voice returns:

> 'The reason I am an atheist was mother died when she was 59... and she suffered 5 years with dropsy, had 27 operations, dropsy was water you know, you blowed out with it, and legs thick as you could put pillow cases on, you know, for stockings, and she died in agony, that day I never thought there was any God because, because she was a God-fearing woman, my mother, and never swore, never drunk. And she suffered and suffered...'

The play ends with a verse from a hymn.

Throughout, the method of dramatising Hugh Bourne's life is to have the words of his biography spoken while the scene described is enacted. In the following example we see how this method is brought to life by the two invented fragments of dialogue from mother and father. The fluency of the method is apparent also in the spoken biography which is switched from an impersonal narrator to the actress playing the youthful Bourne at a moment which heightens the immediacy and enormity of the promise:

'Narrator He had been in the habit, in any little work he had to do, of applying to the Lord to help him, but in this instance... he had made a great promise to the Lord:
(Jill - the actress playing Hugh Bourne as a child - hesitates at the end of the bridge - a plank - with a loaded coal basket.)
Jill He had promised if the Lord would but help him this time, all the family should worship Him, and even this was hardly the extent of his promise.
(Jill starts across; tymps. punctuate first two steps; she falters.)
The Mother Go back!
The Father Let 'im be!
(Jill steadies herself, falters slightly again, and then makes her way across the bridge, with tymps. punctuating each step.)
The Mother (meets Jill) Thank God! '

The succinct dramatisation, and the use of tympani to draw attention to the danger of each step, is a far cry from the wordiness of 'Six into One', and is reminiscent of Grusha crossing the rotten bridge in 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle'. Recalling the same play is the retention of third-person speech despite the switch from Narrator to Bourne. It reminds us of the scene where Grusha's soldier-lover, Simon, returns to her, and they speak of themselves in the third person so as not to be overwhelmed by their emotion. At the scene's climax, the Storyteller has to speak the thoughts they are each incapable of expressing. Like Brecht, Cheeseman uses narration and third-person devices to overcome the problem of revealing the feelings of a character who cannot express them within the scene. The technique effectively heightens the audience's awareness of the character's dilemma.

In 'The Burning Mountain', the third-person enacted narrative is often intercut with Hugh Bourne's own expressed beliefs. A few lines later in the bridge scene, we hear the narrative:

> 'And when all was over, he began to think of his promise; but behold, it was strangely beyond his power to perform. At length he attempted to make it out that he had not promised so much, and he was immediately struck with the thought that he was trying to tell a lie to the Lord...'

During the narrative, the actress playing the young Hugh Bourne paces downstage to a block where she kneels. There are punctuating beats from the drum as she says,

> 'I was deeply and fully convinced of sin. No human being had to do with this.'

The company were fortunate in having as sources both biography and autobiography. The striking theatricality of their juxtaposition results in a surprisingly rounded portrayal of the somewhat surly character of Hugh Bourne. It is akin to the intercutting of soliloquy into the action of a Shakespearean scene. The particular quality of 'The Burning Mountain' is that its emphasis on the opposition between first and third person accounts diverts us from

solely concerning ourselves with the qualities of characters as individuals, but forces us to be aware of the duality we all share. It is as if a distinction were being drawn between the individual Hugh Bourne and his role as preacher, to enable us to see the relationship between the two. Continually, dialogues are halted while Bourne turns aside to speak his thoughts of the moment. While his actions appear clear and straightforward, the asides reveal the moral evaluation he is continually making of the situation he is in. The juxtaposition has a further purpose, for while Bourne's actions are historically unique, his thoughts seem to belong to a wider continuum that includes at one end the Bible's authors, and at the other, the bar-room philosophers of contemporary Stoke. Hugh Bourne's 'I' with its doubts and terrors is a person we can all feel sympathy with, while hugh Bourne as 'he' seems firmly rooted in the nineteenth century Methodist setting.

The duality of the Hugh Bourne characterisation is a direct counterpart of the duality between the historical narrative and the modern conversations. In the climactic scenes of the two halves, the Mow Cop meeting and Rocester Wakes, in both of which Bourne preaches, his audience's response and his own language are drawn from the modern transcripts:

> 'I believe in Jesus Christ as a Saviour and as a God and as a creator - and Popes and parsons and rabbis and whole bag of tricks (sic) - they just count for nowt as far as I'm concerned. They preach nice cos they've got a - they've got a wonderful display or whatever they callst it (sic) of languages - the sentences are beautiful an' they can pronounce words right nice... an' then they just sit back an' say "the collection will now be taken" - that's it. Well that inner (i.e., is not) faith to me, not to me...'

and

> 'I am a diabetic. I was told that - I was not blind, but I had double vision. But the miracle is, God's given me my eyesight back again. At the North Stafford Infirmary...'

The Rocester Wakes sequence is more complex. As originally planned, Bourne was to lead a prayer meeting to restrain the Wakes, and then to preach a sermon using the speech of a modern lay preacher, as in the above Mow Cop quotation. This was to be followed by comments from modern agnostics, as a justification of the crowd's assault on Bourne. In the event, the prayer was cut, and the speeches intercut with the sermon, so that the result is like a debate between different theological standpoints:

> 'Bourne Good people, the greatest sin is idleness, that's the biggest sin taday (sic), because idleness fost attacks ya mind (sic)... the mind corrupts and corrodes and cancered and gangrened an' rotted away - consumptive. (sic) -
> Charles If a man works and earns his money he's entitled to have a good time with it -

Bourne Jesus said 'Go and work', well go -
Stan This is life, without drink we've got nothing...
Bourne God said ta I, 'Ay must go and work an' ay went an' worked an' men said alraight, you keep on working same as ya are doin' an' youn shoul (i.e. you shall) have your wages...' (sic)

This use of modern language for the climactic scenes of the Primitive Methodist story was an act of faith by Cheeseman. In the programme, he notes,

'It seemed logical to provide as (Bourne's) antagonists and his converts, ourselves, our world, our own beliefs, scepticism or indifference, to stand alongside the people of Bourne's own time.'

His faith appears to be justified, and the transition from modern to nineteenth century dialogue is often so smooth as to take one by surprise. The mingling of current and historical viewpoint is developed at first by parallel scenes, such as 'Stromboli' and 'Death Tokens', so that it is easy, later on, to accept the two side by side in the same scene. The form clearly articulates Cheeseman's intention. Additionally, the intercutting makes the split between Hugh Bourne's everyday faith and the organisational complexity of his Church appear to bear a causal relationship to the situation today. For the majority of people recorded by the company and used in the play, the church as an organisation was irrelevant. In consequence, any religious experience they had had could find no proper social expression, but must be relegated to anecdote or superstition. In this, there seems a direct link with Hugh Bourne's frequent inability to give outward, third-person expression to the turmoil of beliefs and feelings within him. The solitary thoughtful figure of the closing scenes, standing apart from his fellow Methodists, seems a pointer to a modern society for whom corporate acts of worship lack meaning. The point is emphasised by the placing of the atheist's speech, almost at the very end of the play.

For the critics, 'The Burning Mountain' marked a coming-of-age of the Stoke documentary plays. A performance at the ILEA's Cockpit Theatre to celebrate its opening merited reviews by many London critics. The Guardian had been first in reporting from Stoke on how the play was being created, but it was B.A. Young of the Financial Times, who, acquainted with earlier work at Stoke gave the most sympathetic reaction. He describes the company as setting an unequalled example of teamwork:

'They have big, quite complex ensemble scenes where nearly a dozen actors do different things with such assurance in one another's reactions that they radiate an effect of total spontaneity - a joy to watch.'[43]

He describes the effect they created:

'Where emotion comes to the surface, it tends to be over matters concerning loss of faith or accusations of unworthiness. It is much to Brian Young's credit that he not only retains our interest in Bourne with his quiet restrained playing of him, but actually arouses our sympathy.'

The Financial Times critic was sensitive also to the style of presentation which he describes as a 'pointilliste array of short scenes' and it is an accurate description of much of the work at Stoke. The many small elements of the montage do, like the pointilliste painter's spots and dashes of colour, stand in precise relationships to form a carefully designed entity. Harold Hobson, on the other hand, found that the intercutting of the modern dialogue 'interferes with the continuity of the play',[44] a view which seems to miss the point. He did feel that the final, atheist's, speech was a redeeming 'grain of gold', but his related contention, that the other modern extracts were lacking in dramatic weight, by virtue of a low level of philosophical insight, is worthy of answer.

Looked at in isolation, the speeches are frequently trivial: it is the context that gives them significance. What should be clear from the earlier argument is that the dramatic 'weight' of the speeches arises from an implicit contrast between the speakers' strong emotional need to express their beliefs and the absence of an appropriate social mode, and hence appropriate language, in which to do so. The modern speakers are to be compared with Hugh Bourne, for whom his Church required that he express himself in certain forms of utterance which less and less corresponded to the turmoil of his inner experience. Hugh Bourne's autobiography, because it manages to express the depth of his thought, enables him to become, as it were, the articulate spokesman for the modern Stoke person's uncertainties.

With 'The Burning Mountain', whose title (suggesting an image of concealed but powerful fires) relates to its inadequately articulate characters, the Stoke plays took a considerable step towards the documentation of a person's feelings. In the following documentary play, by finding similarities in the feelings of many men in the same predicament, Cheeseman developed something akin to the quality of myth.

'Hands Up - For You The War Is Ended!' deals with the experiences of some Stoke men who were taken prisoner in the 1939-45 war. Unlike 'The Burning Mountain', very few literary sources were used, mainly unpublished letters and diaries, and the play depends heavily on tape-recorded eye-witness accounts and direct contact between the acting company and a small group of survivors and their wives. Stylistically, it seems closer to the second half of 'The Knotty' than to the two intervening plays. The minute focus on what amounts to a detail of the war removes 'Hands Up' far from the province of such films as 'Battle of Britain' and 'The Wooden Horse', since it attempts to dramatise neither a whole campaign, nor the most famous of a number of exploits. In the introductory booklet to the show, Cheeseman wrote:

'None of the men who have allowed us the privilege of... recording their

> conversations with us, would, in their modesty, consider themselves to be exceptional beings. In that sense, in making our documentary... we have tried to show one aspect of a huge and complicated conflict from the ranks, and hope that it will, for a change, give a soldier's eye view...'

The wider scale of the war is hinted at in occasional bulletins, mainly at the beginning and end, and the typical nature of the chosen soldiers' experiences is suggested by songs from the war, some collected locally, and others from published sources.[45]

The play begins with the call-up of several Stoke men, and while their taped voices are heard recalling the occasion, their simultaneous partings from wives and sweethearts are enacted. The sequence is held together by the despondent soldiers' song 'Browned off', and followed, for good measure, by a traditional Potteries song of a pregnant girl who hangs herself when her soldier-lover leaves. General Wavell's Christmas despatch and the ballad, 'Seven Years in the Sand' set us in North Africa for the remainder of the first half. The skirmishes between Wavell and Rommel are briefly hinted at, and a number of short scenes give an impression of the disjointed quality of war from an ordinary soldier's point of view. They build to a climax with the Stoke men's capture and the speech from a German officer which gives the play its title. They and many other prisoners are collected in a guarded circle. Short episodes in this 'Ring of Stones' sequence show the fear of men over such a normally trivial matter as whether in the crowd they might get pushed outside the ring, and the privations endured in the desert with little food or water.

The whole sequence is punctuated by reactions of the wives at home as they try to find out whether their men are prisoners or have been killed. Finally, the men are loaded into trucks for transit to a P.O.W. camp, described pointedly in a ballad, 'The Kriegie':

> There was plenty of water at Derna
> But the camp was not very well-kept
> For either you slept in the piss-hole,
> Or pissed in the place where you slept.

Then, a number of short scenes show the prisoners working for the Germans, and in true film-Tommy style, appropriating champagne in their water-bottles, and 'allowing' a crate to fall through the side of a Junkers aeroplane.

> 'Reg My honest opinion is that I was of far more use to the Allied war effort as a prisoner of war than I ever was as a British serving soldier. And my contribution consisted of sabotage. Sabotage.'

The truculently ironic 'Farewell Ye Sands of Africa' closes the first half as the men are loaded on a boat for Italy.

The second half begins with a sequence, 'PG 59', the title of an Italian P.O.W. camp. In a structure similar to 'Ring of Stones', the sequence describes the minor events which stave off boredom, and again, these episodes are intercut with others describing the women at home. There follows a very long sequence, making up about three-quarters of the second half, which describes in detail the escape of a group of Stoke P.O.W.'s and how they stayed hidden in a church tower, in a cottage, in barns, for months as they painfully made their way to the border. Only near the end are we reminded of the wives, but at last the men cross the frontier, and there is a moment of horror when the guard speaks to them in German, before revealing by his buttons that he is Swiss. There is a brief scene, for contrast, in another P.O.W. camp showing its liberation by American soldiers, and then the play ends with the wives greeting their husbands home, a scene which neatly brings us full circle.

With 'Hands Up', Cheeseman's use of local people's experiences as a dramatic basis reached an artistic maturity. In one sense, this is no more than a direct result of the point of view that seems consistently to be held in the Stoke documentaries; but what began as an imposed, or theoretical viewpoint, by virtue of the absence of a documented 'ordinary' voice, has now found proper dramatic expression. The creative function of the company has become that of rediscovering feelings people had once, but which may now have lost immediacy and significance for them. The actor first has to listen and record a person's memories, and then sympathetically and imaginatively penetrate them in order to revive the original emotion. In this, the actor is helped by his age, as one of the ex-soldiers noted in a remark which was used at the start of the play:

> 'Reg Baker (voice over) I was only looking round at the youngsters, the members of your company, thinking that if you can put them in uniform they're the people we're talking about really - that age and those sort of aspirations and er their reactions
> (Actor, sitting, joins Reg and speaks with him)
> and not a crowd of middle aged men, thinning on top and trying to cast their minds back to the minor orgies and the various other things they went through...'

When the actor's voice joins, and takes over from, the tape-recorded one, we are alerted to the play's central conflict, the struggle to recall and share long past emotions. In 'The Knotty', the taped voices of railwaymen were normally used to corroborate the impression created by the enacted scene. In 'Hands Up', the reminiscence, whether the taped original or a spoken transcript, punctuates the scene which dramatises it or is itself punctuated by the enactment. The effect is to create a tension between first- and third- person accounts not unlike that we have seen in 'The Burning Mountain'. But where, in that play, the tension dramatises Bourne's struggle to evaluate his actions in

religious terms, in 'Hands Up' the struggle is to recall and communicate what it means to be involved in war. We can see how this happens in 'The Breda Gun' scene, which shows the strafing of some Stoke soldiers.

> 'Frank ...we'd got some Italian Breda guns that we'd captured... Well, we'd got - we were getting the odd Gerry planes coming over where we were harboured up. Now we'd never open up as they come over, take no notice let them go over and then they won't know you're there with camouflage and goodness knows what (sic) -
> (Sound of plane. Jim and Alan look up and follow plane. Stan appears with binoculars and searches....with them. Frank pauses)
> Frank - anyhow, some bright kid of an officer saw these planes coming over one day -
> (Stan circles....and exits... shouting alarm. Alan sits up and stares at Stan. Jim follows suit)
> Frank - sounds the alarm -
> (Sound of gun - Jim stands and slowly puts razor in pocket. Frank puts dixie can on... upright box, Jim gets under camouflage. Alan and Frank crouch on spot.)
> Frank - opened up and started firing away - the Gerry planes just turned round - (airplanes over) and came back to strafe the camp -
> (Climax of dive)
> Jim The bloody gun's jammed! (Curses)
> Alan Here it comes again! (Sound of plane returns)
> Jim (Under camouflage) Right lads, duck!
> (Burst of fire...)

The dramatisation of the story is technically accomplished, especially the sudden switch from narrative to dialogue to help create the climax. It emphasises the contrast between the danger of the action and the laconic manner of narration. There is a further sudden switch, for immediately after the plane passes over, the actor playing Frank picks up the dixie:

> 'Frank Look, three bloody bullets through me mess tin - I'll bloody shower him - look, he's buggered me bloody mess tin up!
> (The other two laugh)'

This sudden bathos after the tension of the strafing releases the audience's laughter. The kind of bridge between past and present that such a dramatisation makes was heightened on one evening at least, when the actor added in ad-lib directed at a woman with a particularly loud laugh, 'How would you like to eat soup from a plate with holes in, missus?'

Now, such wartime tales are normally told in fairly particularised circumstances. They are to be swapped by ex-soldier comrades, usually over a drink. For these reasons, it seems typical that the manner of presentation emphasises some humorous or bloody-minded aspect, anything, in fact, except the reality of the danger and the real fear it aroused. It is a basic assumption that the danger was not unique, and that the listeners have shared similar experiences - felt the same fear. This assumption is, of course, untrue when the tale is told to a theatre audience, and what Cheeseman has done is to restore the danger of the original experience. Not only are the audience involved by the sudden shifts

from narration to dialogue, but the really loud aeroplane scream is, in the round, quite unnerving. The effect is that at one moment we are totally involved in the situation - are made afraid of the danger - and at the next moment we share relief in the absurd notion that a useless mess-tin is of greater consequence than death narrowly missed.

In trying to recreate the emotional quality of experience, Cheeseman relies heavily on the overall organisation of separate accounts and episodes. In so doing, he achieves a wider significance than one would expect from his concentration on such a narrow segment of the war. What this significance consists of, we may understand by considering the desert sequence of the first half.

It begins with the song, 'Seven Years in the Sand', expressing the dismal prospect facing Wavell's army. Then a short comic scene in which one of the wives visits a fortune-teller for news of her husband is followed by the Breda Gun episode and then by a complex sequence held together by 'The Ballad of the Disorganised Retreat'. In a nice irony, the first verse begins, 'I'll tell you the story of Wavell's advance', and each subsequent verse details a stage in the retreat. At first the song is intercut with communiqués from Rommel and Wavell, but then a dramatisation particularises the events of the song:

'(Graham as British Officer and Colin as Tug with large kitbag... come round behind Wavell and to centre between Rommel and Wavell - who are standing on blocks. They shout between each line of verse and chorus)

Singers We picked up our kit and set off in dismay,
Officer Keep behind the Major in his Humber 14.
Singers The confusion was something to see on that day,
Tug What, with this little thing - this is a Utility Ten.
Singers Go northwards, go southwards, go eastwards, young man.
Officen Well, do your best.
Singers So we go round in circles as fast as we can.
Tug The footbrake's gone, sir!
Singers (chor.) What the Hell's all the fuss?
Officer Well, do your best.
Singers Oh, wouldn't you, wouldn't you like to be us.'

The men's capture is cut into the song; so is Rommel as he reads a captured British order concerning the issue of prisoners' food and drink, on which he is to base his own inhuman treatment of the men.

The next scene is a straightforward dramatisation of the death of an officer commanding one of the Stoke men, soon after both have been captured. The soldier is allowed by his captor to examine the officer. He puts a cigarette in the wounded man's mouth; it droops. A doctor announces 'I'm afraid the poor fellow's done for'. The underplayed emotion is commented upon by the song which follows. These verses were from a local man:

They put him in the Armoured Division
And they sent him to a foreign land
Where the flies flied round in their millions
And there was nothing around him but sand.

Early one morning at daybreak
Beneath the strong Libyan sun
It was there that this poor British soldier
Was shot by a big Gerry gun.

After the first verse's sense of futility, the second is a trite request for remembrance. Nevertheless, the real sense of personal loss and mourning, as it is felt by soldier comrades, pervades the final scene of the desert sequence, 'The Ring of Stones'. It was itself a place of death:

> 'Bill And it was crawling with livestock. Lice and various other interesting things. Because there were still bodies just below the surface and still blood in the earth, and bits hanging from trees...'

Mourning in the scene is not reserved for human beings, but felt also for the material things that imprisonment makes unavailable.

> '... You think of all the food you've had previous... You visualise water running...'

Additionally, Bill mourned the slow erosion of human values:

> '...some of those fellers were trying to rifle what stuff you had got... After that I suddenly saw things in the right light. Dog eats dog. The fight for food. The deliberate cheating over food. The complete disregard of other people's comforts or even necessities. I've been guilty of it myself...'

The preoccupation with death and mourning is shared by the distant wives, in short intercut scenes. They do not yet know their husbands' fate, but expect the worst.

The sequence is a long one, and it is because its texture is so important that we have looked at it in detail. To recapitulate, it consists of:

1. Frank and the Breda Gun.
2. Ballad of the Disorganised Retreat, containing
   a. Wavell v. Rommel
   b. Tug and Officer
   c. Capture
   d. Rommel on treatment of P.O.W.'s.
3. Death of officer.
4. Ballad of the Dying Soldier.
5. Ring of Stones.

In a very general sense, the sequence has a narrative organisation which is more apparent in synopsis than in script or performance. Although an audience is aware of a general progression, it is clear that the focus of attention is deliberately elsewhere. If we consider the finality and reflective nature of the Ring of Stones scene as summing up what has gone before, it points back to a number of incidents that are similar, like rhyme in poetry. The mourning

for material things reminds us of the uselessness of Tug's disintegrating Utility Ten, and the song has also suggested that all the vehicles in the North African desert were in a similar state. We are further reminded of the uselessness of Frank's shot mess-tin. Mourning for men in 'The Ring of Stones' has clear antecedents in the Ballad of the Dying Soldier and in the officer's death, where the drooping cigarette seems to equate a dead body with other useless objects. The breakdown of social relationships mourned by Bill has been preceded by the differing aims of men and officer in 'Breda Gun', by the disorganisation of the retreat, and by the inhumane treatment of prisoners suggested by the captured order. In sum, what we are witnessing is the disintegration of the material and social organisation that makes life both possible and meaningful. First possessions, then people, are rendered useless. What Cheeseman has succesfully done, is to document an overwhelming sense of loss, tantamount to the withdrawal, if not the removal, of life itself. To be a prisoner is to be in a state of suspended animation.

A second theme, not unrelated to the first, that of human separation, is suggested by the equivalence of the opening and closing scenes. The frequent nearness in the theatre of husbands and wives in scenes set thousands of miles apart is a spatial irony which reinforces the theme. Similarly emphasising the point, are the many letters read aloud. One provides a striking example of the power of thematic organisation. It occurs in the opening sequence, after we we have heard a number of local men introduce themselves by name and recount their memories of call-up. The letter is deceptively similar in style:

> 'Dearest Lu, things are moving fast. My kit is coming on here. I can only take the barest necessities with me... So "our leave" was cut short again. Don't be sad, it had to be . The new job is very big and important.

The signature is a theatrical shock. 'Your loving husband, Ervin (sic) von Rommel.' It is an immediate invitation to view other events in the play as capable of embracing all men and women, even enemies in war.

Looked at in this way, the play's organisation can be simply described. In the first half, there is a stage by stage growth in the separation of husbands and wives to its most complete moment when it is equated with death in 'The Ring of Stones'. The last episodes of the half suggest a growth of defiance, and the transportation to Italy is the first of many steps towards reunion. The second half reiterates, in the prison camp sequence, 'PG 59', the totality of separation, but the escape sequence shows the men overcoming a succession of obstacles to make final reunion with their wives.

The two themes, of social disintegration and separation, are linked in the prison-camp sequences. Here, separation has destroyed human relationships:

the men are like dead, their wives virtual widows. Moreover, the wives, by taking on the men's jobs at home, must attempt to fulfil their social role. Thus the growth in power of the Germans in Africa is dramatically displayed as a direct threat to the community of relationships that comprises Stoke-on-Trent. What holds our attention are the twin struggles, that of the women to preserve a sense of those relationships, and the men to regain them.

If the organisation of the material along thematic lines enables Cheeseman and the company to compare separation with social disintegration, then the editing of the escape sequence displays an error of judgement. By following for so much of the play, the same few actors playing the same parts, the sequence focusses on the personalities of the particular men involved. The result is stylistic disunity. In the middle of a play which is creating an impressionistic texture, there appears a straightforward adventure story, and not a particularly exciting one at that. At variance with this view, it must be pointed out that the Guardian's Robin Thornber wrote:

> 'One of the weaknesses of plays based on war nostalgia... is their lack of a strong story - the colour supplement bittiness with which they flick through old snapshots from which all the meaning has faded. The first half of "Hands Up" suffers from this impressionism...
>
> It was after the interval that the tale of Frank Bayley... took over and swept it along...' [46]

In contrast, my impression at one performance was that the audience were 'held' by the first half's impressionism, but became restless, rather than being 'swept along', in the second half.

With reservations about the over-long escape, we can attempt to say what 'Hands Up' achieves. In the first place, the 'impressionistic' or 'pointilliste' method communicates a fragmentation of experience. No single man could experience all that went on in the Second World War, of course, and could not therefore have an all-embracing view of it. Nor did a single man's experience make continuous sense. He might suddenly be drafted to a new front; find suddenly his friends dead; suddenly his mess-tin might be useless. This discontinuity is reflected in the play's structure. But we have seen how Cheeseman makes out of this fragmentation an underlying statement. The thematic organisation of episodes makes us aware that the play is dealing with the potential of separation to destroy human relationships. Yet the focus on finely particularised characterisations never allows the play to become abstract. What happens is that the constant doubling and trebling of parts, the flow of language from taped reminiscences to their enactment, the comparison of different men and women's similar experiences, dissolves the outline of individual characters. Rather, we become aware of many individuals playing the same social role. While we watch the separate experiences of many men, we cannot

forget their commonalty as soldiers.

It is typical of the men and women in the play that they have no control over the events that happen to them. Their feelings are thus a response to what happens, and not 'motivation' in the acting sense. Indeed, a dissonance often arises between feeling and action. When a man carries out a task, it is unwillingly; when he is required to do one thing, he would have preferred to do another. When emotion is expressed, it is tinged with resignation, because the characters have no control over their destinies. We might sum up characterisation in 'Hands Up' as the portrayal of social roles as they are played by powerless men of feeling. The historical alienation that results from such dissonance between feeling and action is summed up in Reg Baker's speech at the opening of the play:

> 'so er:everything's in retrospect er sort of nothing to do with me, as though I'm talking about something and somebody else...' (sic)

The strength of the play is that it retrieves the feelings associated with past experience and gives them order. This coherence derives from the play's demonstration of the similarity of many men's stories. By showing the elemental quality of their experiences, the play begins to operate at an equivalent level to that of myth. By the impressionism of the treatment, the Stoke soldiers are made prototypical. Their experiences embody far more general feelings than simply those of prisoners. The sense of devastation they experienced is made to remind us of the strength <u>we</u> derive from the community we live in, and how we normally take that strength for granted. By taking the soldiers almost to the point of an anonymous death and then retrieving them, the play makes a strongly affirmative statement.

The most recent of Stoke documentary plays takes affirmation a stage further. 'Fight for Shelton Bar' asks its audience to make a commitment, to fight for the life of a local steelworks facing closure by the British Steel Corporation. To win such commitment, the theatre sets aside the apparently 'objective' stance of the earlier documentaries, and both director and company identify with the aims of the Action Committee that was set up three years before, and which was still in existence during the play's run. In the programme booklet, Cheeseman writes:

> 'In putting on this show we are doing something unusual for us - a quite specific job with a definite purpose. This is to interest, inform and I hope alert you, the people of North Staffordshire (and our guests from other districts) to the Shelton Action Committee's case. We are not taking an unbiased view. But I hope our commitment to the Action Committee's case is an open and obvious one, and that our presentation of their arguments, and of the BSC's is honest and straightforward. But we are putting on this show because we are North Staffordshire's theatre and I believe it is our duty to represent the interests of this district... For me the point of the whole battle is that people, and their natural

> and living communities must always come first... || I hope that by the time you have heard them out in this show, you will agree with me...'

The impetus came from the steelworkers, and it was the Action Committee which asked if the theatre could help publicise their cause. In the now typical Stoke fashion, the company began by tape-recording the steelworkers, and such was their involvement that, at one point, Polly Warren, who was to be responsible for many of the songs, was asked to compose one for a particularly crucial meeting between the Action Committee and the men.

> 'We're Shelton men, we're not afraid, we've got our dignity,
> We'll fight and win the battle, boys, against the BSC,
> They may be strong and powerful but that won't get them far,
> For we are all united now to fight for Shelton Bar.'

It found its way into the play as the title song. We can see how far the process has gone, first noted in our discussion of 'The Knotty', of the company creating its own source material.

The play is not agitprop in that it does not use stereotyped caricatures in a symbolic plot, and it bears many resemblances to the previous documentary plays. It has something of the Chartist fervour of 'The Jolly Potters', and its political debates recall 'The Staffordshire Rebels'. Its script, like 'The Knotty', relies heavily on tape-recorded interviews, and it creates a similar respect for the importance of the men's work. Its committee scenes recall 'Six into One', and it has a strong central character in Ted Smith, chairman of the Action Committee, who, like Hugh Bourne, is capable of reflection to guide his behaviour. One reviewer called it 'agitprop with a human face'.[47] Certainly it shares with agitprop a desire to win over its audience to a committed point of view, and at the end of each performance a member of the Action Committee in the audience is spotlighted to tell us the latest details of the fight.

The overall structure is more clearly and simply defined than any of the earlier plays, with the possible exception of 'The Jolly Potters'. A framework is provided by a journey round the works which begins with the processing of iron ore, and ends with the rolling of steel strip. The audience are, in effect, the visitors; each part of the steelmaking process is dramatised, and described by the actors taking part using the transcribed words of the men. It is like a re-enactment of the actors' own first visit. Intercut with the tour, and forming the first half of the play, are scenes narrating the history of the proposed closure; the intercut scenes of the second half narrate the Action Committee's response.

It does not seem necessary to detail the scenes of the steel-making process. In brief, they show the sintering of iron ore with coke ready for the

furnaces; the blast-furnaces which convert the ore to molten iron; in the second half, the 'kaldos' which convert iron to steel; the 'concast' or continuous casting process; the 'demag' or rolling mill which turns steel 'blooms' from the concast into the required sizes of strip. It must be borne in mind, however, that these scenes are as dramatically significant as the committee meetings and provide an impetus to the whole play in a way that will be described later. A television account of 'Shelton Bar'[48] replaced the steel-making scenes with still photographs of the actual process and quite altered the play's meaning.

The intercut stages of the Action Committee's story begin with its formation to deal with the BSC's proposed closure of the 18" Rolling Mill announced in 1970. There is a mass meeting at which a BSC representative informs the delegates that the Corporation's proposal is being postponed. The Action Committee fear that this is part of a strategy to close down the whole works. After a meeting with the BSC, the Committee approach a Norwegian firm to take over the mill, but the proposal falls through. Vic Feather, the then General Secretary of the TUC, meets the Committee and is remembered for saying 'Shelton Bar, no lame duck - more a racing pigeon'. At a time when, during industrial recession, Shelton was still making a profit, the BSC announces its plans to concentrate steelmaking in five major coastal sites. Ted Smith said, 'It gave approximately 75,000 people working in the industry a lovely Xmas box - the sack'. BSC's chairman, then Lord Melchett, accepts an invitation to meet the Committee. One of the members recalled, 'I remember looking at the faces of people coming in, Melchett was first... I knew from that instant it was bad news y'know'. Melchett announces plans to stop steelmaking at Shelton, which would mean closing sinter plant, blast furnaces and concast by 1975. The first half ends with a stoppage and a protest march accompanied by song.

In the second half, we see the Action Committee hurriedly preparing a brochure to counter one put out by the BSC. Their strong financial arguments are validated by a London merchant banker, the key fact being that in a year when BSC's overall profit was only 2.8 million pounds, Shelton Bar's profit was 1.6 million. The Action Committee suggest that if the BSC will not retain the plant then it should be sold to private enterprise or municipalised. The new BSC chairman, Dr Finniston, meets the Committee and is unable to refute their arguments. He promises a half-million pound investment to put a new machine in the rolling mill. At this point, with the meeting adjourned, and following the men's reactions, the play ends with a song.

On watching 'Fight for Shelton Bar', the spectator's first and strongest impression is the sense of steelworks reality that the company creates.

'...some moments, as when you watch imaginary molten iron pouring purple

> from the furnace, give you the tense, exhilarating sensation of watching the real thing.' [49]

We shall discuss subsequently the contribution of the manner of staging to this sense of reality, but despite an extensive foyer display, it was not always easy for outsiders to grasp the details of steelmaking. What did communicate clearly was a reality in the quality of acting that is worth examining more closely.

Where, in previous documentaries, there had been authentic dialogue, now, running throughout was an authenticity of movement that had occurred before only occasionally, as in 'The Knotty's' Shunting Sequence. It is not to be confused with 'occupational mime' where the emphasis is on the actor's ability to translate repetitive work movements into a graceful rhythm. Rather, as with the dialogue, it was an attempt by the Stoke actors to be precise transmitters of what they had seen, or in some cases, been taught. A photograph in the programme booklet shows a steelworker demonstrating how to take a sample from the Kaldo, while actors watch him, ready to learn and copy.

In this work sequence, a ladle on a handle perhaps twelve feet long has to be poked through a hole in a metal shield on wheels, and used to scoop up a sample of molten steel from the imagined Kaldo. A real ladle and shield had been borrowed from Shelton Bar. As one actor withdraws the scoop, a second must step near the ladle and bear its weight on a hooked bar. The two actors then move together, despite the hampering nature of the asbestos garments and overboots that they are wearing. Only when the ladle is precisely positioned by the second actor over a small receiving mould can the white-hot metal, imaginary, yet totally believable, be poured by the first. It is the minuteness of the actors' observation, their involvement with the ladle's unwieldiness, and the sense of its danger created by the earlier scenes, that hold the audience during this simple action.

At times, the movement even had a 'throw-away' quality that the actors must have observed in the men's movements as they worked. It is a casualness that comes from long being accustomed to gauge precisely the risk that can be taken in working with a dangerous substance. At one point, when molten metal is being poured, represented by a long shaft of bright red light spilling over the stage-cloth, one of the actors, without any fuss or pointing-up, takes a jumping step over the flow of 'steel'. It is a moment before we realise by the gravity of his movement that the actor has seen a steelworker make just such a movement, at a time when the flow of steel was not a pretence.

It might be thought from these descriptions that the Works sequences were a way of enlivening what might otherwise be rather dull committee scenes. It is certainly true that if the Action Committee scenes were the sole burden of

the play, it would be difficult to sustain the interest of even a well-intentioned audience. There does, however, seem to be a more fundamental relationship. In the first place, the Works scenes make real for us, particularly if we are not acquainted with steelmaking, those parts of the plant that are threatened by closure. It is fortunate for the play's exposition that the initial processes are also those to be closed. What might otherwise be little more than names in a political debate become places containing an identifiable process. What is more, we have begun to see how the quality of acting in those scenes makes of the processes an interaction between men and their tools and machines. When those processes are named in the Action Committee's discussions, we are able to visualise the complex of human skills and relationships to which they refer. It is precisely analagous to the dramatisation of Stoke in 'Hands Up' where we were made aware of the German threat not to a geographical Stoke, but to a particular community of relationships. The link between the two intercut sets of scenes is contained in a particular corporate attitude to work which motivates the Action Committee. The quality of this attitude can most easily be discovered by examining in detail the Blast-furnace sequence. (It is worth bearing in mind its striking similarity to the Desert sequence in 'Hands Up', which is emphasised by the placing of both sequences in the second part of the first half of each play).

The Blast-furnace sequence begins with four of the men carrying in over their shoulders a long metal tube whose connecting pipe runs back offstage. The men wear heavy loose garments, and helmets with transparent visors, so that the effect is strange and partly monstrous. We learn the pipe is an oxygen lance to burn a hole through the furnace slag and so release the molten metal. We have previously been introduced to the man in charge of this section:

> 'Ernie Davies, he's one of the senior managers on Shelton. There's only three men who can make iron in North Staffordshire. He's one of them and he treats his blast furnace like some pregnant woman.'

Ernie Davis's words are used to describe the lancing process in detail, but at the same time his feeling towards the furnaces is revealed as one of humorous familiarity:

> 'They're like elephants: if they're well behaved and looked after you're OK, but when they get wild, they're very wild, they're really vicious... you get iron coming out all over the place, squirting out, blowing out... then you've got a hell of a mess... You'd wish you'd been an ice-cream man instead.'

But the humour conceals his real understanding, and as the glare increases, and we understand the iron to be running out, there is great pride as he says,

> 'This is molten iron at fourteen-fifty degrees centigrade.'

Another worker's comment is blunter in its appreciation of the dangers:

> 'Well, it's my job to make sure that this furnace is dry... to make sure you've got as much iron out of it as possible... if you haven't got a dry furnace and you've got chaps walking about in front of that and 'er opens up... there's no such thing as saying goodbye to your mamma, you've gone.'

Death and danger in this whole sequence are talked about in chuckles. It is the men's way of coping with the reality of forces that could maim and kill only too quickly, and the play makes this clear, as it also makes clear that the men's only defence is their skill in handling tools, and their judgement in dealing with the furnace. This total trust in their own ability is most vividly stated in the second half of the play, when an actor re-tells the story of a dispute with a manager over the temperature of a batch of steel. The worker trusts his judgement based on noting the colour and other visible qualities of the metal, while the manager relies on the pyrometer (a kind of high-temperature thermometer). 'And who was right?', the story-teller is asked. 'I was, of course,' he replies.

But the men know that, despite their skill, accidents will still happen, and it is this their chuckles hide. Their superficially light-hearted manner recalls the soldiers in 'Hands Up'. To emphasise the point, and the frequency of death in the steelworks, the blast furnace sequence is followed by a song, sung as a dirge by two actresses, one of whom, Romy Saunders, had written the words:

<u>Micky Dirkin's Ghost</u>

George Rushton lost his life one working day
On the Bar
His head was crushed by a machine
A blow that could not be foreseen
And his workmates stood and watched him carried away.

In '38 Jack Sherlock worked the blast
On number one
The wind went on before its time
The furnace blew out like a mine
And the molten iron ran out and buried him fast

When Aaron Butcher worked up in the mill
Between the wars
The danger there he did not note
A billet caught him by the coat
And drew him through the rollers with the steel

Vince Hewittson was on the steelplant floor
Working nights
A ladle tipped and overturned
The red hot steel blistered and burned
And he'll never work the night shift any more

The ghost of Micky Dirkin haunts the bar
So men say
And the other men who lost their lives
Who left their workmates and their wives
Are there with Dirkin's ghost on Shelton Bar

It is not easy to convey the quality of this song, although the cumulative effect of the men's names is unmistakeable. In reading, the middle couplets of each verse have an easy, McGonegal-like rhythm, while in performance, the dirge-like quality of the melody fights against the easy beat. The song suggests, in this counterpointing, the horror of the man trapped in a machine's movement. It has a quality not unlike the Song of Longton.

The song is unaccompanied, and the theatre grows very quiet while it is sung. Between each verse, the Action Committee Chairman, Ted Smith, comments on the proposed redundancies, and recalls the closure of the 18" Rolling Mill.

> 'I saw those men as had the sack. They destroyed 'em. Killed 'em.
> I've seen men killed by redundancy.'

In this way, an equation is built between the deaths of individual men in the course of their work, the actual deaths of men made redundant who suffered heart failure perhaps as a result, and the death of the Shelton plant with the consequent threat to the whole local community. 'The BSC', says Ted Smith, and he could be referring to individual deaths, or metaphorically to the closure, 'committed genocide'. After the visit of Lord Melchett, Ted Smith is left sitting at a table with his head bowed, and he wonders aloud what the men who died in the works would do, if they were facing redundancy. The taped voice of his original takes over:

> 'But a tremendous experience took place to me... these men that had died... I was thinking to meself, what would they do, and the message came to me they'd fight... energy surged through me... and I was on me way from that point on, mate.'

In equating different kinds of death, the play makes a dramatic link between the Action Committee scenes and those set in the Works. How men face up to death in different forms is the thematic underpinning of 'Fight for Shelton Bar'. We have seen how the men rely on their judgement and physical skills to survive the hazards of steelmaking; when we see them, in the second half, attempting to survive as a working community in the face of closure, it is appropriate that they should bring similar skills and judgement to bear. It thus seems natural when Melchett, and later, Finniston, meet the Committee that they should be made a present. Melchett receives a bowl, but Finniston, when the Action Committee is certain of its total support in the Works, a china statue of St George slaying the dragon. Both BSC Chairmen are shown as being at such pains in their thanks to stress the Committee's courtesy and generosity, that we cannot escape the conclusion that both had expected stormy abusive meetings with a group of (in the pejorative sense) 'militants'.

It is a tribute to the company's treatment of the material that at these two points in the play, we so respect the motives and aims of the Action

Committee that we can share their amused tolerance. We can enjoy, too, the Brechtian manner in which the meetings are remembered. 'He said...; so I said...', and a second adds, 'Yes, you did', and everyone laughs at the memory. It is the same kind of self-satisfied chuckle with which a pyrometer can be dismissed. The instrument lacks, as, by implication, do Melchett and Finniston, the sensitivity of skill and judgement that the men possess because of their involvement with a work situation in which clumsiness can mean death. By showing us 'round the works', the actors have enabled us to share in the men's work-derived self-respect. John Peter wrote in the Sunday Times:

> '(The play) is infused by the now deeply unfashionable pride skilled men take in their craft: pride which baulks at the dole-queue.' [50]

If we now briefly consider the characters of 'Fight for Shelton Bar' we can see that they have strong similarities with the soldiers in 'Hands Up'. Characterisation is not so much of individuals as of the corporate role of steelworker, except that the revealing idiosyncracies of language frequently remind us of the individual occupying the role. We are also made aware that the actors'are not so much creating characters as presenting to us the words of the steelworkers. In working with Graham Watkins who played Ted Smith, Cheeseman told him, 'You are the man's emotional barrister'.[51] The result, of an actor 'standing for' rather than 'creating a role', was very apparent in production, so that although the character of Ted Smith was central to the play, it was as a focus for the feelings of many steelworkers rather than in any heroic sense. The most 'real' characters in an individual and naturalistic sense were Melchett and Finniston, and even their personification was eroded by, in the first man's case, his reliance on advisers and in Finniston's case by Cheeseman's use of the actual tape of the meeting, to which the stage action was mimed.

What Cheeseman has managed to do, in dramatising the social role of steelworker, is also, as we have seen, to show the feelings associated with the role. From the work process the men derive a pride in their own skill, compounded with fear turned by humour into affectionate respect for the forces they must control. As with 'The Knotty', the play shows us men who depend on their work not only financially, but as the means by which their own manliness and sense of identity are defined. The confrontation with the BSC becomes a struggle to retain that sense of identity; to 'Fight for Shelton Bar' is to fight for self-respect.

It is difficult to say what lasting effects the play may have had. On a national scale it aroused considerable interest. As well as the television programme mentioned earlier, both the Guardian and Sunday Times used it as a peg for articles concerned primarily with the industrial aspects of the proposed

closure. At a practical level, it is more difficult to judge. Certainly, when the Action Committee representative stood up at the end to give the latest news, there was great sympathy and attentiveness for what he had to say. Ted Smith reported how

> 'The first person to come up to me after the show was a lady who wanted to tell me... how much she supported us... We feel our case is further strengthened because we really have the people on our side.' [52]

It appears that, in Stoke at the time, the theatre (along with other local media) had made inhabitants very conscious of the need to preserve Shelton Bar. A fund of goodwill was created, and probably still exists, but the theatre itself could hardly take the struggle into the enemy camp. It was a rearguard action, designed to provide a strong base for the Action Committee. Sensibly, the Vic didn't attempt to supplant the Committee.

An apparently paradoxical statement by Cheeseman will help us to define the theatre's role in this case more precisely:

> 'There's a lot of rot talked about the potential role of the theatre through involvement in local social issues. For me that's an evasion... the essential purpose... is to see the eternal verities - not to chase after incidental, mundane problems...
> There is no substitute ... for political participation. Nothing can take the place of what those men, in the works, decide and do.' [53]

We can understand the implied paradox if we consider how, running through the Stoke documentaries, appears a more or less constant factor, the attempt to dramatise a community through its network of relationships. Perhaps for Cheeseman, an 'eternal verity' is that only through our sense of belonging to a community can we realise our humanity. In that case, the evaluation in the play of the BSC's actions is clear: for threatening a community it is to be condemned. While this is not, of itself perhaps, a political statement, its implications for the audience are clear. In the Sunday Times, Philip Clarke described the steelworkers in the audience as watching with lumps in their throats, or even in tears, and added, 'by allying themselves with the arts (the steelworkers) have created a powerful propaganda weapon for their cause'.[54] It would have been truer to say that the theatre allied itself to the steelworkers. Cheeseman felt it to be the Vic's duty, and what seems inescapable is that an artistic search for permanent values rooted in the local community has made it impossible for that theatre to remain aloof from political persuasion, if not actual political struggle.

We may now attempt to survey the whole body of documentary work that Cheeseman has created at Stoke. The quantity and consistency of the approach alone makes it worthy of attention. Equally impressive is the range of subject matter. The first three plays at least have been inspirations for documentary

plays at other regional theatres. In particular, Cheeseman, in his pursuit of the voice of the common people has been led to create plays that are quite unique in content.

His guiding principle has been an insistence on the use of primary source material. What stands out, as we review the development from 'The Jolly Potters' to 'Fight for Shelton Bar', is the changing interpretation he puts upon this rule. We can see it as a number of stages:

1. Importance, but not supremacy, of (written) primary source material. Use of secondary sources for statistics and linking speeches.
2. A considerable quantity of material improvised or written, although based on historical accounts. (e.g., 'The Jolly Potters')
2. Heavy reliance on (written) primary material, but scenes of the common people improvised on a documented basis. (e.g., 'The Staffordshire Rebels'; 'The Knotty', first half.)
3. Use of tape-recorded local voices as a source equal in importance to the written source material. (e.g., 'The Knotty' second half; 'Six into One', partly; 'The Burning Mountain'.)
4. The primacy of tape-recorded local voices as the documented source. In consequence, the effective creation of source material.

The most significant step occurs between 2 and 3, when the company are diverted from improvising or writing scenes based on scanty material, into creating with the portable tape-recorder the kind of source material that is necessary for the areas of experience the play is to explore. Paradoxically however, with each successive play, the proportion of originally created songs has increased at the expense of songs native to the material being dramatised. It is as though the company have felt a need to make their own summary in song of the documented emotions preceding it in the play.

We have already discussed, particularly with regard to 'The Staffordshire Rebels', how the insistence on documentary sources is not inconsistent with an overall point of view. How the material is edited determines the statement the play makes, which is only to reiterate what we have said for film.[55] The concept needs restating in the face of Cheeseman's own contrast between the documentary's 'multiplicity of voices' and the single 'voice of the dramatist'. Playwriting has always had two aspects, construction and the writing of dialogue. As an author in a general sense, Cheeseman has come rigorously to repudiate the second aspect in favour of the documented sources; he has retained control, except where this has been delegated to a 'steering committee', of the editing, or construction, aspect.

If we distinguish in this way between two aspects of creating a play, we can better define the viewpoint that grows more apparent in the Stoke documentary plays. Within episodes, we can see that the material does increasingly dictate the presentation. For example, the carefully copied movements of the

steelworkers embody much of the meaning of 'Fight for Shelton Bar' in a way that makes the formalism of the battles in 'The Staffordshire Rebels' seem hollow by comparison. But at the same time there is a growth of the 'layering', or collage, within episodes, which makes the audience aware of much more than one authenticated 'voice'. We are asked to watch from different viewpoints, and to be aware that reality is multi-dimensional. We saw this textural collage as it arose in 'The Staffordshire Rebels' and how it can be organised thematically in the Desert sequence of 'Hands Up' or the Blast-furnace sequence of 'Fight for Shelton Bar'. It is by the careful juxtapositions within such a collage that an overall statement may be synthesised.

The most noticeable feature of the Stoke documentary plays has been Cheeseman's commitment to expressing 'ordinary' people's views of large-scale events. It is such a pursuit that has led him to place less and less reliance on written sources, which, he seems to imply, are biased against such a viewpoint. Who Cheeseman's 'ordinary' people are, is less easy to say. Clearly, many of them are working class, and trade unionist too, as the railwaymen and steelworkers, but the shopkeeper-soldiers of 'Hands Up', and the Methodists of 'The Burning Mountain' move away from such a social category. What they share, if not social class, is a social - as opposed to personal - inarticulacy. However articulate they may be as individuals, they lack means of expressing themselves through existing institutions, whether they be church or British Steel Corporation. The function of the Vic has been to give such people a public voice.

It is now possible to come to some tentative conclusions concerning the problem we discussed in relation to 'The Burning Mountain', that the articulacy - or lack of it - of the people chosen as subjects, may be a limitation on documentary plays such as these. 'Fight for Shelton Bar' is a triumphant assertion of how articulate non-literary men can be about the things that concern them most closely. The depth of their experience forces them to express themselves vividly. They are the experts in their field. By contrast, in 'The Burning Mountain', the theatre wanted to show the indadequacy of religious expression in most people's everyday lives, and the language they discovered was, naturally, restricted. When expert steelmakers, railwaymen, soldiers, are interviewed, their language has poetic force.

We have seen how an acting style has developed. It is closely linked to the way narration and dialogue are edited, and it enables a social role to be dramatised. It is a sociological and anti-Romantic concept of character suited to bringing on stage people who have no control over their individual destinies. Essentially, the documentary plays describe men who take, rather than give, orders. In addition, we have seen how the treatment of character enables the feelings of people playing social roles to be explored. Now, our language

is commonly full of phrases that assume feeling is consonant with role: 'angry militants', 'harrassed police', 'the dignity of office'; At Stoke, the role-players have a diversity of feeling, and there are tender, or humorous militants, embarrassed soldiers, an anguished evangelist, a dignified railway shunter. It is significant that the soldiers in 'Hands Up' are never seen to kill.

The result in a theatre that shows, to put it at its simplest, role-players with feelings, is a great sense of optimism. Men are capable of surpassing the roles that society requires of them. The documentaries make this statement by choosing moments when roles are re-evaluated. In 'The Knotty', the railway management switch from seeing their workforce as responsible beings to viewing them as disruptive militants. Hugh Bourne's later anguish derives from his conflict with those Methodists who seek to create out of individual vision a social structure. Our attention is held by the way in which individuals respond to the changing nature of their role. The most exhilarating response is when the steelworkers realise their ability to make their own case against redundancy. The impressionistic manner of the plays' construction enables the audience to be aware of an individual's social role both as he and as others see it; also of the feelings aroused when those two conceptions differ.

Finally, we may examine the relevance of these plays to their audience. In the first place, at an obvious level, the choice of local dialogue and subject matter has the effect of affirming the worth of the Stoke community. It presents local people as holding values that are worthy of public presentation. In reviewing 'The Knotty', the local critic said, 'The audience helped to make it an evening of folklore'.[56] We might say that underlying the plays is a force akin to myth. By focussing on a main social role such as soldier-prisoner, or steelworker, and showing the many individuals who have taken that role undergoing similar experiences, the theatre creates the equivalent of an archetype. That Cheeseman is aware of this is clear in the introduction to 'The Knotty', where he acknowledges his debt to G. Wilson Knight's view of characters as 'symbols of a poetic vision'. The equivalence with death both of being made prisoner and being made redundant, reinforces the underlying mythical quality of both 'Hands Up' and 'Fight for Shelton Bar'.

It would seem that Cheeseman is trying not only to document local issues, but to find in that material more universal elements. Put at its barest, all his documentary plays, with the possible exception of 'The Burning Mountain', are concerned with some threat to the life of a community, and how that threat is stemmed, if not averted. Cheeseman's successful search for 'verities' confirms what we have established elsewhere, that documentation is not an end in

itself. It is a tool for the author, whether playwright or director-compiler, who is concerned to explore real issues and events as they relate to a whole community.

CHAPTER 7

Sheffield, Bolton, Greenwich

The documented polemic of 'Oh What a Lovely War', and the development of the documented local history play at Stoke suggested two possible directions for other repertory theatres to follow. Let us now look at the work of three, the Sheffield Playhouse, the Octagon Theatre at Bolton, and the Greenwich Theatre. In common with Stoke, they have each performed plays which deserve consideration as documentary drama. Each has produced a sufficient number, three or four, to have had the opportunity to develop its own attitude and approach to documentary plays. Sheffield's scripts were the work of a writer commissioned by the theatre. The company at Bolton created their own by a process considerably different from that at Stoke. At Greenwich, at first, the plays originated with the theatre director, who wrote his own detailed outline scripts. These differences are of intrinsic interest as examples of different methods of creating documentary drama.

What the three theatres shared, unfortunately, was the inability to define adequately for themselves the purpose of their documentary plays. At Sheffield and Bolton, individual plays did appeal strongly to a sense of local patriotism, and gave voice to local feelings and aspirations, but this success was not maintained and deepened as at Stoke. At Greenwich, and its location suggests a reason, the theatre never found a fully local audience, and its documentary plays have taken their place alongside other genres in a catholic repertoire.

As well as looking at the manner in which the plays have been created, we shall also, therefore, be considering their appeal to an audience. The two perspectives are related, but I propose to show that there is no direct correlation: the group creation of a play is no guarantee of its local appeal. Equally, a writer's intentions, like Hochhuth's, may be highly personal, and in this connection it is worth remembering Peter Cheeseman's view that the writer is a 'middle-man' standing between documentary material and its audience. This consideration will be important with regard to Sheffield and Greenwich. Finally, whether there is a single author or a group, what matters is the intention towards the audience.

After Stoke, the Sheffield Playhouse was the second repertory theatre to perform local documentaries. Although 'Oh What a Lovely War' was never to be produced at the Playhouse, Colin George, who had been appointed director at the beginning of 1965, was aware of its popularity.[1] He was faced with formulating a policy at a time when 'the old regular audiences were getting

increasingly frustrated by changes in theatrical taste, and resenting the substitution of the kitchen sink for the french window'.[2] He had visited 'The Jolly Potters' in July 1964, and recognised the immediacy of its appeal to Stoke audiences. The importance of locally-oriented plays had first occurred to him when he saw a dramatisation of 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' in Nottingham, where Alan Sillitoe's novel is set. This play, performed in April 1964, made an intense impression on its audiences who, for the first time perhaps, saw their lives authentically represented in the theatre.[3] Sheffield followed it in November 1965 with what Colin George has described as the Playhouse's own 'Saturday Night',[4] Alfred Bradley's dramatisation of 'A Kind of Loving' by Stan Barstow. These combined influences led George to commission a 'Jolly Cutlers' equivalent to Stoke's first play. He turned to the resident playwright and schoolmaster-turned-actor, Alan Cullen, who was already known at the Playhouse for his children's plays.

The resultant 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night' opened on May 31st. 1966. Cullen had no previous experience of the documentary form, and although he was primarily responsible for the script, in the published version Colin George stresses the teamwork that had been involved. John Hainsworth of Sheffield University offered as a basis, research he had done into the activities of a Sheffield Trade Union leader in the 1860's. Roderick Horn, responsible for the theatre's music, set some contemporary ballads to music, as well as creating, with John Hainsworth, some new ones. Colin George was responsible for editing Cullen's script, and transposed some scenes. In the Introduction, George notes the contribution of the whole company without specifying detail, but in conversation he suggested that it had mainly been related to sharpening 'the occasional line'. It seems apparent that the whole creative process is in the hands of a much smaller team than at Stoke, and the use of scripted scenes puts the playwright at its centre. The result is,as we shall see, a play that articulates the playwright's own stance. It is, presumably, unintentional. Cullen has stated,'"Stirrings" makes no attempt to take sides, or to make any particular social comment...'.[5]

The play traces the violent attempts by William Broadhead (Old Smeeton, as he is know, from 'Smite 'em') to force workmen to join the Saw Grinders' Union, of which he is secretary. In the opening scene, he orders his two henchmen to maim a foundry-man, Linley, who takes on more apprentices than the Union's restricted entry will allow: 'Just make it so's he won't work again'. Linley is followed, shot, and later dies. Broadhead's part in the manslaughter would be undiscovered, but when he arranges for a non-Union man, Fearnehough, to be 'rattened' with a pound of gunpowder down the chimney, the latter discloses sufficient evidence to the local newspaper for an outcry to be raised.

A Royal Enquiry is set up, and Broadhead saves himself only by confessing. Broadhead's story is intercut, in the first half of the play, with scenes showing attempts by two rival companies to lay mains and supply Sheffield with gas-lighting.

One newspaper reviewer felt that these gas company scenes made the play disjointed, and welcomed their disappearance in the second half. Their inclusion is fully deliberate, for the competition they dramatise occured ten years before the Outrages. Cullen's purpose in thus telescoping history seems clear enough. We are intended to see Broadhead's actions in a wider context of the social change that Sheffield was undergoing in the mid-nineteenth century. As well as fatalities, industrialisation is to be seen as having benefits, although these may have come about in absurd fashion. In one delightful episode, two workmen from the Consumers' Gas Company dig a hole, while a retired labourer acclaims their progress: 'Wonderful. All them pipes. Ramificatin'. Ramificatin' all over.' When they 'knock off' for lunch, the hole is filled in by workmen from the United Gas Company, and the scene ends in a knockabout fight between the rival pairs.

The pity is that the play does not maintain this wide context, and therefore lays itself open to criticism levelled at the exposition of the Broadhead story. There is a weakness in the ending which lapses into an unusual sentimentality. Leng, the editor responsible for unmasking Broadhead, stands with him on the emigration pier.

> 'Leng There was never anything personal, you know.
> Broadhead I did what I had to do.
> Leng Are you a villain, Mr Broadhead?
> Broadhead I am a realist. [6]

A newsboy then crosses, shouting, 'New Charter for the workers. Trade Union Bill passed in Parliament'. But whether this has been brought about by the Outrages, or whether it will lessen the grinders' hardships, we are not told.

There must be theatregoers who are disconcerted by a play such as this, and the many other documentary plays which deal seriously with the politics of labour. But an examination of 'Stirrings' shows that its attitude is very much that of the orthodox end of the left-wing spectrum. Broadhead is the militant who is an embarrassment to the Union. His policies are illegal, and eventually he must be made to pay for them. Only a small part of the play dramatises the conditions that gave rise to his policy of violence. One of the songs tells of the grinders' conditions of work:

> And every working day we are breathing dust and steel,
> And a broken stone can give us a wound that will not heal,
> There's many an honest grinder ground down by such a blow,
> For there's few that brave such hardships as we poor grinders do.

A song immediately following Linley's shooting attempts to justify it in similar terms.

A programme note suggested that Broadbent, if resurrected, would enjoy the theatricality of the play (he was apparently a great quoter of Shakespeare). Maybe; he might also suggest that to die at thirty from steel dust was a violence that could only be countered by equal violence. Since the audience is never fully shown the workmen's condition, it is not possible for them to judge.

When I put this view to Cullen, he suggested that in production the balance is redressed and the staging creates a sense of poverty and hardship. Photographs of the original production do not bear this out;[7] like the revival at the Crucible which I saw, the picture is 'cosmeticised'. The setting looks clean and wholesome: there is none of the 'muck' that reputedly accompanies 'brass'. The actors depict sturdy and upright workmen: there are no cripples; none dying of the hideous 'grinders' asthma'.

Nevertheless, Cullen and George knew their audience. 'Stirrings' played to 90-95% capacity houses compared with the then more usual 60%. It was revived at the opening of the 1966-7 season, and again in November the following year, when audiences 'would not let it go'.

> 'Time after time, a closing date was fixed, to be followed shortly by the announcement that, due to popular demand, further performances would be given... and(it passed) its 100th. performance in the late spring, with still no letting-up in the demand for tickets...' [8]

It is not easy to account for this success. The local first-night review was enthusiastic, but not overwhelmingly so. 'The audience is swept along... alternating poignancy and flippancy... Unlike most stage documentaries, it doesn't get too bogged down in the mechanics of the plot to create proper characters.' The reviewer suggests the fault we have already considered: 'Where it is a little disappointing is in its failure to face the issues of the Outrages seriously'. Later, on the other hand, Denys Corrigan recalled, 'I have never heard acclamation to surpass that accorded it by the first-night audience...' In a programme note to the 1968 revival, Colin George suggested the 'spontaneity and freshness' of rehearsing this particular play invigorated the company with a feeling that they transferred to their audience. A far preferable explanation, which I expect to gain more force as we consider documentary plays at other theatres, is that it satisfied a strong hunger in the Sheffield audience for confirmation of their sense of local identity and self-evaluation.

While the play is based on historical incidents, and Broadhead and the other principal characters actually existed, it is the bulk of the dialogue, and therefore the implicit attitude of the characters, that has been invented.

The many unnamed workmen and their wives form a kind of chorus, and it is against their comments that we judge Broadhead's actions. In real life, to act as he did for so long, must have depended on a substantial body of workmen condoning violence. That there is no similar body of opinion in the play is, on the one hand indicative of the kind of bias that is inevitable in any documentary reconstruction of this period, but on the other, of something much more significant. 'Stirrings' owed its success to the fact that its workmen's attitudes and values are those which a group of modern Sheffield working men might hold in that situation. To condone such as Broadhead would, morality apart, fly in the face of the Trade Union stance today. Thus the audience can closely identify with the workmen and wives of the play. Broadhead is the antagonist against, not only the 'decent' people of the play, but the audience itself. Leng, the editor, is 'our' spokesman.

To end the season that the first 'Stirrings' had opened, Cullen was commissioned to write a second documentary play, set this time in the plague years. 'Ring o' Roses' tells the story of the small village of Eyam whose shopkeeper orders a trunk-full of secondhand clothes from London, and proceeds to sell them cheaply. The shopkeeper, followed by others, contracts the plague from the clothes, and dies. Slowly, the disease spreads through the village, until the parson, Mompesson, aided by his wife Catherine and the Puritan ex-incumbent Stanley, persuades the remaining villagers to isolate themselves from all outside contact and endure until the plague is spent. This they do, at a cost of some families wiped out and others halved. Mompesson loses his wife. The story is intercut with scenes set in London showing the decadent gaiety of the Court of Charles II, and the dog-eat-dog situation brought about in the city by the plague. A clear contrast is thus drawn between the self-interestedness of the Londoners, and the selfless sacrifice of the parishioners of Eyam.

There are two important contrasts with 'Stirrings'. In the first place, the subject matter is not as directly local; in the second, far fewer documented sources existed for the playwright to base his script on. In conversation, Cullen stated his preference for this state of affairs: it gave him freer rein. His research had suggested that the population had decreased from 600 to 300 before the cordon was set up, but this point is largely ignored in the play. Cullen is quite clear that he wanted to make of the material a parable, and such figures would not have helped. Similarly, there is little or no evidence for the parishioners' motives, and those in 'Ring o' Roses' are Cullen's sympathetic invention. The result is a kind of neatness in the script which doesn't quite ring true.

In this connection, it is interesting to compare Cullen's play with

another treating the same subject, 'The Roses of Eyam' by Don Taylor, which was first performed at Exeter's Northcott Theatre in the autumn of 1970, and subsequently was televised on BBC2 on June 9th. 1973. Taylor's play is much more claustrophobic, set only in the village, and arranged so that the stage is depopulated as the plague spreads. The language has a poetic quality, perhaps over-wrought, and explores the anguish of people in such a situation. There are many more, and more clearly drawn characters than in Cullen's play, and much more weight is given to the village faction opposed to the cordon. Because of this engagement in dispute, character is better revealed than in 'Ring o' Roses'. The disproportionate invention in 'The Roses of Eyam' compared with the paucity of source material hardly qualifies it as a documentary play; indeed the author does not see it as such himself. What it illustrates is how, in the other play, Cullen, without the discipline provided in 'Stirrings' by the source material, falls between two stools. Where characters exist, as in those of Mompesson, Catherine and Stanley, there is a tendency to naivety in their creation, a result of an uneasy compromise between naturalism and the parable form; where the play tries to document a wider context, as in the London scenes, there is an oversimplification of history into an unsubstantiated 'good and evil' contrast.

For all these reservations, the quality of parable triumphs, and this gives 'Ring o' Roses' a strength. As presented, the villagers' selflessness in the face of adversity has an appealing quality. The play illustrates Cullen's view that the point of dealing with historical material is to provide a parable for a modern audience, but its reception by Sheffield audiences, lukewarm in comparison with 'Stirrings', suggests that it failed to tap any deep sense of community. The material, the situation, and the parable are too far removed from modern experience to be much more than politely nodded to. There was, of course, one bonus of enjoyment for the Sheffield audience: a nearly-local village is shown as morally superior to the southern capital.

'Ring o' Roses opened on July 18th. 1967 with Cullen playing Charles II. One reviewer grudgingly described it as 'another of his cerebral local history pantomimes' while a second made an interesting comparison:

> '"Stirrings" free-wheeled - "Ring o' Roses" is driven ahead forcefully by a lot of things Mr Cullen wants to say about corporate responsibility and the mechanics of heroism...'

Cheeseman's point about the middle-man writer is beginning to apply.

During the first revival of 'Stirrings', Cullen wrote 'The Life and Times of Charles Peace', which opened on July 16th. 1969. The play, based on secondary sources, dramatises the life of a famous nineteenth-century burglar. It is far less concerned with 'the times' which are sketched in with token scenes

of a revivalist meeting, a fair, and a soirée of song and recitation. Peace's life is traced from when, as a youth, he is crippled in a steel mill accident and takes to pickpocketing for a living. After 'doing time' with hard labour on the inhuman crank and treadmill, he becomes determined: 'I'll swing before I do another stretch'. Thereafter, he carries a gun, and on a subsequent 'job' manages to escape only by shooting a policeman. He takes to disguises and aliases, and we see him as a womaniser, pestering a neighbour's wife and provoking a fight in which the husband is killed. He escapes to London, sets up a ménage a trois, and proceeds to live by day like a Victorian gentleman. Finally, he is caught burgling and the police discover his true identity just before his mistress reveals it herself. He is sentenced to death, and there is a final scene in the condemned cell.

The focus of the play is on the character of Charlie Peace, and his warped sense of humour. We laugh with him when he outwits a fellow pickpocket. On a station platform, disguised as an old man, he gets talking to a police sergeant who speaks the memorable line, 'Every Constable in England knows what Peace looks like'. The two are then joined on the seat by the public hangman. But the joke slowly goes sour, especially when Peace takes to robbery with violence. Nevertheless, the character is so drawn that we can understand how he attracts women. But in understanding Charlie Peace, we are finally led to condemn him. When he takes a mistress into the same house as his long-suffering common-law wife, our sympathies are finally alienated. It is an insight into the playwright's sense of values that Cullen should choose Peace's womanising to condemn him, rather than by showing us the victims of his burglaries.

The play remains neutral on whether Charlie Peace could be said to be a victim of his 'times', although the hint is there in the opening steel mill scene. The play could have been about a burglar in any period of history, for it never shows signs of intending to consider the particular role of the criminal in Victorian society. To that extent, the dramatisation of Victorian 'times', perfunctory as it is, is mere dressing.

Cullen was himself dissatified with the play. He felt that in the end, he had no clear statement to make. He was perhaps hoping to show Peace, in part, as a victim of Victorian society, but as he worked upon the character found no redeeming features. In contrast, he said he had enjoyed working upon Broadhead's character. This arbitrary affinity for, or dislike of, the material, typifies the problem of the playwright who creates out of documentary material a play to suit his own predilections. It is not to be confused with Piscator's method where an attitude is taken which governs the search for documentary evidence, but yet it is presented in its own right. Cullen is straining for what he sees as universalities, and if his material does not provide the basis he

requires, there is an end to the matter. At the root of any documentary drama must lie a commitment to the potential value of the material itself.

Cullen's fourth documentary play for Sheffield, 'Britannia's Boys', which opened on May 20, 1971, was the last production in the old Playhouse in Townhead Street. Perhaps fittingly, for the sake of nostalgia, it was a series of short scenes depicting the growth and heyday of the Empire. It was conceived on a grand scale and began with scenes showing Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth I, and the subsequent colonisation of Virginia. The play continued with the Indian Mutiny and an obligatory Black Hole of Calcutta scene, the buying of the Suez Canal, the Boer War, and Victoria's death. Colin George described the presented material as the 'tip of an iceberg', and admitted that the whole play had been under-rehearsed. Certainly the strain of handling such a large topic was apparent in performance.

Some of the episodes in this revue-style piece were very funny. One involved a soldier who had bought expensive new leather boots which were so stiff that on parade he could walk only on tiptoe; when marching through a flooded paddy-field, he found they tightened so painfully, 'If they knew where my neck was, they'd strangle me'; when they dried out, they were too sloppy to fit. His virtuoso clowning never had the ironic bite which was half the meaning of 'Oh What a Lovely War'. In the final analysis, it did little more than enliven a tedious chain of apparently unrelated events.

One moment was theatrically very effective. At the end of the play, pop music, dancing and appropriate decor suggested Carnaby Street, and we saw the soldiers' uniforms from earlier episodes now worn as fashionable clothing. Suddenly there was a dead march, and the company froze into a tableau of 'mutilation'. It may have been a coup de théâtre, but it wasn't a sudden illumination of what had gone before. The play had been too diffuse to summarise.

With 'Britannia's Boys', Cullen expired as a writer of documentary plays. His interest seems to lie in the creation of rounded, naturalistic characters, and he needs the scope of a conventionally-developed plot to do this. Insofar as his last documentary had a structure, it was a series of undeveloped one-act plays. because he had no commitment or critical attitude to the subject matter, and there were no characters to build, Cullen was at a loss.

It is a pity that Sheffield's documentaries should progressively diminish in stature. In retrospect, the reasons appear clear enough. If an episodic montage structure is used without the wish to present a wide-ranging argument, or to express a many-faceted point of view, the result is hollow. On the other hand, Sheffield audiences demonstrated by their response to 'Stirrings' a desire to see themselves defined historically by their theatre. It was unable to commit itself to such a task, except by continually reviving the same play.

After the initial experiments in local documentary plays at Stoke and Sheffield, there appears to have been a lull, while the idea was assimilated. Then 1968 was a boom year. At Bolton, Robin Pemberton-Billing, the director of the newly opened Octagon theatre, decided to include a local documentary play in his programme. Opening on June 25th., 'Crompton's Mule' was to be the first of four staged during his years at the theatre. Like 'The Jolly Potters', it looked for its subject to the source of the town's industrial wealth, in this case cotton spinning.

The first impression for a member of the Bolton audience was of the company's intention to respect historical accuracy: the expensively printed programme contained, besides routine theatre credits, nineteen pages devoted to original source material. Not only were there maps of Bolton, diagrams of spinning machines, songs, and eyewitness and newspaper accounts, but even facsimiles of Samuel Crompton's letters and a grocery bill. The cover showed Crompton's invention, the Spinning-Mule, in a working diagram that was not only accurate, but beautiful in its own right, as prints of machinery can be. It was as if the audience were being asked to judge for themselves the authenticity of the play.

Indeed the attempt at veracity is implicit through most of the script. Immediately we are introduced to the intricacies of spinning, and after an account of the traditional spinning-wheel, we hear,

> 'Hargreaves All I did really in principle was to turn the spinning wheel on its side and have the wheel driving eight spindles instead of one. The main problem was to devise a method of stretching the cotton before it was spun... So I clamped the cotton between two pieces of wood, and by drawing the clamp away from the spindles, stretched the cotton before spinning.'

Similarly, the songs are all industrial folk songs of the period, such as 'Poverty Knock', or 'We're Three Apprentice Weavers'. Time and again during the play we are presented with statistics, verbatim reports, and letters read aloud. We are left in no doubt about the play's basis in documentation.

The scope of the play is very much wider than an account of Crompton's act of invention. We see Crompton grow up at a time when spinners wrecked mills in an effort to preserve their livelihood; in consequence he works in secret to perfect the Mule. The first half ends when, abhorring this furtiveness, Crompton hands over his invention to the mill-owners for the general good of the industry. But he has already lost out, for he has no patent rights, and when the second half of the play opens, manufacturers are beginning to install the machines for a token guinea each donated to Crompton. 'I find... I am not calculated to contend with men of wealth', he sorrows. Nevertheless, he attempts to obtain redress: he collects detailed statistics of the number of

Mules in use, and petitions Parliament. Meanwhile, children and wife die; there are more intense Luddite attacks. Finally he receives a grant, but the mill he invests in goes bankrupt, and he lives on a tiny, locally-subscribed, annuity, until his death.

There is a wide variety of theatre language: short naturalistic scenes, chanted statistics, songs, mime sequences, crowd scenes, addresses, and so on. The need for it arose from the detail and complexity of the copious material. How the company handled it was crucial to the play's eventual form, and the programme notes enable the stages of the process to be set out:

1. Research by an individual (Maggie Hellewell).
2. Selection of material.
3. Scenario roughed out.
4. Early decisions about the use of narrative and song.
5. More detailed research by the company into the characters and events.
6. Events improvised, discussed, and polished into scenes.
7. Further consideration of the place of narrative and song.
8. Script evolved and rehearsed.

The fifth and sixth stages point to the degree of involvement expected of the actors in the company. Their contact with the historical material was first-hand, rather than, as at Greenwich and Sheffield, third-hand. The importance is that when actors are called upon to improvise scenes, their attitude, language and movement is the more likely to be influenced by qualities in the original document. The method is less rigorous than finally at Stoke; it recalls the creation of the commoners' scenes of 'The Staffordshire Rebels'.

The seventh and eighth stages need some amplification. The scripts were assembled in loose-leaf binders and thus, in the latter stages, each actor had a collection of 'elements' of a montage which could easily be cut or re-arranged. From the script I saw, it was possible to deduce something of the way in which the elements came to be in their final form. The scenes arising from initial research show typical rehearsal cuts, alterations and insertions. In some cases, lines (for example a documentary page of accounts) have been allocated around the cast. As rehearsal showed up gaps, new scenes were written at a later stage. In the first half, these appear mainly to provide a fuller historical and family context for Crompton's invention, while in the second half, they establish more clearly the value of the Mule to the spinning trade, and in contrast, the poor remuneration that Crompton received. At this time, an episode-by-episode synopsis was distributed to ensure uniform scripts, and at a later stage, perhaps during the early part of the run, further scenes, especially in the second half, were cut.

We can see that the creative process was primarily in two parts. There was the creation of the separate elements and there was the editing. It is analogous to the making of a film, where shooting precedes editing. In

contrast to Sheffield, where actors received a virtually complete script, Bolton's loose-leaf binders signalled to the company that change was probable, and encouraged all to take part in the creative process. Undoubtedly such participation took place, but an analysis of the script will show that there was not the same confident penetration and assimilation of the material that characterises the work at Stoke.

Insistent throughout the play is the single voice. Narrations, addresses, the reading of wills and letters, recur frequently. It is the most obvious response to the researched documents forming the play's basis. Gilbert French's 'Life and Times of Samuel Crompton' (1859) was the main source, and quotations must have sprung to the actors' eyes with their verbatim detail:

> 'I recollect that soon after I was able to walk I was employed in the cotton manufacture. My mother used to bat the cotton on a wire riddle. It was then put in a deep brown mug (sic) with a strong layer of soda suds. My mother then tucked up my petticoats about my waist, and put me in the tub to tread upon the cotton at the bottom...'

There is, unfortunately, a preponderance of narration which frequently substitutes for the dramatisation of unwieldy material. Much more effective is the use of a chorus of voices, as, for example, when the manufacturers who have adopted the Mule, agree on a subscription fund and each of the ledger entries is spoken by a different actor, in a kind of round. On the final chorus, the manufacturers disappear, and Crompton's single voice is heard:

> 'I consented in the hope of a generous and liberal subscription. The consequence is that many subscribers will not pay the sum they had set against their name...'

The method is one of montage. We hear the juxtaposed viewpoints: they do not hear each other. The technique is reinforced on the Octagon's arena stage by spotlighting. In the montage, the emphasis on voices suggests the influence of the radio ballad. By editing from chorus to single voice, the play makes its point. Crompton is alone against the manufacturers.

In contrast, some episodes, such as a Luddite attack, have no dialogue, and authentication is by the folk song which follows, in this case the defiant 'Foster's Mill'. ('Croppers' shear the nap on wool)

> Come all you croppers stout and bold
> Let your faith grow stronger still
> For the cropper lads in the county of York
> Have broken the shears at Foster's Mill.

We accept the scene as an emblem of all such attacks on factories, and contrast the experience of Luddite anger with our knowledge of Crompton's inventiveness.

One more scene without speech is a dance drama of the building of the Mule.

Here, the human bodies miming the machine are in a style far removed from the rest of the play. It is the same difficulty, that of dramatising machine work, which we noted earlier in connection with workers' theatre. Nevertheless, if the style of the scene is misplaced, it is a welcome realisation of what Crompton has been striving for.

Of the many episodes in the montage, roughly one-third are relatively conventional dramatisations of two or three characters who converse in naturalistic dialogue. Even so, a number of them manage to contain original documents embedded in a matrix of improvisation. The danger is that, because we do not recognise the document for what it is, our attention is held by the characters and not by the historical situation. In fact, the play emphasises individual characters, in particular Crompton. He is the one consistently to appear from start to finish. As his mother and uncle, and Arkwright and Hargreaves disappear after the first half, and in the second only Parson Folds appears with any frequency, and then to bury the diminishing Crompton family, Samuel stands out against a background of increasing fragmentation. He is the one constant factor in a world that otherwise appears to be diminishing in coherence. Yet this is only <u>his</u> viewpoint. In reality, Crompton's single-minded purpose in perfecting the Mule blinds him to the potential of his invention to revolutionise cotton manufacture, to the effect its exploitation by the mill-owners will have on the hand-spinners. The lone inventor is unaware of the industrial revolution of which he is an important factor.

It is to the detriment of the play, that the emphasis on the character of Crompton tends to invite us to share his narrow viewpoint. At its best, and for the greater part, the play offers a tension between the montage of episodes which sketch in the wider social context, and the individual's, Crompton's, aspirations. This tension, between character and montage, individual and society, is the play's greatest strength. Unfortunately, it is never fully followed through. In the end, the emphasis is on the rejection and poverty of Crompton the individual. It is a half-hearted attempt at the tragic, and the local newspaper critic would have preferred this aspect to have been developed at the expense of the wider view.

> 'I came away with the conviction that there was yet another play to be written about Crompton, outside the scope of this one. That would be a study of the essence of this great and simple man who kept his integrity through all the vicissitudes that beset him.' [9]

Such a demand could be met by a writer like Alan Cullen. The group at Bolton recognised the importance of the wider canvas, but were unable to find a dramatic resolution for their montage. They present some large issues, but leave a number of questions unanswered. Was Crompton, through his invention,

guilty of the hand-spinners' distress? Were both Crompton and the spinners the victims of the manufacturers' exploitation? Is industrialisation necessarily harmful to workers' interests? There are more.

If the play displays no overt commitment, like 'Stirrings' one is implicit. Ultimately, the montage is transcended by the lone figure of Crompton, so that the point is made that the fate of such a single individual is more worthy of consideration than say that of the mass of hand-spinners. It is a Romantic viewpoint, very different from that of 'The Jolly Potters'.

It has to be said, finally, that the method used at Bolton failed to express the multitude of viewpoints that, in montage, might have made a statement about the town as an example of early industrial society. Partly, there is a pedantic regard for the material: it is never transformed into a many-layered statement reverberant with internal meaning, such as Cheeseman achieved at Stoke. For all the effective editing, from scene to song, chorus to voice, dramatised scene to document, the intention remains to tell us about Crompton, not to review Bolton in the light of his invention. Arguably, as the local critic felt, the montage method is an encumbrance:

> 'It is a tribute to this play that through all the historical fact, the technicalities and the period flavour, (Crompton's) integrity shines through with undiminished brilliance.' [10]

The local response to 'Crompton's Mule', if guarded, was sufficient to encourage Pemberton-Billing, a year later, to create a second documentary play. Just as Stoke's second play dealt with local incidents during the Civil War, so did Bolton's. 'The Bolton Massacre', opening on June 3rd. 1969, was created by a team that included many who had worked on the first play. There were the same director and designer, and the songs were arranged by the same two actors, David Brooks and Bernard Wrigley. Two other members of the company had also acted in the earlier play. Perhaps because of this previous experience, the material was better translated into stage terms, with less reliance on narrators, announcers and speakers. For example, an excellent use was made of a sequence of flags which could be raised to denote Royalist victories and lowered for losses. In one battle, the Royalist flag was thrown down by a Roundhead to signify his victory.

'The Bolton Massacre' begins with three rather long-winded sermons by Protestant, Catholic and Puritan, to inform the audience of the religious situation prevailing then. A number of scenes show the Earl of Derby, who owns Latham House outside Bolton, raising a large force to fight for the Royalist cause. We see how his enemies persuade the King he is treacherous, and how the King relieves Derby of his Lieutenancy. Derby remarks to his wife, somewhat bitterly, how the King is 'as usual hard-pressed for troops,

but apparently not for Commanders.' Despite good reason to do otherwise, Derby remains loyal when he is approached by the Roundheads. Yet he still lacks the King's confidence and is 'banished' to the Isle of Wight to suppress a rebellion there. Meanwhile his wife fortifies Latham House, and after 'discomforting' Colonel Rigby, the local Roundhead leader who requests her surrender, is besieged. The first half is brought to a climax when we see Lady Derby arrange for a large mortar, a symbol of Roundhead might, and a dangerous threat to the house, to be stolen at night. Rigby's discomfiture is complete.

In the second half, Rigby calls off the siege as Prince Rupert and the now-restored Derby come to the relief of Latham House. Rigby's troops take refuge in Bolton, and when it is narrated that they have hung a Royalist prisoner, this provokes a battle in which we see the Royalists not only rout the Parliamentarians, but kill townspeople as well.

> 'The massacre in Bolton is made quite bloodcurdling by the effective use of lighting, and the hard work of the cast... (It) gives the impression of scores of people being involved.' [11]

After this climax some rather feeble news episodes narrate the events of the war which led to Derby's eventual surrender and court-martial. The closing scenes focus closely on the man, as he petitions Parliament and then writes a last letter to his wife. It is long, but the prose is the emotional yet reasoned expression of a gentleman scholar. Of similar quality is his last, scaffold, speech.

In the end, therefore, the play is Derby's tragedy. The first half builds our sympathies for this nobleman, using the documented voice of the fine letters he wrote to his wife. In the second half, he makes the error of revenging himself on innocent townspeople, and is finally brought to justice. The pattern of the play organises our sympathies clearly enough. The Civil War is seen in terms of individuals, and the chosen Royalists, Derby and his wife, are noble and courageous. The main Roundhead character, Rigby, is easily deceived, and pompous as well. The sum effect is to assert that the Royalist cause, typified in Derby, is right but prone to mistakes. The important reasons for the Civil War occurring in the first place are less than hinted at in the opening sermons.

There are, in fact, references to a wider scale of events, by two diggers of holes and ditches, in no way connected with those other, political, Diggers, who pop up for weak 'I say, I say' routines which convey such titbits as:

'1st Trap Hey! Have you heard?
2nd Trap Heard what?
1st Trap Able (sic) Tasman has just discovered Van Diemen's Land.
2nd Trap Where's that?
1st Trap Tasmania.'

They recall the workmen of 'Stirrings', but they are not nearly so closely related to the structure of the play. There are also a pair of 'rather effeminate cavaliers', Gervaise and Arthur, who are used for a similar burlesque purpose. Such approaches display at a surface level a lack of trust in the material's intrinsic interest. They pay lip-service to some half-felt idea that a 'documentary' should have wider implications.

'The Bolton Massacre' is paradoxical. It is presented as a documentary, and the programme contains an extremely substantial bibliography. But the great quantity of local material has led to the national events being ignored. In consequence, the play's purpose seems to be no more than to tell us an adventure story with oversimplified values. We sympathise with the protagonist, Lady Derby, without considering her underlying motives, and certainly without passing judgement on the relative claims of the two sides in the war. Siding with Lady Derby is as automatic as siding with the cowboys in the traditional Western, and as thoughtless. In contrast, the material for Stoke's 'The Staffordshire Rebels' had been selected in an attempt to reveal some of the causes underlying the events and conflicts of the Civil War, and in consequence, to enable the audience to judge the validity of different points of view. 'The Bolton Massacre' lacks the very quality that marks a documentary play, that of placing the values and actions of individuals in a wider, social context.

The third documentary, 'Bolton Wanderers' about the town's nationally known football team, is interesting for another paradox, not uncommon in this field, the discrepancy between the quality of the script, and the strength of feeling evoked in performance. There were many new people connected with this play. Although Pemberton-Billing was still overall director of the Octagon, John Roche directed 'Bolton Wanderers', and wrote it in association with Tim Shields. Bernard Wrigley again was responsible for the music, and one actor, Len Kavanagh, had worked on both previous documentaries. In a programme note, John Roche described the process by which 'Bolton Wanderers' had been created. He had spent three weeks on local library research, followed by interviews.

> 'The field is being narrowed down and the first selection process has begun. The question asked at this time is, "What must be included at all costs?" Thus you get an idea of the rough shape of the show. The interviewing of the characters that are to figure in your show will throw a completely different light on things, and in many cases will lead off on several fascinating anecdotes...'

At this stage, the 'rough shape' was partly scripted. Incomplete parts were taken to rehearsals. 'Here, what the actors improvise during the day will be scripted at night and rehearsed next morning.' It was this contribution by the company that gave a relatively shapeless script its theatrical

power. The price of the method, as at Stoke, is the immense strain it places on the company and this is presumably why 'Bolton Wanderers' was the last play to be created in this way at the Octagon.

The play chronicles the Wanderers football club from its origins in a Sunday School class of 1871. The first half of the play deals with the formative years of football, emphasising Bolton's part in inducing the Football Association in 1885 to legalise professionalism. Too much of this half is taken up with long committee meetings discussing first the dispute with the founding clergyman when the club want to become Bolton's, and then the issue of professionalism. To an outsider, certainly, the political in-fighting of a hundred years ago is not the most compelling of subjects, and although the documentation can be admired, better editing might have made these scenes more compelling, and avoided one critic's charge that,

'The show dribbled its way through a historical pageant of a first act.' [12]

A money-raising bazaar scene brings the first half to a climax. It was 'played strictly for laughs', and the local reviewer found the included 'attractive belly dancer' more than he 'had bargained for'. [13] During the interval, the audience is to suppose the First World War come and gone. The second half relies for continuity on interspersed newsreel of the Wanderers' old triumphs, but these film inserts are neatly made to serve a purpose. The play's nostalgia is interrupted by the barracking of some Manchester United supporters and the film is used as evidence in support of the Trotters' former glory. The United heckling was to provoke the audience 'into a barracking fervour leading into the infectious sentiment of the good old-fashioned spectacular finale'.[14]

The play suffers from trying to include too much. It is fatiguing to follow a character for half a dozen scenes only to lose him and have to get to know another. The sense of skimming across the material becomes acute. 'Aye, they played together, then fought together - some of them were killed', is sufficient to dismiss the years 1939 - 45.

Presumably the local audience were able supply a great deal of detail from their own knowledge. For the Bolton Wanderers fan, the play must have been like an inventory, ticking off the triumphs and the celebrities year by year: a kind of catechism of success. In this context, criticism of width or of characterisation is irrelevant: the play is triggering knowledge or feeling already latent within the spectator. It is like the conversation that can take place in a family or among old comrades, which revives well-worn memories in quick succession, 'Yes, and do you remember when...?' Perhaps for such a play, the criterion to apply is the number of memories successfully evoked in a short space of time.

A consideration in these terms goes some way to explain the response of both critics and audience. 'Bolton Wanderers' opened on May 19th. 1970, and next day, the Bolton Evening News called it 'a winner'. In comparison with the moderate reviews of the previous documentaries, this was strong praise. The critic particularly noted the audience's response to the production which he described as hammering home 'tradition, pride and belief in Bolton Wanderers'.

> 'Thrcughout the evening, the mood was one of pure unashamed nostalgia... The audience joined in the Wembley community singing and their "Abide With Me" added a touch of reality tothe proceedings'.

The critic of the Journal and Gazette said the first performance

> 'evoked a surprisingly spontaneous reaction from the audience who entered the spirit of the production whole-heartedly and thoroughly enjoyed it.' [15]

Like the response to'Stirrings', we note the audience's pleasure of surprise at recognising something so close to themselves.

As a paradox, given this initially warm response, the play appears to have closed a week early.[16] Presumably the play lay between two camps. On the one hand, the regular Bolton theatregoers may have found football beneath their taste, and on the other, the Trotters fans may have found the theatre alien to them. It is a pity, for the play speaks to what must be close to the heart of Bolton. At the same time, it is a comment on how the regional theatre still appeals only to a minority of the population.

'Bolton Wanderers' celebrates an important aspect of the town's life. With this play, the theatre is not disguising a history lesson, or elevating long dead personages; it is making an appeal to what is important in contemporary Bolton. The theatre's heroes are the people's heroes.

The Octagon performed one more documentary play, but this time the script was completed in advance by Phil Woods, an actor in the company who had been responsible for the documentary, 'Settle Us Fair' at Hull the year before. 'In Place of Strife', which was first presented on March 30th. 1971, chose a different kind of relevance from that of 'Bolton Wanderers', and was set in the immediate future when, it was accurately assumed, the Industrial Relations Bill would be law. The Octagon, in-the-round, was turned into an Industrial Court administering the act.

In the play, Jack Mann (played at Bolton by the author) is in the dock, the first Trade Unionist to be accused of causing an illegal strike. As'witnesses', he calls a series of industrial reformers from the past, George Loveless, Annie Besant, Ben Tillett, and so on. Their part in the Trade Union movement is dramatised by short scenes played in the 'well of the court', the

central arena. From the very beginning, Jack Mann is insolent and off-hand to the Judge, and jokes with the police, yet goes unrebuked. Unfortunately, this diminishes our sense of the court's importance. The Judge is a paper tiger, and the outcome of the play predictable. Just as the grinders' hardships in 'Stirrings' needed to exist as an element in the play's structure, so here the power of the Government needs to be dramatised. If the court will be so weak, who needs to fear the Act? The play's strength lies in the historical scenes which remind us of the growing unity and sense of purpose of the men and women who make up the Trade Union movement. In the end, rather than witnesses, they become a jury with a sensible, down-to-earth viewpoint, sitting in judgement on the lawmakers and their Act. Like the fishermen of 'Settle Us Fair', the grinders in 'Stirrings' and the Deptford people in Greenwich's 'Down the Arches', these men and women are a chorus containing the viewpoints of those who, by combining, protect their right to work.

Although an interesting play, particularly from a polemical standpoint, 'In Place of Strife' did not have a particularly local interest for Bolton. Like the first two documentaries it was politely received, but its overtly radical position prevented any warmer response. The Bolton Evening News found the play 'holds the attention with a firm grip', but felt it necessary to warn:

'The author declares himself to be rather more left than otherwise.'

Then, desperate to be fair, continues,

'Obviously he strains to keep political bias well in hand...'[17]

Subsequently, (although not as a result of 'In Place of Strife'!) the Octagon's artistic policy was in trouble at the Box Office, and during the summer of 1971 Robin Pemberton-Billing was succeeded by Wilfred Harrison. Although this new director had played in 'Stirrings' (as the ruthless Broadhead), his more cautious policy at the Octagon appears to have had no room in it for documentary plays.

At Greenwich, Ewan Hooper, the artistic director of the theatre on Crooms Hill, has pursued a policy that has included a number of local plays of a documentary nature. His work is of interest again because of both his manner of approaching the plays' construction, and the values they embody. Indicative of Hooper's commitment is the choice of 'Martin Luther King' to open the theatre on October 21st. 1969.

Previously, Hooper had become interested in the documentary form as a result of some work he had done in 1960 with a church youth group on a large Bristol housing estate, Lockleaze. He had scripted, with Ernest Marvin, 'A Man Dies', a modern version of the Passion Play.[18] Over a space of four years, the play underwent a number of revisions, and Hooper experimented with

juxtaposing huge slide projections of contemporary events with the biblical dramatisation. At first, these juxtapositions were used in contrast only to the crucifixion sequence when the audience saw, amongst others, slides of the H-bomb exploding, and of refugees. In 1971, Hooper, in interview,[19] was to call these images 'liberal clichés', but for audiences at the time, when the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's marches were at their height, the juxtapositions must have had considerable emotional force. In later versions of 'A Man Dies', projections were used at a number of other points, and at the risk of stretching the parallel to breaking point, a more overt link was made with modern events. For example, when Jesus was shown being tempted in the wilderness, the juxtaposed slides were of Hitler's Germany, and of tanks, planes and soldiers.

For many, this attempt to make the Christian message meaningful to a modern audience was too much. According to Hooper, some who saw it called the play blasphemous, while others read into it an agitprop statement, quoting the Bible at the right wing of the Labour Party who were at the time debating the issue of nuclear disarmament. Although for Hooper it was neither blasphemy nor agitprop, nevertheless, 'A Man Dies' taught him the techniques he was to use in his later documentary plays. In addition to the projections, he used songs, either folk, or in a folk or rock idiom, as a further means of pointing the modern relevance of Jesus's life. He defines the documentary form in terms of the comment which juxtaposed slide and song can make on a dramatic action.

Three months before the Greenwich Theatre opened, Hooper began to research material for 'Martin Luther King'. Documentary evidence was to be the main basis for a play which, beginning with the African slave trade, traced the history of the American Negro to the 1960's Civil Rights campaign, and the subsequent murder of Martin Luther King. The quantity of material, given such a scope, coupled with the administrative problems of the new theatre, meant for Hooper a rush to complete even a skeletal script. As a result, the second half of the play was somewhat fragmentary, and in production, showed a need for more shaping. No attempt was made to give the story any particularly local relevance, but at the time, the Civil Rights movement in the United States was given frequent coverage in British newspapers, and racial tension here gave the subject matter a general topicality.

The first half of the play depicted the historical growth of the slave trade. An attempt was made to show the basis of its profitability, and projections showed the capture and treatment of slaves. Particularly pointed up was the manner in which the slaves were packed into ships, and the spoken descriptions emphasised their treatment as a commodity. Some attempt was

made by the use of dance and music, to show an indigenous African culture and to suggest an alternative to the European view that the slaves were merely savages. Inevitably, this was a difficult task: the very nature of the documentary approach weights it in favour of literate, picture-making cultures. It is a similar problem to the dramatisation of nineteenth-century British working class people.

The second half of the play was able to redress the balance and used Negro spirituals and blues, as well as transcripts of Martin Luther King's speeches. The wealth of newspaper reporting, especially on the Freedom Marches, and the extensive photographic record of racial injustice enabled Hooper to create meaningful juxtapositions. The determined but humble attempts of Southern Negroes to win civil rights was strongly contrasted with haughty, murderous White arrogance. The juxtaposition made a forceful appeal for an audience's sympathy with the Negro cause.

Despite the prominence given in the press to Luther King's utterances, and the consequent ease with which he could have been made a tragic figure, this temptation was largely avoided. Unlike Bolton's emphasis on Crompton as an individual, the Greenwich production always managed to retain the wider social and political context, so that King was an emblem of the Civil Rights movement. In him was embodied the suffering of a people; he spoke on their behalf, not only for himself. This view is of course how Luther King saw his role, but the production, by a consistent use of montage, emphasised it, where in the hands of another author a more traditional form might have prevailed to the emphasis of individual suffering.

The manner in which Luther King's role is presented shows the influence, in addition to the juxtapositions of song and slide, of 'A Man Dies'. The character of Jesus is almost passive: he embodies what the authors feel to be a positive attitude towards world suffering. Similarly, King, as the programme notes, is pushed by events towards a more militant position. 'He was an intellectual who might have been happier as a theologian than as a popular leader.' In both plays, the central character is formed by circumstances. In 'Martin Luther King' the extensive montage makes the point. The play documents how an individual can be thrust into a social role by the events around him.

Hooper has thus assimilated, for he had no direct experience, the tradition we have traced back from 'Oh What a Lovely War' to the productions of Erwin Piscator. His purpose is political in the wider sense of the term: to demonstrate the justification of the stance taken by the Civil Rights campaign. Since such an aim must embrace a description of a number of conflicts in American society, he is led, by his material, to create a montage of scenes,

songs and speeches, where previously a simple juxtaposition of two realities had been sufficient. In so doing, Hooper creates not characterisations, but social roles. His actors must depict attitudes and viewpoints: they are elements of the montage.

Where Hooper failed, perhaps, was in not relating his purpose to his own local audience. It is easy, and somewhat hypocritical, to condemn failings in American society and not notice similar tensions in our own. To some extent, 'Martin Luther King' explored the general problem of how far it is possible to meet violence with non-violent protest, but the particularity of detail, precisely because of its documentation, weighed against any quality of parable that the play might have possessed. It was a strong indictment of American failure to enforce civil rights; only very indirectly could its lesson be applied in Britain where racial problems were manifesting themselves in a very different way.

Arguably, Hooper gave his audience what they wanted. There was no acute racial problem in Greenwich: the play could be seen as a sop to the liberal conscience. Its dances, which were strong, colourful and well performed, made the play enjoyable to watch for the visual experience. Nevertheless, for the Kentish Independent, the play

> 'takes little time off for light relief - in fact only once - but the Negro spirituals do much to maintain an emotional tension and the message does not lose its punch.' [20]

'Martin Luther King' was followed by 'Spithead', written by John Hale.[21] This play, based on the 1796 mutiny of the fleet at Spithead, follows, fairly accurately, the outline of actual events. In the foreground of the play, however, are a comparatively small group of men, and it is the conflict between the values they hold which is the centre of interest. Hale makes clear in his programme note that the characterisations are based on his own personal experience in the Navy. 'I realised I had known men who could have managed a Spithead'. He had researched the historical material, but the events remain peripheral. Hale makes it quite clear that he does not consider 'Spithead' a documentary play, but it makes, nonetheless, an interesting comparison with, say, 'Martin Luther King'. Hale assumes from the outset that men can be portrayed by characters who are fundamentally consistent; only a catalyst is needed, the mutiny, to force extremes of behaviour, whereupon a typology of strong differences will emerge. There is an agitator, a hothead, one who is diplomatic, and so on. Undoubtedly such a schematic view contains some truth about human reaction to a crisis; it is simply that the perspective is necessarily limited. The explicit values in the play are decency and moderation, and there is no wider perspective which might, for example, question the

hypocrisy underlying those values at a time when, as we are told early in the play, a man might be flogged to death for striking an officer, or the press-ganged sailor's family starve on his totally inadequate pay. Such historical details serve only as background dressing to Act One; they help to establish the situation. By the end, they are quite lost sight of. Hale's preoccupation is with the psychology of group behaviour. That 'the documentary' was fashionable in 1969 is indicated by his inclusion in Act One of letters and petitions which have the appearance of being authentic.

Of interest when we come to discuss the second documentary play at Greenwich is the method of staging employed by Hale. A composite setting enabled him to present different groups simultaneously: mutineering sailors on the quarterdeck, officers on the main deck, and the Prime Minister with the Admiral of the Fleet 'in London'. Different viewpoints could thus immediately be contrasted: a kind of quick-fire debate with the arguments aimed at the audience. Using a distinction we made with regard to Piscator's work, there is, visually, a collage, which makes possible a montage of scenes.

The second documentary play, if we discount 'Spithead', was 'Down the Arches', which was again written and directed by Ewan Hooper.[22] At the time, Greenwich was under threat from a motorway extension of the M2. The area is a mixed but identifiable community within London, bounded on one side by the Park, where Wren built the Naval College and the hospital which now houses the National Maritime Museum. The proposed route of the motorway would take it across the park, just as, 150 years before, a railway had been planned to do the same. To dramatise the threat from the railway attracted Hooper, for it offered the kind of juxtaposition to the modern parallel which he had enjoyed in 'A Man Dies'.

The first stage was to commission Nick McCarty, a television script editor, to carry out the initial research, and the result was an extended treatment in the form of forty or so pages of compressed dialogue and action. The play was given a title, and its inclusion in the season's programme put Hooper under pressure to complete a script that would at least provide a basis for rehearsal. In this next stage, Hooper saw it as his job to provide a strong narrative flow from one scene to the next, and, even more important, to create clear characterisations as a basis for rehearsal. Hooper does not rate the value of improvisation very highly, and feels it is the writer's job to refine the script. He makes a clear distinction between the functions of writing and directing. Hooper the playwright delivers a script to Hooper the director, who works on it in a comparatively conventional way. Scenes may be rewritten, or cut in rehearsal, but the structure is clear from the first reading.

A problem arose that caused Hooper to depart from this approach when research revealed an absence of either local or folk songs about the Greenwich railway. Accordingly, Hooper wrote two of his own, and suggested others in the draft, which was then shown to Annette Battam, a member of the company who, with Leo Aylen, composed further songs. These were based closely on the material of the research draft and attempted to reflect attitudes and feelings of the time. The basis for one of the songs was:

> 'PEOPLE
> Greenwich people don't want a railway
> You know Stephenson doesn't drive his engines through towns.
> No. The fire from the engines'll set houses alight.
> What if the engine explodes?
> Explodes.
> Explodes.
> What does the excessive speed do to the complexion?
> ...'

The intention is, at least, to express sentiments felt by a number of people. It is social rather than private, in contrast to the sentiment of some of the songs in, say, 'Silk' at the Derby Playhouse which we shall discuss in the next chapter. In that play, the songs replace soliloquy: they express a character's purely private feelings.

The draft script was shown to two local railway historians. One particularly theatrical scene was pronounced apocryphal. It had shown Thomas Hardy, the commander of the Naval Hospital, dressed in Roman clothes, riding into London on a railway coach built like a galley. The scene was cut. It had been mentioned in advance publicity which made the decision harder, and subsequently, one critic complained about the omission. While respecting Hooper's integrity, we can only wish for the inclusion of such myths because of the truth they may pinpoint. It would surely not be impossible to find a manner of 'quotation' which would separate legend from authenticated event.

'Down the Arches' went into rehearsal. The draft script suffered cuts, additions, and some alterations, but the original framework survived. The first half concerns the promotion of the railway on a grandiose scale, and shows how legal and social obstacles were overcome. The line is built from London Bridge on the brick arches of the title, and the play's first half ends with its completion, on a much reduced scale, a mile short of Greenwich.

The play opens with a montage. There is a rousing song, 'See the Conquering Hero Comes', and projected slides of engines, bridges and other railway paraphernalia show us the 'hero' of the mid-nineteenth century. Voices from the crowd narrate facts about the few railways of 1830, and from them emerges George Walter to sell his vision of one from London to Greenwich. He discusses his proposal with Colonel Landman, who agrees to become the project's

chief engineer. He shares Walter's vision that a railway should ennoble men's lives, but warns that the reality is likely to be squalid. As if in confirmation, the crowd return to sing 'What if the Engine Explodes?'

The company directors enter, and in the first of several Board-room scenes, Landman explains the vision. The line is to be elevated, soaring on stone arches over the squalid network of Deptford's slums. It is to be extended through Greenwich Park eventually to reach Dover. For the British, returning triumphantly from their Empire, it is to be a modern-day Appian way, and the tracks are to be flanked with boulevards giving access to spacious houses built within the arches.

Landman's vision is illustrated for the audience by projections of the colour-washed engravings shown originally to the real directors. In the theatre, not only were they beautiful in themselves, but they enabled the spectator to see with eyes contemporary to the event. They also created a strange percipience. Anyone living in South-East London knows the ugly decaying brick arches which carry the railways into the centre. For such a person the contemporary mental image is in juxtaposition to the projections of Landman's vision. While we watch him selling his idea, we already know the outcome. The effect is to distance us: we begin to ask how such a change can occur, and we expect the play to tell us. We want to see the mechanism of a social process, and the play provides it.

The directors accept the vision (in principle) and there follows a sequence in which successive Board-room scenes are intercut with the reactions of local people to the proposed railway. Two different processes are thus shown: the internecine squabbles over the form the railway is to take; and the growth of external opposition.

Let us first examine the Board-room scenes. In bulk, they make up a large part of the first half of the play, and they focus on the directors' personalities. We become aware of the difference between Landman who clings to the initial vision where Walter, a 'man of straw', can be swung to settle for a more utilitarian project. To these two are added the ineffectual chairman, Dottin, and the self-seeking vicar, Macdonald, whose introduction, 'The Song of the Businessman Vicar', is an opportunity for pointed humour:

> My mission, dearly beloved,
> Is washing your souls so bright
> But how could a soul be spotless
> Until the body be white?
> So next to St. Marks your vicar
> Has built a new kind of shrine
> The Isle of Dogs Steam Laundry
> That both soul and shirt may shine.

The vicar, with an obvious self-interest, proposes the replacement of the

brick arches with 'Bramah's Patent Iron Arches', and the ensuing struggle with Landman makes up a very long scene which is almost a one-act play in its own right, with a resolution in the latter's favour.

Hooper enjoyed writing these scenes. He appears to have been influenced by Hale's approach to 'Spithead' (in which he had acted one of the main parts), and based the characterisations on his own experience. As the Greenwich Theatre's director he was well acquainted with committees and could feed this knowledge into the Board scenes. The danger in them, considered in relation to the play as a whole, is that personal conflicts may divert our attention from the wider issues that destroyed Landman's vision. The struggle over brick or iron arches comes close to unbalancing the play.

The Board-room scenes provide a narrative spine for a number of short and varied scenes which are intercut. It is in such scenes as the surveying of Deptford market that the working people,whose houses stand in the railway's path, first show their force. They do so through song and chorus, and it is interesting that their presence was much more important in production than it is in the script. This was their rallying song:

We aint got no towering staircase
We aint got no marble hall
No place for our family portraits
No room where you'd hold a ball
In fact I doubt if a Duchess
Would reckon our 'Umble abode.
But it's mine, it's Lily Benson's,
It's 2 - 7 - 3 Docks Road.

The song was sung by Sally Mates, who was also to play a number of other small women's roles. In rehearsal, she welded the roles into the one consistent character, Lil, and with boy-friend Micky played irrepressibly by Derek Griffiths, the two formed a nucleus for the working-class characters. This grouping entirely re-balanced the play, particularly the first half, and offset with its energy the weight given in the script to the Board-room scenes. The effect was to maintain the wide focus promised at the outset. Landman's vision was not only pared away in the Board-room, it came under attack because it was potentially destructive of a community, embodied in Lil and Micky. Furthermore, the chorus, representing the people of Deptford, emphasised to the audience their own community that the motorway might threaten. The grouping around Lil and Micky makes contact with the present in a manner entirely absent in 'Spithead', and only implied in 'Martin Luther King'.

The whole sequence, of Board-room, and intercut scenes, was a challenge to the staging which Hooper solved with a composite setting similar to that used in 'Spithead'. The Board-room scenes with their large table and leather chairs were set to one side of the Greenwich end-stage; Admiral Hardy, a

vocal opponent of the railway's challenge to the park, occupied the other; and the Deptford market scenes were played centre-stage. There was a consequent fluidity of exposition, as in 'Spithead', but it was used not to present a stalemate of opposed views, rather to show cause and effect. We are shown the complex social consequences arising from the decision to build a railway.

In the latter part of the first half, the play becomes more loosely episodic. The navvies build the arches; Micky gets a job as an engine driver; a man goes for a walk down the arches and is killed by a train; a crowd enjoys opening day. At times one longs for a jump-cut.

Also at this point, Walter is made more prominent. He and Landman find that the rising cost of bricks has forced abandonment of the flanking boulevards. Additionally the arches have been lowered and the houses built in each one are pathetically tiny; the scene achieves its force because the criticisms come from Walter's wife while he feebly attempts to justify the pokey, damp hovels. Above the scene, the projection shows the fine tall houses of the original vision. After the joyful opening ceremony, we are left with Walter alone:

> 'It's a heaviness to me that the boulevards are gone; the houses have failed; the trees are neglected. There is only one part left of George Landman's dream - and that - is the arches, going through Greenwich to Dover.'

The balance between an individual's hopes and practical reality reminds us of 'Crompton's Mule'. Had 'Down the Arches' followed its original script, we might have felt there was a similar emphasis on the individual and the tragic. In performance, the strength of the group centred on Lil and Micky was a counterbalance. Even so, at the end of the first half, it is Walter who has the last word.

In the second half, the vision of a mechanised Appian Way is replaced by the more straightforward need to cross the Park. Now the balance shifts much more towards the motivations underlying the action of individual characters. The obstacle the directors must overcome is Admiral Hardy. Whether to cross the Park on arches (with naval statues in the viaduct's niches) or, ignominiously to tunnel underneath, is the opening argument between Landman and Walter. Hardy soon joins the two men, to express his flat opposition. 'You won't go across the Park, sir, no matter how much you kiss my arse.' The general ambiguity of response to the railway's presence is nicely expressed by Lady Hardy's request, once her husband has gone, to ride on it to London Bridge.

The dual focus, on individual struggles, and the wider social context, is maintained by a montage of short episodes showing the popular effects of

the railway: a song, 'Hurrah for the Mighty Engine'; Sal and her friend, Lil, buying tickets, going on a train and enjoying themselves immensely; the directors singing praise to profits (to the tune of the 'Hallelujah Chorus'). But it is the last time in the play that the working people of Deptford make any strong appearance. After this sequence the play centres on two groups of characters, Hardy and the opposition, and the Board of directors. In these episodes, Walter suffers a series of defeats. He decides he must buy the vote at a public enquiry into the extension, but Hardy trumps his success. 'Even if Parliament consented, Greenwich Park is a Royal Park. I've seen the King... An old friend.' Walter fights Macdonald on a number of issues, but is finally ousted from the Board, losing £4,000 in the process. The emphasis on the one character is heightened by a short scene of pathos when he takes wife and daughter to see the locomotive named after him.

The second half ends the play with a deliberate echo of the first. We hear taped voices and see slides describing the railway and Greenwich today. They surround the lone Walter, who sums up:

> 'There was a dream once. Along the side of the railway track wide boulevards to rival Paris. Trees overhanging... The railway is still there, the arches are still there too. But people are not there. The people are not involved in the dream as they should be. They work on in the muck and the dirt, and the vision is dead...'

Unlike his first summary, this Wesker-like sentiment has a false ring. In terms of the play itself, it is unjustified, for it is through 'the people' that the railway's success is dramatised. Although at first Lil, Micky and the working people reject the railway for its destruction of their homes, when it has become a <u>fait accompli</u>, they begin to see the opportunities it offers them. For the ordinary people of the play (whatever may have been the case in real life) the utilitarian concept of a railway simply as a means of travel offers a new dimension to life, as much of a vision to them as the boulevards and trees to Landman.

The play, like 'Crompton's Mule, tends to fall between two stools. It is hollow where it might be the tragedy of a man with vision; nor is it a resolved statement about the complex response of a community to outside pressure. More extensive rewriting during rehearsal might have resolved the problem one way or the other, or even maintained a balanced tension between individual entrepreneurial will and community conservationism. In the event, by allowing the part of the working people to become so important, Hooper as director posed himself a problem that as writer he had not considered, namely, who are these people who can be displaced by the railway they build, and yet finally appear to welcome it. As John Barber said in the Telegraph,

> 'While grim Doré prints showed us the victims of Victorian finance, stage Cockneys in braces capered with galumphing wenches in frilly drawers...'

A comparison with 'Martin Luther King' shows that 'Down the Arches' is weakest when it is furthest from contact with its sources. The invented characters and dialogue of the Board-room scenes echo Galsworthy, and their dramatic neatness threatens the montage structure of the play as a whole. The 'stage Cockneys' needed the methods of Stoke to bring them into contact with the documented reality of nineteenth century working-class life. At the same time, and despite these faults, Hooper did manage for much of the play to demonstrate a complex social process.

All the reviews of 'Down the Arches' emphasise the enjoyment of song and dance.

> 'A most enjoyable evening spinning along with song and dance vigorously belted out.'[23]

> 'Most of the songs brought a roar of approval from the first night audience...'[24]

But Irving Wardle accurately defines the play's weakness when, writing of the businessman vicar and the comparison between Walter's vision and the reality he states,

> 'These and other ironies come over pretty clearly, though they are muffled by the theatre's habitual resurrection of the old music-hall.'

He is referring to regular music-hall evenings that were held to raise money to create the Greenwich Theatre, and there can be little doubt that the group of supporters thus formed exert considerable influence on the theatre's policy. The Greenwich Theatre is sited on a dividing line between the middle-class residents of Blackheath and the riverside working community stretching into Deptford. The division is expressed in comments published from time to time in the Theatre's magazine, Cue.

> '(It should be) a community theatre. It has to have links with the working-class organisations who make up the broad mass of the community.' - The Education Secretary for the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society.[25]

> 'I agreed to become a subscriber on being assured that there would be plays put on which would interest "normal" people. There has not been one which I have wanted to see' - An ex-'Friend of Greenwich Theatre'.[26]

The music-hall songs of 'Down the Arches' are a nod in the direction of Greenwich's 'normal' people.

As artistic director, Hooper chose to tread a middle path, and the result, in the theatre's first three years, was a policy wavering between Music Hall and 'Medea'. The difficulties of pursuing such a course are clear in the wavering stance of 'Down the Arches'. But the play was successful, measured

by the Box Office, and it played to high capacity houses. It is highly doubtful whether the kind of audience attracted to Crooms Hill, who appear to have few 'links with working-class organisations', want documented drama that touches them closely on social issues. Ultimately, it is those who raised the money with music-hall who are still the theatre's mainstay of patronage.

This contention is supported by the subsequent history of documentary drama at Greenwich. 'The Little Giant' by John Pudney bears many superficial resemblances to 'Down the Arches'. Based on historical sources, it deals with Brunel's construction of an enormous paddle-ship, 'The Great Eastern'. Projections again display prints of Victorian engineering marvels, and photographs of the ship at the end of its life. Again, there is an engineer with a vision, who is ultimately destroyed by it. Local relevance is in the ship's construction and launching at the Isle of Dogs across the Thames from the theatre. Hooper commissioned the play, and was insistent on the use of music.[27]

For all that Pudney is reported to have cried at Brunel's death in rehearsals,[28] in performance, the play seemed a very objective and uncommitted account, reinforced by the tongue-in-cheek quality of some of the songs.

Overall, there was a failure to grasp the social significance of the event. In sum, the Great Eastern, for all the documented display in the theatre bar, was reduced to no more than the cause of Brunel's death. It seems typical of the work at Greenwich that it should reduce the apparently wide social issues of its documentary plays to individual confrontation. 'Martin Luther King' is, of course, the important exception. At the end of the line, we might put John Mortimer's 'Voyage Round My Father',[29] which deals with once-real people, but as they exist in the playwright's memory. For documentation he has his own experience, but in a more precise and factual manner than the generalised experience of types that Hale drew on for the characters in'Spithead', or Hooper for the railway directors. Some acknowledgement of this view lies in a remark by the producer of Mortimer's play which, he says, 'is not a documentary about people who are known to the audience...'[30] He is making the point in another connection, but the choice of comparison, even in a negative sense, is revealing.

Sadly, Hooper had a wide vision for his theatre. Before 'Down the Arches', he wrote of the play that it would be about 'the forgotten people of Greenwich and South-East London, the people who built the arches...' In the same article, comparing his work with locally oriented plays in a number of Repertory theatres, he asks 'whether we have the will to be an initiating theatre in the face of the demands of those who are determined that the first aim of the community theatre is to Give The People Pap'.[31] In view of the direction the Greenwich Theatre has in fact taken, perhaps we must conclude that the character of George Walter

may also be seen as Hooper's self-portrait.

We set out to look at three theatres with different attitudes to documentary theatre. Peter Cheeseman's work at Stoke suggests a standard by which to assess them.

The most obvious feature of Cheeseman's documentary plays is the insistence on the primacy of source material. We have seen how, at Sheffield, a writer can easily impose on his material an outline suiting his own predisposition. This is unsurprising, especially when, as in 'Ring O' Roses', an attempt is being made to create a parable for a modern audience. What we must also be alerted to is that even when a play appears to document, as 'Stirrings' does, opposing viewpoints, an implicit attitude to the material still exists. Similarly, we have seen how at Stoke, the determination to express the voice, or viewpoint of the 'ordinary man' has led to a specific, recognisable style, which is the 'voice' of the Victoria Theatre. We can say then, as we found in the historical survey, that documentation is not to be equated with objectivity, and further that it is sterile to argue the relative claims of, say, Cheeseman's method and Cullen's, without examining their purpose and their audience.

However, we can make limited claims for the value of Cheeseman's method. We have seen how Bolton's approach bears a superficial resemblance to Stoke's. Both Cheeseman and Pemberton-Billing expected considerable involvement from members of the company in the two activities of researching and dramatising the material. At Bolton, we have noticed a number of features which seem to reduce the effectiveness of at least the first two plays. The subject was in each case assumed to have intrinsic local interest, and when this belief faltered, as perhaps it did also at Stoke with 'The Jolly Potters', recourse was made to burlesque. Research at Bolton was, with the exception of 'Bolton Wanderers', done mainly in the library, thus suggesting, if not consciously, that oral history is unimportant. Equally, the members of the acting company were not brought into contact with local people through the tape-recorded interview. The strength of both 'Crompton's Mule' and 'The Bolton Massacre' lay in their characterisations, and we have seen how this emphasis led, as with Crompton's father's will, to the assimilation of documents into the dialogue. Consequently, they serve the revelation of the psychology of character rather than define points of view. The net result is that where Stoke addresses its audience as a community, Bolton appeals to individual sympathies. For example, Hugh Bourne is not, like Crompton, tragic, but the alienation-effect of his first- and third- person presentation refers us to the wider struggle of which he is representative. The style of the Stoke characterisations leads us away from the individual to community, or social issues.

Tentatively, we can assert that the direct use of primary source material is a more fruitful approach for plays addressed to a community. In such cases, an audience requires more verification of the experience presented, than with a play focussed on an individual where the author's personal experience can be a sufficient starting-point. The documentary form enables an author, or a group of authors, to present material that may be well outside their immediate personal experience, yet it is acceptable, because it is exactly what it purports to be: evidence of the experience of others. With such a perspective, we may more readily understand the uneasy compromise underlying 'Crompton's Mule'.

It was in connection with 'Crompton's Mule' that we noted a tension between characterisation and montage. 'Martin Luther King' resolved this so that we were at once aware both of the individual man, and the social issues surrounding him. Characterisation became an element of the montage: we were aware of King in his social role rather than as a 'rounded' psychological character. Hooper therefore appears with this play as an author who contradicts Cheeseman's view of the playwright as 'middle-man'. Hooper is sensitive to a multitude of viewpoints in his material, and is prepared not only to view human action in a social context but to search for appropriate theatrical means of 'collage' and montage to achieve this end. It is interesting, though, that Hooper is primarily a director rather than a writer, confirming, as we have noted at Stoke, that to work with documentary material, the skills necessary are primarily those of editor rather than dialogue-writer.

In admiring 'Martin Luther King', we have also noted how it did not relate directly to any deeply-felt local issue. The experience at Greenwich suggests that those documentary plays which are oriented locally, like the political documentary plays of the 1920's and 1930's, must be considered in relation to their audience. The documentary form is a tool to express a communally-felt issue. Where an audience expects its theatre to purvey the best of historically past drama, or modern 'pap', as Hooper describes it, there is unlikely to be sympathy for a play which speaks to a living community of itself. This seems to have been the fate of 'Bolton Wanderers'. In such a theatre, the 'documentary' must take its place alongside other forms of theatre, all equally 'dead', in Peter Brook's terminology. At Greenwich, in the same year as 'Down the Arches', could be seen 'Medea', which, in its modern plastic set and costumes, gave no hint of the play's original part in a community ritual. The experience of 'Stirrings' and 'Bolton Wanderers' suggests that plays based in documentation can move an audience with a unique experience, provided the theatre can attract the appropriate audience inside its doors. At best, as at Stoke, the local theatre accepts the values of

its community, examines them, and presents them, perhaps with some criticism, but plenty of approval, as an affirmation of the worth of that community. This is an arguable standpoint, and documentation is used to sustain it.

From this viewpoint, the failure of Greenwich, Bolton and Sheffield to develop as Stoke has done, is because of the pressure upon them to appeal to a wide audience within their local community. Each found subject-matter for a play that crossed local divisions and had a wide appeal. What none of the three could do was to sustain the discovery of such material, since they had not defined whom they were addressing, nor what they had to say. It is significant that the impetus for 'Fight for Shelton Bar' came from the steelworkers. Somewhat to oversimplify the matter, while the actors from the Victoria were going into the Works with tape-recorders, at the other theatres, the researchers were walking into the local library.

'Documentary' in the regional theatre

It took two years for the Sheffield Playhouse to follow Stoke's example of 'The Jolly Potters'. It was a further two years while theatres elsewhere assimilated the idea of local documentary plays. Then, in 1968, a rash of them appeared, created by theatres up and down the country, but mainly in the North. Many were staged out of conviction, but it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that many others simply followed fashion. Amongst directors at the time it was common knowledge, or common myth, that the Arts Council favoured theatres which could demonstrate a policy aimed locally. Certainly there appears to be no pattern to the growth of documentary plays, except on the rare occasion when a director moved theatre and took his ideas with him. We shall not, therefore, survey the plays chronologically, but rather city by city, which will emphasise the local links where they exist. Many of the theatres have attempted more than one such play. Even in these cases, the hotch-potch of influences has made the work very variable.

'Close the Coalhouse Door' is one of the better-known local documentaries, largely as a result of its transfer via Nottingham Playhouse to the Fortune in London. It opened in Newcastle on April 9, 1968, and had much the same effect as 'Stirrings', drawing an enthusiastic response from an unusually wide section of the local community. In London, reaction was disappointingly lukewarm.

A team created 'Close the Coalhouse Door'. Alan Plater scripted, on the basis of coal-mining stories by Sid Chaplin. Alex Glasgow, also a pitman's son, provided the songs, and the director, Bill Hays, was a County Durham man. The material was, therefore, drawn from the personal experience of team members who were in close sympathy with miners and their trade unionism. They 'tell't just what they felt',[1] and this closeness is apparent not only when the play expresses some of the miners' deeper feelings, but also in the gentle self-mockery with which the play notes the miners' failure in the wider political field. In other hands this might well have been turned into bitterness, or an opportunity for politically sectarian preaching.

In a preface to the published text, Alan Plater deliberately avoids calling the play 'documentary'. Nevertheless, the play's scope, its construction techniques and its sympathies, entitle it to be considered at least as much as many others presented under the 'documentary' label. It is certainly no less accurate with regard to historical fact. Perhaps the main reservation arises from the use of a fictitious family whose party to celebrate the grandparents' golden wedding provides the play's framework, but it does not overwhelm the historical material, and even adds a personal dimension.

The play's three acts deal with the nineteenth century struggles of the Durham miners against the pit-owners; the inter-war years, especially the General Strike; and post-war nationalisation and its aftermath. The

scope is, in fact, that of a Federal Theatre Living Newspaper, in the investigation of a problem, present-day mine-closures, within a historical perspective. Where it differs is in not offering a solution, but rather in singing 'a hymn of unqualified praise to the miners'.[2] The praise is for their individual qualities and their consciousness of solidarity, but it is suggested, if only implicitly, that a greater political awareness would not have come amiss.

The family scenes were played very naturalistically: they were present-day 'reality'. To play the historical scenes, the same actors stepped down-stage into a scenically neutral area, and used props, top-hats or miners' lamps, to denote the new character. It was very much the technique of 'Oh What a Lovely War', yet the central historical sequence of the first act was equally reminiscent of Cheeseman's style. It came after a number of short scenes demonstrating the harsh conditions of pit work, and dealt with a strike of 1844. The sequence, like the others, was marked off by a lighting change, a drum-roll, and a slide projection of the date. One of the cast announces, factually,

> 'Strike meeting, Shadon's Hill, 1844, forty thousand men present. Their leader, Mr Martin Jude.'

Jude, played by Milburn, the pitman whose golden wedding it is, addresses the others in the cast. Then they begin to sing the rousing 'Time for to make a stand, me lads', and between each verse, over a musical link, just as at Stoke, a voice speaks the miners' demands,

> 'Brothers, it's time to end the killing and the maiming, it's time for proper safety precautions, it's time to end legalised murder in the name of profit.'

The meeting disperses, and the ubiquitous coal Expert, now playing Lord Londonderry, describes in a letter the strike situation from the owners' point of view. Intercut, and this is where the play shows a very sure touch, are quotations from the bible, spoken by the Vicar, one of the party celebrants, condemning rich men. This juxtaposition of wealth and censure is followed by a scene in which a pitman and his family are evicted from their tied cottage. It is done with hardly any language, only the following:

> Policeman Will you gan to work?
> (The Pitman looks round the room.)
> Will you gan to work?
> (He looks at his wife, who looks away.)
> For the third time. Will you gan to work?
> (Pause)

The emphasis on the movement and sounds of eviction points up its lack of humanity, and at the same time casts a shadow back on Londonderry's speech making its hypocrisy the greater in retrospect. The sounds culminate in a

slow handclap by the bystanders, which builds to a climax, cuts, and we hear the Vicar again:

> 'Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts as in the day of slaughter; ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.'

Whereupon, Londonderry finishes his despatch,

> 'Believe me, I am your sincere friend, Lord Londonderry.'

The emotions aroused in the scene are capped by a spoken statistic,

> '35,000 men, women and children were evicted in Northumberland and Durham during the 1844 strike.'

It has the effect of turning our sympathy with the evicted family into anger at the coalowner's injustice. The orchestration is Cheeseman's, but the capping statistic is from Littlewood.

In the second act, the style of historical presentation is different. A number of devices reminiscent of agit-prop show up the outcome of the General Strike as ludicrous. Then there are miners' deputations to Whitehall in which the cast unfurl a banner, 'We Want Work', march offstage in time to the orchestra, and back on again. Each time a dialogue follows; each time the pattern is the same:

> Geordie He seemed a canny enough fellow, that Deputy Assistant Parliamentary Private Secretary.
> Thomas He didn't dae nothing.
> Geordie Ah... but the conscience of the nation was stirred.

The humour of the repetition makes the point. In a more obviously agit-prop style, the tripartite negotiations between Government, coalowners and miners are reduced to a ring-o'-roses. We laugh, but we also recognise the underlying pathos. As Sid Chaplin and Alan Plater understood, the miners were 'a group of men who forged a revolutionary weapon without having a revolution'.

The humour of the third act is that of a satirical revue. Great play is made of the 'rationalisation' which follows nationalisation, and we see the miners' struggle diverted from coalowners to Government in the person of the Expert playing Prime Minister. Slide projections show prominent politicians all in cloth caps while the Expert puts one on too, and sings

> '...You must use the local language when you're talking to the men,
> Say a miner is a 'pitman' and they'll ask you back again.
> ...
> But there's one thing makes the locals really fall into your lap,
> Get your picture in the papers with a little cloth cap...'

The ironic humour of this act of the play conceals a great deal of pithy comment on the impersonal callousness of bureaucratic administration, and on the

disillusionment of the miners, whose hopes of nationalisation were so high at the start:

> 'When it's ours, Geordie lad, when it's ours,
> Man, what glorious times we'll have when it's ours...'

This underlying sense of failure is in part dramatised by the party which forms the play's framework. It contains a curious conflict, 'sibling jealousy to spice the plot' in Chaplin's phrase, between John the son who follows his father down the pit, and Frank who returns home from post-graduate study with his university girl-friend. John steals her for the evening, and in a number of short episodes intercut with the General Strike scenes, she questions his motives for remaining, and he, rather unbelievably offers her the option of becoming a pitman's, his, wife. Although somewhat jarring in their sentimentality, these scenes do offer some insight into the psychology of the miner's attachment to his work and mates. He is sustained by a unique sub-culture. Thus the apparently bizarre intercutting between naturalistic lovers and the strike in agit-prop style does go some way to explain how the miners can be militant and yet not desire revolution.

> 'I'm like that bloody slag-heap... built into the landscape... just as solid, just as thick...
> ...it's only people like you make us think about it.'

The party scenes succeed in linking the present with the past. They emphasise how the miner of today belongs to a long tradition which influences him culturally and psychologically. As Ruth, the girl-friend, becomes aware, he is tied to his past and his ability to choose courses of action is limited. There is thus an ambiguity in the final song, 'It's only a story'. Sung pointedly at the audience, it seems to demand a shouted reply of 'No!', and when Trade Union banners are flown in from above to fill the upper part of the stage picture, there appears to be a tremendous show of solidarity, worthy of the ending of a piece of workers' theatre from the 1930's. Unfortunately, no resolution is suggested for the difference of interest between the Labour government's need for cheap energy, and the miners' need for employment. Consequently, the stage picture can be read ironically: the miners are standing to attention, the band is playing, but the ship, their industry, is going down. Is the coalhouse door to be closed for the last time?

Apart from Stoke's documentary plays, 'Close the Coalhouse Door' is one of the few which is at all complex in its structure. Not only does it manage to chart the significant events in the history of the Durham miners' struggles, but the intercutting of the 'real' scenes at the party enable

it to show how events have shaped the miners' psychology and feelings. We could perhaps wish that in place of the John and Ruth scenes there might have been a documentation of those feelings, perhaps using the methods of Stoke. It is in those scenes that we are most aware of the playwright standing between his material and the audience, and diminishing its worth. Perhaps if we could have heard the voices of actual miners, there might have been less underlying pessimism in the third act.

Perhaps encouraged by repeat runs of 'The Knotty' at Stoke, and 'Stirrings' at Sheffield, Crewe's director, Ted Craig, embarked on a documentary about the town. He collaborated with Margaret Ollerenshaw, and 'The Railway Borough' opened on February 25, 1969. It is a somewhat perfunctory history of Crewe from its formation to serve the railway works down to the present day, and it hints at the Borough's former dependence on the Midland Railway Company.

The episodic structure is rather like a succession of factually based revue sketches. One and a half centuries is spanned by comparatively few such scenes picking out events of local but apparently random importance: the muddiness of the unpaved streets and the unhealthy sanitation soon after the town was completed; how the town became a royal borough; the celebration of Queen Victoria's jubilee; celebrating the three hundredth engine to be built at the works; the prosecution of some suffragettes; letters home from Crewe men enduring the trenches of the First World War. At this point, a full script ends, and subsequent events are dealt with in synopsis, to be improvised by the company. Clearly, the compilers had been overwhelmed by the task. The Second World War gets omitted, and the play ends with what were current newspaper reports about threats to jobs in Crewe.

Curiously, the play shares an event with 'The Knotty', the purchase of Oakwood Farm as a site for Crewe station. There the similarity ends, for 'The Knotty's' intense commitment and lightness of touch in dramatisation, are missing in 'The Railway Borough'. This play is too broad and lacks personalised detail, although it does occasionally comment on the material, especially when in one scene it suggests that the Midland Railway possibly bribed and intimidated its workers to vote for pro-Company councillors.

The play is enlivened by song, but the overall effect is of a montage with no strong guiding principle except historical sequence. On its own, it is not sufficient. In each episode, the audience must identify with a new set of characters, and no discernible pattern of roles emerges.

Aware, perhaps, of 'The Railway Borough's' deficiencies because he had acted in it, Peter John, when he subsequently became artistic director at Crewe, staged an adaptation, 'The Wheel of Fortune.' This opened a year

later, on March 3, 1970. The individuality of its authorship is clear: the language is deliberately poetic, even, and not very convincingly, in the mouths of labourers. The play centres on a single fictitious family, intended to be typical of those dependent on a wage-earner employed by the Company. The play appears to provide a fairly accurate picture of mid-Victorian artisan life, and when the son, Billy, goes to become a navvy, it is an opportunity for his life to be described, although not dramatised, in details drawn, presumably, from Terry Coleman's book.[3] The play compulsively embroiders: pathos is introduced by a character, Mad Maud, who dies melodramatically; a local man, Arnold Willett, shown in 'The Railway Borough' penning letters to every M.P. in protest against the proposed railway, becomes in 'The Wheel of Fortune' an unsuccesful attempt at the tragic. How is an audience to respond to a character who, after only two or three scenes, is supposed to die of a broken heart occasioned by failure to divert the railway?

Where the play succeeds, is in limiting the historical scope. It builds to a climax, in the conflict between Mike, the family's breadwinner, and the Company, who wish to bribe him to vote for their councillors, and influence his gang to do the same. He refuses to put pressure on his men, although he himself will vote for the Company councillors. In consequence, he loses his job. In the final analysis, the play's strength lies in taking an attitude to the Company. It is first seen threatening the fields and countryside with 'monster' locomotives, and then itself becomes a kind of monster in Crewe.

Still within the Midlands, at Derby, a number of documentary plays were performed from 1970 onwards. The first was 'Up the Rams' by Bill Grundy, opening in the September. Coming five months after 'Bolton Wanderers', and apparently influenced by it, Derby's play is similarly an attempt to dramatise the history of the town's football club.

The play traces the Rams' history from the beginning when they were a cricket-club 'bastard', created in order to occupy players and supporters in the winter. The club is shown in and out of First League football every couple of years or so, and the haphazard swings of fortune are taken up to 1939. The effect of the war is shown, and then the revival of the Rams' fortunes under a new manager.

The play explores neither character nor incident in any depth. It is a kind of bland eulogy, larded with beery songs forgiving the teams failures. The thin script shows little evidence of primary source material, and the jokes appeal mainly to a local audience. The play seems to have hoped to draw football supporters.

A month later, the T.I.E. team staged 'The Reign of Terror' about the French revolution. It was closely based on primary source material, and is a much more honest piece than 'Up the Rams', but its appeal, intentionally of course, is very much to the school historian. More substantial than both plays, and designed for the local audience, was 'Silk', which had its first night on March 28, 1971.

Written by Gordon Bewley, with music by John Bennett, 'Silk' was originally described as 'not a "Musical", more a play with incidental musical numbers... included to... establish the atmosphereof mill-life in those particular times'. This is a fair description, yet the play is based on documentary source material at least as closely as 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on a Saturday Night' and deserves to be considered here.

'Silk' covers the years 1714–1722, and describes the role of John Lombe in establishing a prosperous silk industry in Derby. This 'fantastic story', as the playwright describes it, was 'based entirely upon accounts and publications printed between 1791 and 1830'[4] , which of course is very much secondary material. Whether Gordon Bewley also had access to earlier material is not clear when he goes on, 'Although the basic facts and principal characters in the story are clearly defined in the contemporary accounts, the author has been obliged to fill in detail where this is not recorded.' A reading of the play suggests that he did not have access.

'Silk' opens with scenes in Thomas Cotchett's ailing silk-mill in Derby. We learn that the mill will soon be forced out of business by competition from Italian spinners producing better quality thread. John Lombe persuades Cotchett to finance him on a journey to Italy where he will attempt to steal their machine designs, even though such a theft is punishable by death. He arrives at the Cassinelli mill, is offered employment, and with the help of two young Italian apprentices pirates drawings of the machines. So complex are they that the work, carried out at night, takes over a year. The drawings are smuggled out for him by a priest whom he has bought. Finally he is discovered, but manages to escape to England. Here in Derby, he sets up a new spinning-mill based on the designs. It is highly successful and brings prosperity both to Lombe and to the town.

There is a sub-plot. Jenny, Thomas Cotchett's daughter, has been in love with Lombe all this time. In Italy, Lucia, the Cassinellis' daughter, also falls for him. Now, Lucia arrives in England and finds the mill. While jealousy mounts between her and Jenny, Lombe becomes more and more ill. We learn that competition from the Derby mill has ruined the Italian trade and that many in Lucia's district are in poverty as a direct result. Lombe dies of acute stomach pain, and in a final narration we learn that Lucia

was held briefly on suspicion of poisoning him. The question is posed, if she did poison him, whether he was a victim, or the recipient of a just revenge for ruining the livelihoods of so many.

The story is interspersed with many songs, and these are the weakest part of the play. Their style is variable, and although they are often sung in chorus, are intended to reveal feeling that is private to the individual.

'Jenny's mad on him
Jenny's sad for him
Jenny won't hear anything that's bad of him...'

We do not sense, as in many of the folk-songs used in documentary plays, the expression of a feeling that is both intense and personal, and yet is representative of what is experienced by many in the singer's predicament.

The play's strength, and the main reason for its inclusion here, is the second half. Just as in 'Crompton's Mule', which 'Silk' resembles both in subject matter and in the kind of relevance it has for a particular town, the first half of the play is largely concerned with the character of an individual. If John Lombe is a thief, we must also recognise his tenacity of purpose and ability as a draughtsman. But just as 'Crompton's Mule' goes on to show the social reverberations of an invention, so does 'Silk'. We are asked to consider the wider issues, that Derby's industry was depressed by Italian success; that, subsequently, Derby's prosperity was Italy's poverty.

To some extent, Lombe and Lucia are emblems which show this changing balance, but they are not passive. Rather, they are the agents of two social attitudes. Lombe's motive is entrepreneurial and capitalistic: that he might be a thief does not occur to him. In his scale of values piracy is a normal part of competition; he is the forerunner to today's industrial spies. Lucia is repaying Lombe, but if it is out of personal revenge, this is only to be inferred; instead we are aware of her mainly as an agent for the feelings of those in Italy who have been robbed of their livelihood. 'Silk' thus has a dual relevance. Not only is it showing Derby audiences their historical roots, but it is an implicit reminder that the scales could again be reversed, that the place of any community must be precarious in an entrepreneurial society.

In Liverpool, both theatres, Playhouse and Everyman, have staged documentary plays. Although both are aiming at the same locality, their audiences are very different, and an examination of their documentaries reveals how choice, style and approach reflect the general policies of these two very different theatres.

The first, and perhaps least successful, was 'The Mersey Funnel',

presented at the Everyman in May 1967. It celebrates the opening of the new Catholic cathedral with a chronicle of its history. It is the building's shape, like a funnel upturned, which gives the play its mildly irreverent title.

Liverpool's religious background is sketched in with a fight between Orangemen and Catholics, which is parallelled with a scene, echoing Osborne, in which Martin Luther contests the Friar Tetzel's right to sell indulgences. The link with the appeal fund could be thought to be a little loaded. When the fund is launched, scenes show a vicious circle: the poor will not give unless they can see building actually in progress, but the building cannot be started until there is enough money. Dole-queue scenes suggest the Depression, and in one, it is implied that a Catholic had more chance than a Protestant in getting work on the site. The play's pace speeds up with a competition for a new and cheaper design. The cathedral is completed, and factually-based but humorous scenes are made out of attempts to hire dancers for the opening ceremony and out of the diplomacy surrounding a proposed visit by the Pope. With celebration and a laudatory but cautioning poem by Roger McGough, the play ends by suggesting that the cathedral must not allow itself to become divorced from the needs of its congregation.

In a programme note, 'The Mersey Funnel' is described as 'an attempt to create a new form of theatrical presentation... Although it started out as being a straight documentary play, it somehow evolved...' This appears to be subsequent justification, for the thin story outline is amplified and burdened with a vast amount of improvisational backchat. Apparently, working was collective, information was pooled, scenes improvised, before a script was created. 'We have tried... to capture the spirit of the Cathedral and its meaning for people in Liverpool...' Had the company put more trust in their documentary material and come to terms with its dramatisation, the play might have succeeded in this aim. In fact, what is largely presented are the personalities of the company, overlaying the story with comic irrelevancies. Later, we shall see how David Wright at Edinburgh was able to discover humour within his material, rather than impose it from outside, with the result of illuminating his documentary sources.

A year later, the Playhouse staged W.J. Weatherby's 'Breaking the Silence', which is peripherally of interest in a study of documentary drama. It re-creates the author's relationship with a black woman when he was a reporter for the Guardian in the U.S. during the racial tensions of 1968. The short scenes, the wide range of characters and events, do portray the treatment of American negroes. We see, for example, the biographical central character's anguish when, with the black girl-friend, he cannot get service

in a road-side cafe. She is resigned to the situation but he complains, whereupon a policeman is called who accuses him threateningly of being a troublemaker. Such scenes are from the author's own memory, and they tend to focus on his personal responses. Finally, for example, after he has failed to persuade his girl-friend to come to live with him in England, she is killed, and he is shown in great personal anguish. It is moving to an audience, but it fails to translate individual feeling into a wider social concern. It is an example of the kindof play Brecht would have attacked for denying, in its very form, the social perspective which could reveal the causes of the depicted suffering. 'Breaking the Silence' might be contrasted with 'Martin Luther King' at Greenwich, which did manage to show the social roots of racial injustice.

When the Everyman presented 'The Braddocks' Time' in October 1970, Liverpool was able to see a play that is much more obviously documentary in origin. Following the lives of Jack and Bessie Braddock, it also depicts their social milieu, the effect this had on them, and in turn, the changes they were able to bring about through political action.

The play begins with what amounts to a dramatised prologue, showing Bessie helping a destitute family. From then on, the play takes the form of a boxing match, with each round given a title such as 'Round Five, Jack versus the Communist Party'. At first in flashback we see Bessie's early life, She refuses to go to school to celebrate Empire Day, and instead goes with her mother to a Communist meeting.

Later scenes show their early political activities, culminating in one where voices are heard through many loudspeakers, suggesting a kind of communications network. We see Bessie in a key organising role within the Communist Party, and Jack helping a Russian agent. He survives a police raid which is played as burlesque in a kind of Keystone Cops fashion. They lead a protest march against dole cuts, and when it is followed by a violent police attack, Jack strikes a bargain with the local Tory chairman, and in consequence he is disciplined by the Communist Party. They see the private bargain as a class betrayal. Jack and Bessie resign membership and commit themselves to working through the Trade Union movement.

The General Strike is dramatised in agit-prop style as a sequence of speeches and caricatures culminating in a boxing contest between the personified T.U.C., and a Coal-owner. Undeterred by the collapse of the strike, Bessie contests a council ward. Again, a boxing match is used to dramatise her fight against an 'Independent Catholic' candidate. Bessie wins, only to discover the impotence of the few Labour councillors in the face of a large Tory majority. She explodes in indignation in the chamber.

Later, Jack is sent to prison for 'inciting riotous assembly'. From gaol he fights a local election and wins, learning then that his appeal has been allowed. The point is again reinforced by a comic scene in which the gaoler swallows the keys, so that the giant Bessie Braddock has to bend the cage bars to free Jack.

The scenes that follow show Bessie and Jack working for local reforms. The Second World War intervenes, dramatised, of course, as a boxing match between a British and German soldier cheered on by Churchill and Hitler at the ringside. The war over, Bessie stands in the elections, and the play ends with her victory over the 'safe' Tory seat.

As a whole, 'The Braddocks' Time' manages successfully to create a sustained dramatic action throughout. There can be no doubt that the boxing match format gives the play one of its main strengths. It parallels the use of the Pierrot Show in 'Oh What a Lovely War'. The boxing scenes serve a number of purposes. They dramatise the Braddocks' own struggle, and they are an agit-prop device to dramatise the two large-scale events of 1926 and 1939–45. They also create a recurrent image of physical struggle which emphasises the underlying unity in the material, that it is, ultimately, about a class struggle.

The police scenes are in the style of comic burlesque which tends to reduce the status of the struggle and thus of the combatants. In consequence, they work against the play as a whole, and the poor humour often becomes tedious. On the other hand, comic moments such as when Bessie frees Jack from prison seem legitimate insofar as the growing myth of the character is presented alongside the reality. The result is partly to replace character with role, that of the 'working-class hero'. In that sense, what is documented is the growth of a legendary character during that person's lifetime. Thus the scenes of naturalistic dialogue give the struggle a grounding in reality for the audience. The prologue, of Bessie in the slums, has an archetypal quality of 'saint amidst poverty', and paves the way for the growth of the legend.

Stephen Fagan, the author, had worked at Stoke-on-Trent, but not, apparently, on the documentaries. In the programme for 'The Braddocks' Time', he said the play was 'not a documentary in the accepted sense of the word', but 'based on "historical fact", if such a thing exists'. Clearly, 'The Braddocks' Time' would not fit into Cheeseman's sense of 'documentary'; equally, it is difficult to imagine another description. Although it uses the techniques of agit-prop theatre, the play documents a span of events in Liverpool's history. It has two central characters, but not in order to investigate their psychology, rather to show how events mould them, and they in turn shape future events. Moreover, as in life the Braddocks were the

champion of the ordinary man, so in the theatre, they are the protagonist on behalf of the audience fighting such 'villains' as rack-rent landlords and Tory councillors. We are alert to what they do, not primarily because of any psychological interest, but because they represent us. In this sense, the two characters have a close similarity to Cheeseman's 'emotional barristers'. They present a case for a person drawn from real life so that we feel it is our case.

In contrast, Ray Dunbobbin's 'Black Spot on the Mersey', performed six months later on March 24, 1971, might have been the Playhouse's riposte, both in content and style. It, too, deals with the hardships of Liverpool working-class life, but this time they are the repercussions of the Irish potato famine. We are shown scenes of poverty and brutality and no more attempt is made to explain their cause than to lay the blame upon antagonism between Protestants and Catholics. Into this hell-pit comes Father Nugent, a little too saintly to be believable, who refuses to accept his colleagues' complacency in the face of so much suffering. He mobilises support within the city, and single-handed sets up Industrial Schools to teach orphans a trade, and night shelters to keep them off the streets. Then he moves into prison reform and establishes training ships for young offenders. We are left with the distinct impression that by the end of the play's fifty year span, Liverpool is a much more salubrious city, thanks to one man.

The play piles success upon success with little conflict. No sooner does a problem arise than Nugent is able to solve it. Upon reflection we wonder whether it really could have been so simple, and if it was, whether the successes were really reforms as the play's eulogising suggests, or only isolated pockets of charitable assistance. The absence of any conflicting viewpoint makes it impossible for us to judge: we are forced to accept the play's evaluation of Nugent. The result is, paradoxically, that the play is more propagandistic than 'The Braddocks' Time'. There, a wider scale of events was documented, so that we could judge the Braddocks' stance by their effect not only on Liverpool, but at a national level. With Father Nugent, the play's scale is drawn to a size in which he cannot help but be a success. Furthermore, he does not represent us on stage, but rather is held up for us to admire, and presumably to copy.

Ultimately then, we must say that 'Black Spot on the Mersey' is not a documentary play in any sense that we have used the term so far. Its concern is to prove what it sees as the intrinsically good qualities of a single person. It does not, as 'The Braddocks' Time' does, show him represent our aspirations and struggles on a social level.

Across the country from Liverpool, at Hull, the Arts Centre opened on January 20, 1970, with 'Don't Build a Bridge, Drain the River', whose title was a local joke about the problems which had beset plans to bridge the Humber. The script was by Alan Plater, and is a very light-hearted and rather feeble pantomime history of Hull, with obligatory references to the Civil War in the locality, the city's whaling industry, a prominent local citizen, Wilberforce, and the 1939-45 War. In the final sequence, it attempts to introduce a serious note by recalling in a poem previously written by Plater, the names of trawlers which had failed in recent years to return from the fishing grounds. Apart from this one instance, the overall result is to treat local people as parodies of television characters so that, for example, when Charles I asks for refuge in Hull, he is turned away by a policeman who might be out of 'Dixon of Dock Green'. The humour patronises local people both on stage and in the audience. After 'Close the Coalhouse Door' it is a great disappointment, and suggests the debt that play owed to Sid Chaplin and Alex Glasgow's personal experience and commitment.

The value of 'Don't Build a Bridge...' was that it established at Hull the possibility of local documentary drama. Phil Woods had acted and created an episode in it, and six months later he had researched a script of his own. 'Settle Us Fair' opened on June 16, 1970, and is based on the events of the trawlermen's dispute which occurred during the time Phil Woods was at Hull. Of the author, the programme said that he had a 'deal of courage' as a Londoner tackling the Hull dispute. It describes 'Settle Us Fair' as a 'documented play loosely based on the events of the Hull trawlermen's strike'.

The script is plotted around such characters as the 'fisherman', 'trawler owner', and the 'White Fish Authority'. They are representative rather than based on identifiable individuals. An exception is the 'Militant Woman' who is obviously modelled on Mrs Lillian Bilocca, who became nationally famous at the time for her strike activities. Appearing through the play is a chorus figure, a kind of fisherman Everyman, who goes on fishing despite disasters, despite strikes. He seems to symbolise a quality of bloody-mindedness, bravado and romanticism which appealed to Phil Woods.

Although the characters may be representative, the events of the strike are dramatised in detail, and apparently accurately. While the strike continues, two scenes show the role of television coverage in presenting the strike in a biased way so that viewers' sympathies are turned against the men. A picket scene is left to be improvised, and so is a sequence, the climax of Act 1, which creates through poems, songs,

reminiscences and tape-recordings, the terrible loss of Hull trawlers in the icy winter of 1968.

> '...the scenes where the news comes of two trawler losses were unbearably moving. The Hull audiences watched and listened with a solemn intensity, as if it were a religious ceremony.' [5]

The second half deals with the legal arguments leading to a court injunction that effectively stopped sympathy strikes. Interspersed are scenes showing a small fish-merchant losing out to big firms such as Ross and Birds Eye. He can neither pay the high prices resulting from the strike, nor can he afford the higher levy which must be paid to the White Fish Authority on each 'kit' of fish. We are shown that the W.F.A., while supposedly raising quality in the industry, monitoring catches and advertising, mainly benefits the large owners. The play approaches satire in the humour it derives from the W.F.A. advertising campaign.

After a representative of the owners plays golf with a representative from the Department of Employment, we see the strike crumbling. The men are left disputing the effectiveness of the Union, but the suggestion is made that a grass-roots militancy has begun that will have to be organised and strengthened in the future.

The sympathies of 'Settle Us Fair' are firmly with the strikers. The immediacy of their action and its effect on Phil Woods are apparent in the writing. Although he has assimilated his source material and the words of the play are his, nevertheless, many points of view have their say in the script; the issues that preoccupy Phil Woods are the same as those preoccupying the fishermen. He is not using the strike as background to some different statement of his own. The Sunday Times reviewer wrote,

> '...you have to look hard to find a trace of either nostalgia or sentimentality in it.
> ...Beyond this (conflict) is the larger target of the twin cruelties of the sea and the profit motive which, the play argues, have already cost Hull dear in men's lives.' [6]

In showing the men's commitment to their job and the meaning it gives to their lives, the play is dealing with the same forces that underlie 'Fight for Shelton Bar'. In a comparable way it enlists the sympathies of its audience.

> 'The production gained strength from its audience, which identified itself totally with the men's struggle...' [7]

After 'Settle Us Fair', Phil Woods moved to Bolton where his 'In Place of Strife' was performed. It is worth noting that where 'Settle Us Fair' was closely relevant to its local audience, the second play was far more general in its political intentions, and had a quite different appeal.

It is our Northern cities that have, on the whole, been the home of documentary plays. To those already discussed might be added Leeds Playhouse's production of 'And Was Jerusalem Builded Here' by Barry Collins[8] which amplified rather thin source material on the Luddites into a sequence of naturalistic scenes about a poor weaving family. The effect was strained by the interpolation during rehearsal of Tarot pack tableaux suggesting that fate and chance dominated the Luddites' future. When these were removed, in a radio version of the play, [9] it was immediately more forceful, but it remained the story of a family rather than a social movement. There was Albert Rhodes' 'Don't Whistle for Me' at Chesterfield Civic Theatre,[10] which set a human interest story against a background of mining, but it barely qualifies for inclusion here.

The comparative absence of documentary plays in the repertoire of Midlands theatres such as Birmingham, Coventry and Nottingham is very noticeable. It is my impression that the main reason lies in their audiences. Nottingham has from its opening in the new building encouraged coach parties of visitors, and it could be argued that all three theatres are to the Midlands what the West End, R.S.C. at the Aldwych, and National Theatre are to London: centres where theatre can be enjoyed for its own sake, whether as light entertainment or as a 'cultural heritage'. A corroboration of this view is in the body of excellent documentary work built up at Coventry not in the main auditorium, but by the Theatre-in-Education team. This group, which from the start maintained its independence of the repertory company, has performed such local work as 'Joseph Guttridge: Weaver' and 'The Carmakers', which between them explore the social conflicts arising from the dominant employments of Coventry in the past and today. The work has only transferred to the main auditorium in one instance, a version of 'The Carmakers' entitled 'You must be joking'.[11] It was a rambling, overlong, and predictable history of the Coventry car industry, memorable mainly for displaying at the end a car straight off the production line. The performance lacked the immediacy and relevance of 'The Carmakers' which had its audience participate, one half siding with the management, one half with the workforce.

Further south, and across the country, Ipswich Arts Theatre staged two plays based on documented sources. The first, 'Margaret Catchpole', the story of a local girl eventually convicted of horse-thieving, was directed by Nicholas Barter. Because of a novel about her by William Cobbold, Margaret Catchpole is something of a local heroine and demands for a play about her came after a production of the much less local 'Maria Marten'. The play was a group creation, and a member of the acting company,

Brigid Panet, and the trainee director, Suki Pitcher, were responsible for research. The most important finding was a local historian's unpublished manuscript which compared the known facts of Margaret Catchpole's life with the inventions of Cobbold's novel. Barter decided this comparison should be the backbone of the play which would have two interleaved styles, romantic melodrama for the novel, and naturalistic for the historically authentic. These good intentions were barely realised because so little could be authenticated, and the play in its final form became little more than a dramatisation of the novel. When a first draft was available, it was prefaced 'The following script is a map. It represents the course of a journey to be taken through the story, but at no point is it to be followed slavishly...' The invitation must have enabled the company to give a great deal to a thin script, for the Ipswich Evening Star admired 'the inventiveness and gusto' while feeling that the play lacked a sense of direction.

In sum, the play is an interesting account of a rather unusual country girl living in eighteenth century Suffolk. It shows a character located in a precise rural environment and does not condescend in her portrayal in the way that the novel does. The play's main fault is the absence of a firm dramatic structure, something that neither the incidents of Margaret's life could supply, nor Barter's approach remedy. The Ipswich Evening News sums it up,

> 'Of the other characters we never know anything other than that they provide cues and exits for every turn of Margaret's life.' [12]

Perhaps because of the experience of working on 'Margaret Catchpole', the company in the following year created a workshop production of a documentary nature, 'Walpurgisnacht', about witchcraft. 'Devised and directed' by Doc Watson, it was about a so-called Black Magician, Aleister Crowley.[13] Finally, Alan Gosling's 'Devil Take Ye' was directed by John Southworth, in charge of production when the play opened.[14] Originally for radio, this play is based on some scant Parish records for the village of Laxfield. The author's interest was aroused by curious entries about the cost of 'bleeding Ed. Bishop', and for 'repairing a room to put Ed. Bishop in if he had continued crazy'.

From such entries, the play attempts to recreate Ed. Bishop's life. The character is a tailor who is driven by the villagers into a state of angry madness. As the persecution increases, the Parson and Schoolmaster try to stem it, but they are barely successful because they are 'foreigners' in a village which is proud of its independence. The villagers build a crate for Bishop, and have him taken to a London bedlam, but Schoolmaster

and Parson procure his escape. Years later he returns to Laxfield, where he is kept in a secure room at Parish expense for the rest of his life.

Many of the scenes are set in the public house, and they serve to create a sense of enclosed village life, with its poverty and petty bigots. The Suffolk dialect is very well reproduced, and again a strong sense of the country environment emerges, but the play is strong in just those aspects which were the weakness of 'Margaret Catchpole'. A recognisable community is created, and a strong interaction occurs between this grouping and the scapegoat figure of the tailor. However, the scant source material has forced Gosling to create types from his own experience, much as John Hale did for 'Spithead'. It is doubtful whether the play has much more than passing interest for an audience with a mind for the locally historical. It certainly does not echo with meaning for the modern day as some of the other plays we have considered.

In the West, at Exeter's Northcott Theatre, Jack Emery has scripted two partly documentary plays. 'The Bastard King', first performed in July 1968, was about the 1685 Monmouth rebellion and was initially a strip-cartoon, joke-laden history, which nevertheless had some success because of its locally relevant material. Emery's 'Wesley: a Man Against his Age' was an attempt to repeat the earlier success, and opened in September 1969 at the Weston-super-Mare Playhouse before transferring to the Northcott and then touring the West Country. Like the earlier play, it had a strong local interest, but failed to show Wesley battling against his 'age', in favour of a study of his private doubts. In this, it is very like 'The Burning Mountain' which was running almost concurrently, but it had not the ability of that play to show the preacher's public face, and to examine the schisms he was at the heart of. 'Wesley' suffered from concentrating too narrowly on Wesley the man, and despite an attempt to spice the material with a music-hall approach and quotations from letters, diaries, and so on, what Emery 'gave us was a bulging scrap-book, not connected narrative'. [15]

More recently, and more successful, has been David Illingworth's run of documentary plays at Bristol Old Vic's studio theatre, the New Vic. ('The Oz Obscenity Trial', which we have already mentioned, [16] played at the Little Theatre) 'The Great West Show' opened this adaptable space on May 30th. 1972. It was a curious mixture of song, naturalistic scenes and technical effects revolving around the Bristol Riots of 1831. The impressionistic collection of episodes sketched in the sense of oppression and injustice felt by the Bristol poor in the years beforehand. The culmination was in the Riots which set the centre of the city ablaze, and this sequence was very effective to watch especially as the play was set in-the-round and the action took place

on catwalks and upper levels to heighten the audience's sense of involvement in the confusion. Yet for all these technicalities it would have been valuable to have been shown more precise details of the Riots' causes, especially as a curious kind of 'distancing' was created by the use of the 'Camera Obscura'. Built just before the riots, the Clifton camera obscura is still today a tourist attraction, and scenes set in it had a more than topical purpose. The point made by its use was that Bristol's middle classes could, through such a machine 'see' all the events beneath them, but with a feeling of detachment. If the play itself had displayed a stronger commitment, perhaps to the Rioters' cause, the irony of the Camera Obscura would have been more pointed. As it was, the play left no lasting impression, except of an enjoyable romp through a slice of local history.

'The Great West Show' was followed by 'The Bristol Road Show' which took for its subject the construction of a proposed Bristol ring road, and the attendant destruction of tracts of the city. It was a multi-media presentation with projections of slides and statistics; there were songs from a group, dances, and flashing lights; the audience participated, pantomime fashion, in a surveying scene. With a great deal of zest, the cast of five satirised the arguments in favour of the ring road, and took a clear stance against it. The company were committed to a case and documented it, but the play was almost too good-natured to be considered a polemic. Nevertheless, the audience were involved in the arguments, first by a cast sheet in the form of a brown envelope containing information sheets and petitions to sign. Then, the third act, labelled 'Discussion', was given to just that, and on at least one night, it was 'surprisingly well-informed',[17] and after making an active contribution, the audience filled out the forms in favour of public transport and against the ring road.

A year later, the New Vic staged David Edgar's 'The Case of the Workers' Plane', about another contentious aspect of the city's recent history, the construction of Concorde at the Filton plant. The piece was well-researched, quoting statistics to punch home a view of administrative wastage and incompetence, with sideswipes at capitalism and environmentalists. It was not, despite Edgar's known left-wing views, a strongly partisan political piece, but, like 'The Bristol Road Show', achieved its ends through satire. It had a detective narrator who investigates the story's different aspects like an archetypal Hollywood figure.[18]

The work at the New Vic is interesting, but somehow it has never quite caught hold of the popular imagination in Bristol, as documentary plays have done in some of the other cities we have looked at. There seem to be a number of causes. The theatre shares a foyer with the imposing Old Vic with its

tradition of theatrical culture, so that it may appear alien to, and keep away, the potential audiences of trade unionists who might otherwise be attracted by the subject matter of plays such as David Edgar's. Its audiences tend to be relatively young, but they come as theatregoers rather than as members of the local community. The plays themselves never quite take their subject matter seriously enough, and although funny, and sometimes biting as satire, they fail to find the moment to rivet their audience's attention with an address to community values, and it is perhaps this slight sense of a tongue-in-cheek quality which makes certain audiences suspicious. Primarily, it suggests a lack of that deeper commitment to community issues which characterises the work at Stoke, and some of the other documentary plays we have considered. Sadly, David Illingworth's death, at a very early age, will probably end the documentary experiments at Bristol. It would have been interesting to see whether a sense of local commitment might have developed.

Turning from England to Scotland, we find examples of documentary plays at both Glasgow's Citizens' Theatre and Edinburgh's Traverse. At the first, Keith Darvill was responsible for staging 'Times are Getting Hard, Boys' and 'Clydesiders'. While stage managing at the Citizens', he had the opportunity to create and direct a late-night show. Not seeing himself as a writer, he chose to compile a 'collage' of material, trying to use contemporary accounts and avoiding the use of narration. In this approach, he acknowledges the influence of 'Oh What a Lovely War', and the radio ballads of MacColl and Parker. Additionally, he had some knowledge of Piscator's production of 'War and Peace'. [19]

'Times are Getting Hard, Boys' compiles original speeches, poems and songs into a montage history of the period from the Wall Street crash of 1929 to the Republican defeat which ended the Spanish Civil War. It contrasts the gay spendthrift attitude of 'Society' with the rigours for the working population of means test and dole. Furthermore, it deals with the growth in this country of a strong Right wing sympathetic to Fascism, and with the beginnings of the Second World War.

By virtue of the many 'voices' chosen, it manages to create an impression of a whole social order. The subject matter ranges over a Society ball at which the pretence was maintained that it was set in a railway station, Society gossip about Ramsay Macdonald's private life, the growth of Sunday hiking, and the reactions ofa public school head to a book on sex education. This variety, which could so easily become muddling, makes sense because the play is arranged to show that all the events reflect a class struggle, of which one culmination is the Spanish Civil War. Yet while the point of view is clear, the play does not have the effect of

propaganda. For example, while it shows the growth of discipline in the Spanish Republican Army, it also shows how the British contingent of the International Brigade recruited down-and-outs by getting them drunk. The play manages therefore to avoid idealising the class-struggle, and it does not pretend that right is always on the side of the workers.

The play is remarkable for the breadth of its research, and the interest of the selected material. There is a good variety of songs. Characters, as such, do not exist, but the many voices fall into two main categories, or roles, crystallising the class differences the play is about. Through this conflict, Keith Darvill hoped to hold his audience's attention by making an implicit equation with the present.

As a result of this production, Darvill had the opportunity to create a second play along similar lines. 'Clydesiders' opened at the Close Theatre Club on May 10, 1967, using a cast of six actors and two musicians. The intention, when the production was commissioned, was to create a local play about the Clydeside shipyards. Early on a difficulty arose, because most of the documentary material was from the owners' point of view, and they were apparently reluctant to release anything that might damage their interests. In order to include the workers' point of view, Darvill had to dramatise Clydeside politics, centring on the Independent Labour Party. Thus there evolved a script whose debt to 'Times Are Getting Hard, Boys' is clear, and which deals for a large part with the Clydeside group of politicians.

The first part of the play surveys the early growth of Clydeside, and in the form of a television documentary emphasises the abominable housing and working conditions, and the depression of wages by immigrant Irish and evicted Highland Crofters. This unsavoury view of the city is contrasted with several official viewpoints, and the 'TV documentary' leaves it an open question as to whether such conditions might lead to revolution. The second part begins with a many-voiced description of the industrial strength of Glasgow in a style close to that of 'Times Are Getting Hard, Boys'. It goes on to dramatise, in a number of more conventional scenes, the growth of the Independent Labour Party, and spices the story with gems such as Willie Gallacher using his National Insurance book to triumph over local bureaucracy. The attitude of the I.L.P. to the 1914-18 War and its links with the Russian Left are contrasted with speculators making war fortunes. The celebration on the Clyde of the Russian Revolution coupled with mass unemployment leads to a virtual occupation of the area by the army, but the culmination is when the I.L.P. sends ten members to Parliament. After this climax, the third part sketches in the Depression and the events leading up to the Second World War. The compression is aided by a style derived from Low cartoons, but Darvill later acknowledged the weakness of this final section.[20]

'Clydesiders' is closely based on historical sources, and contains primary source material. Nevertheless, in comparison with the earlier play, this one is very much the product of an individual writer, having many scenes of invented dialogue and relying much less on multiple juxtaposition. The intention was that at least one theme should emerge, that prosperity and happiness in Clydeside depends on the national economy being on a war footing. Unfortunately, the scope and detail are too wide to be contained. The I.L.P. leaders are the most clearly drawn characters and would presumably be the obvious focus for the sympathies of a Glasgow audience, but they are not really married into the play's wider scale. The difficulty the play cannot quite overcome is that the I.L.P. was at the mercy of economic forces it did not control. A montage of juxtapositions rather than naturalistic characterisation would have been the better dramatic form, because it could have shown the characters' actions as responses. Nevertheless, 'Clydesiders' does attempt to dramatise issues of real importance to the local Glasgow audience, and in these terms its success can be measured by its revival two years later at the Citizen's Theatre.

In Edinburgh, at the Traverse Theatre, a policy of encouraging new writing has been favourable to the staging of plays of a more or less documentary nature. Records of productions at the theatre appear not to be in good order, and the selection of plays discussed below is not necessarily exhaustive. The first that may be worth considering in this context is 'The Gaiety of Nations' by Alan Seymour. The play was toured to the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre in London and a Guardian review said it was

> '...a post-Littlewood charade: 'Oh What a Lovely Vietnam War' presented with a minimum of expenditure, except perhaps in blank cartridges...
> ...the casual role-swappings...(were) hard to pull off. The special effects were good, but Mr Seymour's puppets - the British Council lecturer, the American adviser, the Chinese indoctrinator - could never quite make up their minds whether or not they were meant to be human beings.' [21]

From 1967, David Wright, the author of 'Hang Down Your Head and Die', worked with the Traverse, and a number of his plays have a documentary basis. 'Boswell in Scotland' is mainly a biographical reconstruction which is not concerned with wider community or social issues. The second, which began life as 'The Stiffkey Scandals of 1932' is of interest because of its form, that of a trial.

The Vicar of Stiffkey is in the dock, later to be defrocked for immorality. Heavily edited trial records build up a picture of his character, and this is augmented with scenes in which the Vicar preaches to the audience as though they were a congregation, approaches a girl on a railway station, and finally accepts an offer to lecture in a lion's cage at Skegness. The

ending is ridiculously horrifying and authentic: watched by holidaymakers, one of the lions kills the vicar.

As the trial develops, we are swayed in our sympathies for the vicar. The final view is that he had to be defrocked because his actions appeared to be immoral, even if the likelihood is that he was a naive man, not fully aware of his own motives in meeting women. There is thus perhaps more than a hint of the ambiguities of everyday morality.[22]

David Wright's final play for the Traverse, staged for the 1969 Edinburgh Festival, was 'Would you look at them smashing all the lovely windows', about the Irish Uprising of Easter 1916. It is the most complex in construction of Wright's three plays for the Traverse and is the closest in form to 'Hang Down Your Head and Die'. It uses simultaneous staging, film, slide captions and rhythmic speeches to explore, often very humorously, attitudes amongst the Irish to the Uprising. Permeating the play, and arising from the humour, is a feeling of bemusement, as though the Irish could never quite accept that they had, in reality, begun an attempt at a real revolution.

The play begins with an Irish rebel song in a pub, and film to set the background of 1916. An English sergeant tries to recruit from the crowd.

> 'Is it me you're asking to enlist, Sergeant? And with a war going on?'

Two scenes then set out the opposing politics, and in a number of short episodes we are shown the build-up to the fighting. They are concluded with a hilarious scene on a Dublin tram requisitioned by armed Volunteers.

> 'Volunteer 3 Fifty-seven tuppenny tickets, please.
> Conductor Man, you've already commandeered the tram, what do you want with tickets?'

Further comedy arises from the inability of passengers to take the threat as real. When a bayonet accidentally pokes a woman passenger's rear:

> 'Woman Mother of Jesus, they're trying to murder us now.
> Volunteer 2 I'm very sorry ma'am, but the tram is a little crowded.
> Woman And whose fault is that?'

When the Central Post Office is taken, onlookers describe the event in belittling terms and through two chorus-like characters, Mulcahey and Flanagan, Wright expresses the condescension and contempt felt by many Irish for what the Republican army was trying to achieve.

A similar inability of imagination grips the Volunteers, and conversations in an I.R.A. platoon give us further insights into their attitudes. The first half climaxes with the Irish taking control of the centre of Dublin.

The second half begins with film of Tommies embarking for Ireland. On stage, we see how they have been led to believe they are on their way to the German front, but finally an officer disabuses them: 'We've always played fair with the Irish, and now they've upped and kicked us in the balls.' We are shown looters in Dublin, and this is an opportunity for the socialist/nationalist argument, with the former believing the poor have a right to appropriate such goods. Film shows the growing destruction in Dublin, while Mulcahey and Flanagan cynically get drunk. The climax of the second half is captioned: 'The Battle of Mount Street Bridge, a Symposium', and is dramatised by the the company sitting on a row of chairs speaking in rotation language which is indebted to Joyce.

> 'Where is Mount Street Bridge?
> Here. (Points to map) Important because it is situated on the main road into Dublin from the port of Kingstown.
> What plans were made for the defence of this bridge?
> Small garrisons were placed in the following buildings:
> (Marked on map as they are announced)
> Saint Stephen's Parochial Hall,
> The School,
> 25 Northumberland Road,
> Clanwilliam House.
> Who occupied these outposts?
> ...
> What does Jimmy Doyle remember of that afternoon?
> Four khaki caterpillars squirming across the bridge.
> Two formed of soldiers wriggling across the gutters on their bellies.
> Two more crushed against the stone coping of the building.
> What did the young English troops remember?
> Thirst.
> The cries of the wounded.
> Pink and grey brains spattered on the paving stones of the bridge.
> ...
> The battle of Mount Street Bridge was over. What was the outcome?
> The rebels lost four men dead.
> Lt. Foster, having found the house empty, returned to the street. He shakes like a leaf.
> The English lost
> 18 Officers killed and wounded, 216 other ranks killed and wounded.
> ...'

This extract can only hint at the cumulative effect of such antiphonal speech. It is heightened further because there is no action when the context, the remainder of the play, demands there should be. It is as though the event is beyond dramatisation and requires the imaginative participation of the audience.

After this emotional climax, more conventional scenes dramatise the Uprising's concluding battles. Finally, Pearse's speech to the Court Martial, and songs, punctuate the sentences of death which are 'carried out' by each actor in a row dropping his head.

There is a final irony when, in the present day, we see Mulcahey and

Flanagan dressed in the Volunteers' uniform and cadging drinks on the pretence that they had fought the English in 1916.

'Would you look at them smashing all the lovely windows' is an impressive play. Like 'Hang Down Your Head and Die', and 'Oh What a Lovely War', it captures its audience with humour, before subjecting them to an an argument calculated to arouse deep emotion. David Wright has created a form in this play which admirably expresses his view of Irish attitudes to the Easter Uprising and suggests, as the title hints, the reasons for its immediate failure. The play is not 'objective', but it is well-argued and supported by its documentation of film and caption, so that a very convincing statement emerges. The obvious question of course, is why perform it in Edinburgh?

One more of the Traverse's plays deserves attention here. It is Ranald Graham's 'Aberfan'. The play is set in a classroom in the school, Pantglas Junior, which was engulfed by the coal-tip slide that occurred on October 21, 1966. Its first production, in January 1968, was with members of the Edinburgh Children's Theatre Workshop upon the insistence of the author. It was directed by Gordon MacDougall and Max Stafford-Clarke.

The Teacher is the predominant central role, and the class are having a lesson on the theme of responsibility. It is being taught through dramatisation, and to begin with, the Teacher distributes transcripts of the enquiry into the 1870 Tay Bridge disaster. A role-play takes place in which the Teacher examines in turn each witness played by members of the class. The now well-known chain of responsibility emerges and during the 'Inquiry', the class 'improvise' reactions which get more and more out of hand. Then the Teacher starts the class rehearsing a play about the question of responsibility with regard to the coal tip behind their school. In this way, through the play-within-a-play we are shown a simplified history of the events leading to the disaster. The principal juxtaposition is between a succession of meetings by the worried local inhabitants, and palliative statements first by the Colliery Agent and then by National Coal Board officials. Each round of confrontations is punctuated, rather effectively, by a loud rattle of stones to simulate a slip. The class become bored with the re-enactments, and the teacher has to goad them to 'complain'. Their growing displeasure with the lesson is used in the play as a parallel with what the Merthyr inhabitants must have felt when their representations were effectively ignored. Finally, a sequence takes place showing a succession of slips, each one more serious. The children play frightened workmen and nonchalant officials. The National Coal Board, shown in an image worthy of agit-prop, as a pyramid of people all fast asleep, ignores the last desperate

representations. The sequence culminates in the final engulfing slip at Aberfan. The noise of the stones in a tin is replaced by the roar of 'a real tip slide', and the play ends abruptly shortly after.

Such an ending depends for its full effect on an audience that can recall the event, and it seems doubtful if it would have quite the same impact now as when performed fifteen months after the event:

> 'Only we, the audience, know how imminent the final disaster is. The continual abdication of responsibility, the buck-passing from one official to another and back again, is irreverently acted out to an intermittent chorus of unheeded complaints from those on the spot. Suddenly total darkness and a crescendo of deafening sound engulfed the theatre: long minutes afterwards, thin childish voices begin to break the silence with the horrified accounts of survival: that is all. It is not, as it so well might be, self-consciously pitiful, or sentimental; but immensely telling.' [23]

'Aberfan' relies heavily on documentary sources such as verbatim records of the Tay Bridge Inquiry and the Aberfan tribunal. One of its interests is how the play's statement arises from the attitude of the actors to their material. The lack of interest and boredom of the children is a comment on how easy it is to ignore what is not of direct concern. The play also makes us realise how difficult it is for anyone to excercise a sense of responsibility in the face of strong commercial interests. 'Aberfan' is not agit-prop, for it does not seek to convert us to a course of action, but it does offer a strong criticism of officialdom. We are left in horror that the children should have died, and our horror is the result of knowing the play to be authentic.

The record of documentary drama at the Traverse is thus an interesting one. It does, however, differ materially in its policy from the other theatres surveyed here. The Traverse plays to a comparatively sophisticated audience and as a consequence, its documentary plays are informed by a feeling that they should deal with issues of wide relevance. If we can imagine 'Aberfan' performed in Aberfan itself, the response would be electric. The play would be half ritual, half a call for unity in the face of any future threat from the National Coal Board. Performed in Edinburgh, it is a lesson on the general theme of responsibility. So far, the Traverse has not committed itself to a documentary play about an intense local issue.

The documentary plays at the Traverse conclude this survey of such work outside London. All the theatres dealt with, having first attempted some kind of documentary play have followed it up, with the one exception of Newcastle.[24] Of course, there are some loose ends, but few, comparatively speaking. Notable is John McGrath's 'Comrade Jacob', a play dramatising events in the life of the Digger Winstanley, and using copious

quotations, or near-quotations, from his tracts. The play's sympathies, as might be guessed in retrospect from McGrath's work with the 7:84 Company, are in favour of the Digger movement, although it also explores some of its weaknesses. Presumably approval of land expropriation would hardly commend the play to an audience at the theatre local to the play's action, in Farnham, Surrey,[25] and 'Comrade Jacob' was eventually performed at the Gardner Arts Centre of Sussex University on November 24th. 1969. In that location, it sparked a response that must have been warmly received by McGrath, for a group of local squatters entered the auditorium after the press-night performance, paraded around with banners, and addressed the audience on the similarity of their actions with those of the Diggers. The audience response is not recorded.[26]

It is possible to reach some general conclusions about documentary plays outside London. One feature stands out: they all seem to satisfy a hunger for local history. The subject matter is drawn, on the whole, from a radical tradition stretching from the Civil War to the present day, with an emphasis on nineteenth century industrialisation and its repercussions.

The approach of these plays to their historical material has been for affirmation and justification. It is not difficult to see that the less compelling plays suffer because they have attempted only 'impartial' historical accounts. They have had, like 'The Railway Borough', no real principle upon which to base the selection of material, and they are either little more than an illustrated lecture, or, like 'Devil Take Ye', an interesting curiosity. The deadly question must be, 'How do we make this material exciting?', for if this has to be asked, then author and director can have no real dramatic reason for the inclusion of a particular episode. Equally deadly is the attempt to inject, or impose, humour. The usual resort is to music-hall techniques or to television parody. 'The Mersey Funnel' is weak in this way, where 'Would you look at them smashing all the lovely windows' finds humour in its source material, the conflicting attitudes of Dubliners. In this play, the humour tells us something about the period and the event; the reasons why we laugh have a close connection with the reasons for the failure of the 1916 Uprising. The best plays, as might be expected, have arisen where author and director have had a clear purpose, to find in the material a particular relevance to the modern day. This may be of a polemical kind, to show the root causes of a dispute and justify an attitude towards it, as in 'Settle Us Fair', or it may be to discover a less tangible, but celebratory and affirmative statement, a 'hymn of unqualified praise' as in 'Close the Coalhouse Door', the work at Stoke, 'The Braddocks' Time', and others.

The desire for modern relevance has led to a preoccupation with

social history rather than the history of individuals. We might contrast the plays here with the 'historical' play which deals with a person in charge of events, or at least in control of his own actions and conscience. Directors do not always appear to have been too sure what this shift to social history entails. There appears to be a lack of trust in plays with a montage structure and a pressure to take refuge in plays with central characters, even invented ones. In 'Close the Coalhouse Door' this does not seem to matter because the family typify a number of attitudes which are highly relevant to the enacted political scenes. Both 'The Wheel of Fortune' and 'Clydesiders' suffer in their transition from the episodic plays which preceded them. In moving from thetypical to the particular the plays lose their appeal to the sense of community in the audience. 'The Braddocks'Time' succeeds from the very reason of having characters who, although based on two highly individual people, appeal because of their representative quality rather than any idiosyncracy. For the new material, a new kind of characterisation is needed, and this this is where Stoke is preeminent.

Stoke is also exceptional in having stageda run of successful documentary plays. At each of the other theatres only one has fully caught the imagination and loyalty of the local audience. They have succeeded in tapping a strong but latent sense of 'local patriotism'. In 'Close the Coalhouse Door', the pitmen complain because of other coalfields letting them down when they are engaged in a drawn-out strike; they, the Durham men, are the real fighters. 'The Braddocks' Time' celebrates the struggles which have forged the identity of Liverpool's Labour movement; 'Settle Us Fair' tunes in to the new found militancy of Hull fishermen and gives expression to their traditions which are its roots. This 'local patriotism' is that fierce sense of belonging to a particular community which gives a person identity, stature and dignity. It arises from knowing who he is in relation to the people around him. He knows his worth and the worth of others, and they know his. For these three plays in particular, the historical scenes have a clear purpose: to define the roots of local patriotism, to show how it has grown, and to use it as a perspective from which to judge modern events.

We can begin to see now why it is so difficult to repeat local successes. When a town's roots grow from a single, predominant, industry, it is tempting to believe that a history of that tradition is the only history to be told. It is the adaptation to a place of the old newspaperman's adage that every person has a story to tell. Bolton and Derby asked the question, What other history can we tell? and turned to

the local football team. In both cases, the result seems to have been more satisfying in the theatre than on the page (although not entirely so at Bolton) because the theatre had found subject matter that local audiences were happy to see celebrated. The problem is not so much one of director and author casting around for a subject with plenty of recorded history, as their finding one which deserves a commitment. The questions to be asked are, What local cause should our theatre espouse?(which might lead to a 'Settle Us Fair') or What local qualities should we celebrate? (which might lead to 'Close the Coalhouse Door'). The two questions are often interrelated, as the examples of 'The Braddocks' Time' and 'Fight for Shelton Bar' show. Even to come up with a good answer is no guarantee, as the experience at the Bristol New Vic shows.

Given that the two questions are the appropriate ones, it is not difficult to understand why documentary plays have been performed in the cities and larger towns, but not in the theatres surrounding London. Theatres such as the Yvonne Arnaud at Guildford have not given birth to documentaries because their policy, like the theatres of Birmingham and Coventry, is to purvey theatre as an 'art form' which means in practice 'classics' from Shakespeare to Rattigan mixed with ex-West End money-spinners. The plays we have been discussing here are the expression of a policy which tries to recognise a local sense of community and show loyalty to it. From this standpoint the Traverse – even – appears as a theatre which stages documentary plays just because it is a few steps more avant-garde than the Yvonne Arnaud or the Belgrade. Like the majority of London theatres, it responded to a desire by audiences to see plays about large social themes illustrated by documented particular issues, such as 'Aberfan'. The result may well be the stirring of individual consciences, but it does not strike a chord of community awareness.

At the beginning of this chapter, Alan Plater's dislike of the term 'documentary' was mentioned. Indeed documentation as such has hardly featured in this discussion. We have, however, become aware of a body of plays having in common a number of characteristics such as a concern for social history, and an allegiance to local issues and values, which are variously called 'documentaries', 'musical documentaries' and one of them, 'Silk', even 'A play with music to establish mill atmosphere in those times'. We may share Alan Plater's uneasiness, but if we were to avoid all use of 'documentary', an important aspect of these plays would be omitted. The strong factual basis and such documentation as exists, emphasise event and situation more than character, which is in itself important, but furthermore, they authenticate what is presented on stage. They encourage a particular kind of suspension of disbelief. The person in the audience can accept the stage action as being

an authentic representation of events in which he and his neighbours have taken part; he is encouraged to nod in recognition, 'Yes, that's how it was!' The facts and documentation are important, too, at an earlier stage when the play is being created. They help to test the involvement of author, director and actors, firstly in the material and then in the people to whom it relates. They set up a challenge which can be avoided, as with the send-up jokes of 'The Mersey Funnel', or met with the insight which characterises the language and acting of the best productions.

The documentation is thus a means to an end. It is not the sole defining feature of these plays, but it is an important one. It has enabled them to affirm a local tradition, and even to propagate a people's history of Britain. They have not, in general, done this in a doctrinaire way: the theatre administrators would have thrown up their hands in horror, and no doubt a good number of the audience would have done so too. Nevertheless, the plays have created a monument to a radical tradition as seen from the grass roots. As the local audience watch a play about arguments and political battles which once took place in the streets, pubs and factories only yards from the theatre, they are participating in an event which is at once the celebration of a tradition, a solidarity campaign, and an affirmation of their own ability to take up similar struggles.

CHAPTER 9

Documentary and stage design

The subject matter of documentary plays suggests that new problems are presented to the stage designer. We have mentioned in passing some of the solutions, but let us now look at the general relationship of design to the overall statement of a documentary play. The continuing success at Stoke must also make us ask the related question of whether in-the-round staging offers an inherent advantage.

When Colin George writes, as one of his reasons for staging 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night', that the older members of his audience were tired of sinks being substituted for french windows,[1] we realise how tiny were some of the innovations which marked the 'new wave' of 1950's playwrights. For three-quarters of a century, staging in the establishment theatre of the West End and provincial Repertory had, with the exception of Shakespeare, been dominated by interior box-settings. But even as early as 1929, R.C. Sherriff's 'Journey's End' was interesting for its attempt to create a convincing impression of the horrors of war seen from a dugout. The flashes, the explosions, and the deaths are convincing enough; the setting provides a little of what Piscator called scenic documentation. But of course the war is taken for granted. There is no way, given both writing and staging, that this play could ask the questions that 'Oh What a Lovely War' does. Its scale is too minute.

Given the function of the proscenium theatre, we should not be surprised at its failure to give dramatic form to twentieth-century issues. In its origin, it was a means to express a single viewpoint. It replaced the separate mansions of the medieval stage with a view unified on a pictorial rather than allegorical basis. From a single vantage point in the auditorium, the king or prince's throne, all the flats, borders and backings appeared as a visually accurate three-dimensional representation of a humanistic landscape. The result, from that one point of view, was impressively beautiful, but the lower the rank of the person watching, the worse his position in the auditorium, and the more distorted his view. The theatre thus confirmed, even at a simple level, the 'truth' of the monarch's vision. The proscenium theatre is fundamentally undemocratic (we still, in going to one, debate which are the 'best' seats) and it preserves social divisions and makes them prominent by its architectural form. Furthermore, the emphasis on the pictorial relegates to a secondary place any communal purpose shared between audience and actor.[2] We go to 'see a show' rather than participate in an event of importance to the community we belong to.

As socially critical plays became more frequent, two main solutions were found to staging them. One was to seek, as the agitprop troupes did,

new performance spaces in the districts where their intended audience lived, and the other was to find a new approach to design on the proscenium stage. The latter was the path of Meyerhold, Piscator, the Federal Theatre's Living Newspapers, and Unity theatre.

The importance of 'Mystery Bouffe' was that it revitalised the allegorical form in terms which were political rather than religious. At the same time, it reverted to the principle of multiple setting so that different viewpoints could be presented simultaneously. The purpose of the proscenium arch as a picture-frame was abolished, and the stage again became a non-localised 'platea' on which a hemisphere could denote half the world. The medieval precedent was easily apparent in 'Mystery-Bouffe', but its techniques of staging were to inspire a generation of agitprop plays.

The difference between 'Mystery-Bouffe's' staging and that of the touring agitprop, is similar to the difference between the medieval platea with its mansions, and its contemporary, the booth-stage. In both cases the difference is in the elaboration of setting; the dramaturgical principle is the same: the stage can signify any geographical place or simply be an arena on which to demonstrate an abstract but personified argument. It no longer has to support an illusion.

Typical of the ability of the agitprop stage was Piscator's 'Russia's Day'. The 'frontier-gates' which set out the acting area not only drew attention to the play's internationalist stance but also signified the political choices open to Germans, as they were embodied in the conditions of the three countries denoted by the gates. On such a stage, a wall could stand for the insurmountable barrier between property-owners and propertyless. When the wall was stormed and destroyed, the stage action pointed a Marxist solution to insurmountability. If the bare agitprop platform was filled with actors in top-hats and actresses in long dresses, it instantly became a gathering-place of the rich, but with such fluidity of style, it was not incongruous if bankers in top-hats broke into a fox-trot to the clinking of gold coins. [3] Comment was embodied in clowning episodes, or in a boxing match. In 'The Red Revue', boxers in contest became the means of dramatising the political struggle between election candidates.

We have seen the lasting influence of allegorical staging and its application to documentary plays. The boxing match in 'The Braddocks' Time' is exactly similar in purpose to the one in 'The Red Revue'. 'Close the Coalhouse Door' has Thomas, Jackie and Geordie dance ring-o'-roses as an emblem of the inconclusive negotiations between Baldwin, the miners and

the pit-owners. In the Royal Shakespeare Company's 'US', an actor was painted in two colours above and below the waist to represent the division of Vietnam by the Geneva Conference. These examples are vivid summations of a particular state of affairs: arising from a carefully documented argument, the conciseness of such emblems has a strong theatrical force. Unfortunately, outside Unity, the fringe and street theatre, examples are rare in the generally apolitical climate of British theatre.

One important development of allegorical forms of staging has been the ironic use of emblems. We have seen how much of the force of 'Oh What a Lovely War' derives from the use of the pierrot costume. We are led to expect a humorous, even comical account of a war: the facts are to be made palatable by the presentation. But as the relationship between pierrot costume and soldier-role slowly emerges, we realise the underlying allegory, that men are fools because the cause they die for is not their own. The emblem runs counter to the factual content of the projections and captions. The same point is made by the clown costume of 'Hang Down Your Head and Die'; and the innocence of the children who are ignorant of, and want to learn about, the Tay Bridge disaster in 'Aberfan' is contrasted with the inaction of the well-informed engineers in charge of the coal-tip. These are all uses of stage images which are in themselves ironic.

Meyerhold and Piscator both accepted the pictorial nature of the proscenium arch, but broke with the representational tradition. Their two designers, Rodchenko and Heartfield, introduced their respective theatres to designs based on the principle of collage, especially as they had developed it into photo-montage. The purpose of collage as explored by, say, Picasso, had been to 'quote' real items, such as a fragment of news headline, in the context of a traditional form, oil on canvas. Heartfield in particular developed the form to a point where the quoted material formed the substantial bulk. No longer was it only an element in the artistic conception, but the clash of viewpoints between different photo-quotations was itself the 'meaning'. On the stage, we have seen how Meyerhold at first inserted quotations into an extant piece of work, in his production of 'The Dawn'. Piscator, collaborating with Heartfield, went much further, and the quotational contribution in 'Rasputin' and 'Hoppla,Such Is Life' was at least as important as the initial script. It seems clear, that had Piscator been able to develop his ensemble, his scripts would have become the result of equal contributions by writer, designer and director, working collectively. As it was, his writers, unused to such an approach, felt their contribution was devalued. Once the quotational material reached such proportions, Piscator's problem was to make a dramatic unity of the diverse elements. The solution lay in the

contribution of his other designer, Traugott Müller.

While Heartfield was responsible for contributing film and projections, Traugott Müller designed the stage-constructs. These were to provide the unifying factor for a production. The simplest example is that of the derricks in 'Economic Competition' which are only one step on from the emblems of agit-prop theatre. To the bare stage is added an oil-derrick, then another, and another, until the stage is a forest of them. Each is the result of a logical decision by a competing oil company to join in exploitation of the oil field. The final conclusion, with the derricks all working way below capacity, clearly demonstrates the inherent absurdity of competition's over-exploitation of resources. The interest of the stage picture is that it is not static: it demonstrates a process occurring over the duration of the play's first half. As a result, it replaces the conventional plot of character-initiated action with a unifying design concept. It is the dynamic of the setting which is the play's dramatic impulse.

In 'Hoppla, Such is Life', the construct of rooms on three storeys points to the interrelatedness of human affairs, because scenes in one part of the 'building' are influenced by or lead to scenes in another part. Yet at the same time the separation of the 'rooms' emphasises the divisions within society. When the film screens are flown in to fill exactly the frontage of a room, a visual unity is created between the projected material and the acted scenes. They are all components of social interaction, and the visual collage as a room is lit at the top of the 'building' and at the same time a scene plays in another lighted room lower down, invites us to consider the nature of the ties which bind human beings together. Again, the social process overrides consideration of single characters. The 'globus' of 'Rasputin' was not only an emblem for the half of the world that is Russia, but when segments were lifted, it revealed the private and secret nature of decision-making in the Tsarist empire.

Piscator did not, as it is sometimes alleged, use machinery only for its spectacular effect. The use of a stage construct for the purpose of political allegory linked the Piscatorbühne more closely with earlier, and continuing, agit-prop theatre than with the theatrical experiments of such contemporaries as Reinhardt. Even Jessner's symbolic use of levels is separated from Piscator's work by its avoidance of direct comment on the contemporary situation. Largely, of course, this is because Jessner, like Reinhardt, was mainly interested in staging the classics. With Piscator, the process of scripting and staging are inseparable. The stage-construct supplies the unifying force which, in more conventional playwriting, is supplied by the plot.

In developing a collage approach to the stage picture, Piscator and his designers discovered that the manner of staging establishes the status of documentation. At the simplest level, a projected caption giving names and a date, can remind us that a stage action, a fight or an argument, say, is a reconstruction of what really took place. Our attitude to the argument is changed because we see it, not as between any two, but between two particular, figures who have markedly changed the course of real events. We watch, not the psychology of the quarrel, but to see how history, our history, was made.

Similarly, a large-scale event, shown on film, can authenticate its simplified stage-representation. When, at the end, a comparatively few actors crowd into one of the segments of the Rasputin globe, film of revolutionary Russian crowds projected on the other surfaces reminds us of the actuality of what is being represented. The projection screen in Piscator's work, as with Meyerhold's, was to be associated with factual accuracy. In addition, particular areas on a stage could become associated with one kind of documentation. Lenin's speeches in 'Rasputin' were made from a podium, so that the audience could accept them for what they were, an acted record of real oratory.

The association of different stage areas with different classes of material is a method which has passed into fairly common use. 'Oh What a Lovely War' authenticated the simplified stage-floor presentation by the use of slide projections and a newspanel. In Phil Woods' 'In Place of Strife' at Bolton, a clear distinction was made between the historically authentic scenes which were played in the central arena, and the fictional scenes in the envisaged Industrial Relations Court. By setting the judge's bench and the prisoner's dock into the surrounding seating tiers, the whole auditorium became the courtroom. Similarly, 'Close the Coalhouse Door' kept its fictional party scenes upstage in a naturalistic setting of parlour and backyard, and played its historical scenes downstage in a sparse, agit-prop style.

The music in documentary plays can also require a precise use of stage areas. It is possible to hold up the action and have the characters sing in a 'production number' in the manner of the American musical. 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night' did this, and so did 'Down the Arches' at Greenwich and 'Silk' at Derby. All three plays used song to express the feelings of relatively inarticulate characters but in 'Down the Arches', in contrast to 'Silk', the content and style of songs gave them a social meaning. They were the voice of one character-group within the play. With such songs, it is not important where on stage they are played. In 'Stirrings', however, original folk-song was used, and it had a further purpose, to authenticate

the working-class situation. As a result, there was an unintended conflict between the generalised content of the songs and the particularisation of the characters who sang them. The worker-chorus would enter and form up with detailed greetings, back-chat, and so on, and then launch into a song about their general condition. One solution to the problem might have been that employed at Stoke, which enables an actor to differentiate clearly between playing as a particular character and singing in a more generalised social role. There, singers and musicians inhabit their own area on the open stage. A bench or low rostrum serves to fix the area, and the instruments may be left there through scenes taking place in another area. When an actor leaves a scene, goes to the bench and picks up an instrument, we understand instantly that he has stepped out of character. The songs objectify feeling, and make it common property; the space set aside for the musicians emphasises that they express the feelings not only of one character.

If the proscenium stage can be adapted for documentary presentation by treating it as a space to be divided for the purposes of collage, it has, nevertheless, failed in one significant area, that of depicting places of work. Usually, the problem is avoided. Despite their importance to Crewe, 'The Railway Borough' never takes us into the locomotive workshops; we never see the arches being built in 'Down the Arches', or view the grinders' sheds of 'Stirrings'; 'Close the Coalhouse Door' takes us to the pit-head but not the coal-face. At Bolton, Pemberton-Billing attempted to create Crompton's Mule in terms of actors' movement, but failed to be convincing.

The problem is partly one of stage mechanics: wood and canvas flats do not adapt to machine shapes; and partly of economics: metal alternatives are expensive. Machines could be created on a proscenium stage, but the interesting point is that, by and large, they have not been.

The proscenium theatre was successful at creating the impression of solid aristocratic or bourgeois interiors. Its scenic magnificence confirmed the ability first of nobility and then of businessmen to buy their own living environment. The setting belonged to the principal characters of the play just as the real palace or bourgeois mansion belonged to the privileged audience. When working-class people began to be prominent in plays, it was possible to create a relationship between characters and setting by considering the latter as an environment moulding and affecting the lives of its inhabitants. This is the function of the settings in 'The Weavers' and in Piscator's production of 'The Lower Depths'.

The place of work, however, the mine or factory, is not, to the worker in it, a passive environment like a palace or cottage. It is the place where men act upon and change the world, either by the extraction of minerals or by the creation of artefacts. It is a place of process and change, and

what takes place is an interaction between the environment of coal-face or machinery, and the workers who both inhabit and act upon it. How to depict the dynamic of this interaction is the central problem of staging the work-place.

Meyerhold found one solution in 'The Magnificent Cuckold'. He explored the interrelationship of machine and work rhythms by means of a 'mill' which was a number of constructivist platforms and ladders supporting actual wheels and belts which could turn at varying speeds. It was an emblem of machinery in general, not the representation a particular machine. Actors worked to the rhythm of the wheels' rotation: as the wheels speeded up, so did the line of actors marching round the platforms. Meyerhold appears to have used this startling relationship only to dress up what Lunacharsky saw as a bedroom farce, [4] but photographs of the production suggest that, at least at some moments, he had created a stage metaphor for the grinding repetition of factory work.

A useful comparison is Fritz Lang's film, 'Metropolis', in which workers are shown moving in total subjugation to the rhythm of Moloch, the all-encompassing machine. While individual shots and sequences define the subjugation of individual workers, when seen in long-shot with its myriads of identically-clad beings swallowed and forced to a work-rhythm, the whole complex is an emblem of capitalism. In contrast, as might be expected, the better-known 'Modern Times' emphasises the individual. Although it shows man's subjugation to the machine, especially when lunch is served on the assembly belt, the ending is sentimental and unconvincing, leaving all but Chaplin's Charlie still enslaved to the machine. 'Drifters' and its successors managed, as we have seen, to explore the interface between man and his work, and at their best, these films celebrated the worth of manual labour. More recent documentary films seem to have concentrated on exploring machinery as a source of a visual rhythms. Bert Haanstra's 'Glass' is perhaps the prime example and shows bottles and glass instruments being shaped and formed in continuous conveyor-belt processes with hardly any human intervention. The machine is shown as a magic provider, and its place in human society is left undefined. The fundamental questions of who built the machine, who services it, who owns it, and who owns its products, are left unasked.

In the theatre, which, because it is a medium for actors, cannot avoid showing human relationships, these questions must be faced. Successful design solutions depend on the clarity with which a play's author, or collaborative authors, have analysed the dynamic of human interaction at the place of work.

Examples are few, because the theatre has so rarely explored the

area of men (or women) at work. The recurrent image of the assembly-line, revealed behind gauze in 'The Belt' by the Siftons, seems successfully to have made the point that it was the dominating factor in the workers' lives. The relationship between one worker and his machine was an important theme in an adaptation of Sillitoe's 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' at the Nottingham Playhouse. The factory was denoted by the single lathe which Arthur Seaton worked, and this was sufficient to make the main point, that he could work automatically while his imagination was given full play. The total work-place interaction in this case was between Seaton, his machine, and the foreman who kept him at work. By implication, each worker in the factory worked in this isolated and alienated fashion. In Steve Gooch's 'The Motor Show' [5], the repetitive, robot-like work upon the assembly-line was mimed, and this was an acceptable solution, partly because of the agit-prop style of production and, at least at the Half-Moon Theatre, the staging in-the-round. But more so, it was because the dialogue was concerned with the rate of the workload as determined by the speed of the belt. Our concern as audience was not with what was being handled, or what operation was being carried out, but solely with the speed at which the actions had to be performed. The mime, because of the absence of any representation of machinery, focussed our attention on the prime issue. In all these examples, we can see how a clear understanding of the social relationship between man and machine has solved the problem of staging.

It is sad that the authors of documentary plays in this country have shown a reluctance to meet the question of how machines are part of man's social environment, particularly when work has been so central to much of the subject-matter. The work conditions of steel tool-grinders could easily have been shown in 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night'; indeed, the programme reproduced a contemporary illustration of a grinders' shed. In 'Down the Arches', some stage-token could have been found to represent the advance of the arches and the destruction of houses. It might have been along the lines of 'Economic Competition's' derricks, or 'One Third of a Nation's' grass mat. Similarly, in the Westcliff Theatre's production of 'It Sticks Out a Mile and a Bit', a largely unmemorable documentary about the town's pier, the scenery, suggested rather successfully, the lattice-work of iron pier supports. It would have been so much more effective had we seen it brought on stage and joined together, in place of a rather poor mime of building. The representation of Crompton's Mule is a more difficult problem. The mime solution reduced it to a singularity and made it a thing of beautiful rhythmic movement; instead what was needed was the stage picture of an industry transformed by many Mules.

Scenic documentation of the kind we have been discussing is far

removed from naturalism; frequently some kind of token is all that is necessary. Meyerhold and Piscator's rejection of the proscenium for pictorial purposes suggests that theatre in-the-round is as good a form as any for the staging of documentary plays. It may even offer distinct advantages and to discover this, let us look at the work of Stoke-on-Trent from the point of view of stage-setting.

The Vic was (and still is) the permanent expression of Stephen Joseph's crusade against the proscenium theatre, which he saw as pictorial legacy of the Renaissance now pre-empted by cinema. He viewed the paraphernalia of box settings and flown scenery with a historian's love and a creative loathing, and seems to have been unaware of, but more likely to have discounted, Piscator's and Meyerhold's innovations. Furthermore, Joseph emphasised the anti-democratic nature of the proscenium form, and asserted the equality in the round of the actor's relationship with each member of the audience.[6]

Now that theatre in-the-round has been established in the country for nearly two decades, it is possible to make some general assertions. The actor, in this form, is the unrivalled centre of attention, and he can no longer be considered, from a design point of view, only as an element within a pictorial composition. Freed from such constraint, his movement can take on a dance-like quality, especially in the groupings he makes with others, and in the way the groupings change. We have seen this in the formalised dances of 'The Staffordshire Rebels'. Even more fundamental to theatre in-the-round is that the actor is not viewed within a symbolic representation of the universe, as in the Elizabethan playhouse. Instead, the emphasis is secular, and at a most basic level, there is no possibility of placing a deity on high, or of lowering him from 'the heavens'. Nor is the actor viewed within a material environment such as Belasco created, but rather in the centre of a ring of equals. Insofar as an acting environment can be created, it is small-scale. The actor dominates the objects. Moreover, the actor-audience relationship suggests a more immediate sense of participation than the proscenium auditorium, and the circle is suggestive of a courtroom or tribunal. The net result is that theatre-in-the-round tends to make a humanistic and democratic statement. Man is the centre of attention, and his actions are judged by a group of equal men. It would be perfectly possible, of course, to produce a play in-the-round so as to deny all these points, but in general, they hold. They are the normal properties of the form.

Clearly, such a theatre offers advantages to a form of drama which deals with social situations, and treats them as belonging to the realm of

politics. The proximity of the action to the audience puts pressure on the members to become involved and possibly to suggest or seek solutions. In such a theatre, an appeal to the gods is less convincing than an appeal to the audience.

The focus of attention on the actor can be used to make a particular point. At Stoke, as we have seen, the central characters of the documentary plays are ordinary men and women. By placing such people in the centre of the audience's gaze, the deliberately anti-heroic nature of the plays is emphasised.

If theatre in-the-round offers an amenable climate for documentary drama, let us go on to consider some of its more particular advantages.

We have seen how a stage cloth was painted to represent a map in 'The Knotty' and 'Hands Up'. This was particularly effective in the latter play, where the Western Desert was represented. During the 'Ballad of the Disorganised Retreat', Rommel and Wavell stood on ammunition boxes and watched each other's tactics across the arena through binoculars. Between lines of the song, one or other of them stepped down, his box was moved to another point of the map, and he stepped up again. Not only were the moves of the desert campaign clearly represented, but a strong theatrical statement was made when, after Wavell is transferred to Greece and the actor and his box had left the arena, Rommel was left on his box dominating stage, map and war. Such schematisation was both acceptable and highly effective, but unfortunately, it could not be sustained. Only at one other point in the play did the cloth relate so closely; for the rest it was decoration. The same is true of 'The Knotty' where the cloth related directly only to the scene of Stephenson's survey. Further exploration of the device is needed. Possibly the map could allow of its being returned to at different points in the play; possibly it could be laid for its particular scene and removed afterwards. The value of a floor map is that it can be a very convenient means of showing how geographical relationships bear on the human relationships of the play.

Stoke has also used the dance potential of the arena stage to simulate certain kinds of complex processes. One dance, related to the floor-map, was developed in 'The Knotty', and it was an attempt to dramatise the speculative rivalry between twenty-four separate railway companies competing in Staffordshire. The jogging rhythm of an Irish traditional tune suggested the dance which was directed to be something like Morris dancing. The men carried surveying poles, and the dance was to have a kind of humorous and heavy-footed formality, and recalls the formalised fights of 'The Staffordshire Rebels' in its four-square choreography closely related to the shape of the Vic's stage. The names of the railway companies were chanted, and on each

name the dancer speaking had to move across the acting area, and thus 'over' Staffordshire. The movement does not appear to have had theprecise relationship to the map of the Stephenson scene, but instead suggested the general compass direction of the proposed railway line. As the surveyors jogged and loped across the arena there were comic confrontations and a climax when three of them found themselves in one place, ('They all jog up and down discomfitedly in Macclesfield'[7]) and were charged by the fourth. The scene appears exactly to have caught the poker-faced absurdity of mid-nineteenth century railway speculation, and 'won a great round of applause' and 'a final roar of laughter which creamed off into loud clapping'. [8]

The same dance-like quality existed in the Shunting Sequence of 'The Knotty' and, to a much less formalised extent, in 'Fight for Shelton Bar'. At the Vic, work movements retain their three-dimensional quality without the exaggeration or distortion imposed by the uni-directional proscenium theatre with its distant back rows. In 'The Knotty', the movement of driver and fireman into the light could readily be accepted for the real movement it represented, when on a proscenium stage it might have become a feeble cross to a hidden light in the wings, or an over-dramatic move down-stage into a frontal light. In the proscenium form, the absence of scenery draws attention to itself: we want to see the engine, the tracks, the signal, in order that the movement may make visual sense; in the round, we accept such movements as a simulation of, or as standing for, the real movements. This is what is meant when it is said that 'you use your imagination' in theatre in-the-round. The theatre form calls attention not to the surface detail, but to the human purpose of an action; it looks beneath to an underlying unity of action. It is a token, or emblematic form rather than representational, and as such, creates visual allegories of social processes. For this reason, it is highly suited to plays which have their roots in agit-prop theatre, and which attempt to document complex social interrelationships. It is an ideal form for documentary plays.

If the stage setting in-the-round is dominated by the actor, it is possible to suggest a surrounding environment by the use of sound and light. In proscenium theatre, sound is either an effect, a single off-stage noise to indicate a thunder-clap or the arrival of a car, or a background suggesting a 'beyond', like the artillery fire in 'Journey's End' or 'Oh What a Lovely War'. In-the-round, sound has a different dramatic function. Because the audience, in the same room as the loudspeakers, is encompassed by the combination of sound sources and reverberation, there is the feeling of being wherever the sound is supposed to originate. It has an imaginative effect similar to that of radio. In 'Fight for Shelton Bar', the quality and intensity of the sound (which

forced the actors to pitch against it) created the sensation of being in a steelworks. Of course, it is still possible by using a single loudspeaker, to pinpoint a sound, but even this can be highly involving for the audience. In 'Hands Up', the placing of the overhead loudspeaker made the dive-bombing aeroplane frightening to hear. But in general, sound is around the audience, it is everywhere. It is like aural scenery transforming not only the stage but the seating areas.

The sound at the Vic is doubly compelling because of its authentic quality. The noise of Shelton Bar was itself recorded to provide the play's backing, and the earlier documentaries used equally realistic sound. Thus, just as Piscator used film to authenticate his stage action, so the Vic, with its more limited resources, uses sound. Of course, in the earlier documentaries, the sound can only appear to authenticate the historical situation, but in 'The Knotty' and 'Fight for Shelton Bar', the sound is truly a documentation of the events dramatised.

There is a difference between authentication by sound and by film. Piscator's film ran at the same time as the stage action, so that the visual effect was of an ever-changing collage. The film underscored the social reality surrounding and influencing the behaviour of individuals shown in acted scenes, but it did so as a comment. The audience had to make an intellectual synthesis of the two impressions. By contrast, the nature of the Vic's sound, and its surrounding quality makes us feel what it is like to be in a shunting yard, in a steelworks. We become involved in the character's own situation.

The function of scenery, what little there is, at the Vic, is to create an impression, not an illusion, of the chosen environment. The design for 'Fight for Shelton Bar' suggested a hard and steely setting. A number of identical iron fences were used, some being hung permanently over the arena, and others which were freestanding, and could be re-arranged to suggest, for example, the open square of a committee room, or the double line of barriers fencing off a channel supposedly containing molten steel. The repetition of these scenic elements suggested the extension of such a harsh, metallic setting throughout the auditorium. Equally impressionistic lighting suggested streams of molten iron, or the bright flickering of a Kaldo steel converter. This impressionistic vision combined with the environmental use of sound to involve the audience. Furthermore, the total impression gave rise to a strange duality which was an important part of the play's meaning. The men of the steelworks could be seen to be in control of the whole, strange process, and this impression was reinforced by the authority of their language. At the same time, the audience could feel what was unspoken, the threat of

the danger inherent in such an immense and inhuman working environment.

If the stage of the Vic is ideal for creating an impressionistic reality, its single arena would seem less convenient for the simultaneous juxtaposition of points of view that characterised for example, 'In Place of Strife' and 'Close the Coalhouse Door'. In fact, Cheeseman has developed his own convention at Stoke, whereby a scene in the arena may be commented upon by one or more characters standing in narrow beams of light on the steps leading down through the audience tiers. In 'Hands Up', the prison camp sequence is made up of short episodes which alternate between the minor excitements which break up the camp's routine, and the feelings of the wives back at home. In staging, Cheeseman had the men occupy the stage, and placed the women one on each set of steps. The wives being in the midst of the audience, we are encouraged to share their feelings. They speak on our behalf, like the actors who shouted 'Strike!' from the auditorium of 'Waiting for Lefty'. The result is to make us look down on the men with the wives' eyes; when the scenes on-stage take place, the wives standing on the steps are silent reminders of the men's aspiration to return home. This spatial organisation helps give the play its dramatic impetus: the unresolved tension between actual proximity and imagined distance draws us to the main theme of 'Hands Up', the need of the prisoners to belong again to their community. By using the steps in this way, Cheeseman asks his audience to <u>share</u> the 'private' response of individual characters to the 'public' events being played out in front of both. The actor becomes a spectator as the audience become a participant.

The identification of the audience with some of the character groups is used in the other Stoke documentaries. We have seen it in 'The Knotty's' scene between Stephenson and the board of directors. In 'Fight for Shelton Bar', as the Action Committee prepare to take their arguments to London, they are questioned about their reasons for going by steelworkers on the audience steps. We identify, too, with the voice of the eye-witness while looking down upon the boy about to be flogged in Chell workhouse. This partisan identification is a clear request from Cheeseman for his audience to make judgements and to take sides in the arguments presented to them. It is very different from Hooper's simultaneous staging at Greenwich where the audience may look equally dispassionately at either scene. Cheeseman asks for an involvement of feeling: the facts of a documentary are only valuable insofar as they may be interpreted in the light of our experience.

We may say, then, that from the Vic's experience, theatre in-the-round has a number of advantages to offer documentary plays. Its emphasis on the actor, and his stance in the midst of a circle of equals, suits it to plays

of a humanistic and democratic nature. Because it does not need to create a scenic illusion, dance-like movement in-the-round can take on emblematic qualities. It is easy to make allegory, and so reveal social interrelationships. But it is perhaps in the area of actor-audience relationships that theatre in-the-round has most to offer the documentary form. We have seen how it can solve the problem of creating work environments by creating an impressionistic structure which involves the audience. It is particularly compelling in asking us to identify with the feelings of those caught up in the documented event. In contrast, the proscenium theatre as used by Piscator presents the complexity of a detailed argument and arouses strong feelings against a particular state of affairs. At Stoke, an initially indifferent audience is persuaded to become involved in the authenticated feelings of others. The form of the theatre is instrumental in allowing this to happen.

Conclusion

It would be satisfying to conclude with a simple, neat, definition of 'documentary', but it is not hard to see why we cannot do this. Because of its strongly political roots, documentary theatre has been surrounded by controversy and suspicion, so that Piscator's book containing chapters on it was never translated, and practitioners such as Arent had to write with circumspection. The result has been the absence of a tradition in which experiment builds upon experiment, and with rare exception, authors or directors have not had the opportunity to practise long enough to define their standpoint through their work. Cheeseman's work at Stoke is one of the happy exceptions.

As a consequence, documentary theatre has been marked by continual rediscovery, with eclectic results. Yet in spite of this, we should not lose sight of an overall purpose. Pre-war documentary plays were concerned with the large events of the time; they aimed at increasing working-class consciousness; and their stand was radically political, often on an international scale. Such a larger purpose is still the hall-mark.

Much nearer the present, 'Oh What a Lovely War' has signalled the possibilities of a documentary approach to a new generation of theatre directors. In the diversity of Britain's theatrical climate, the message has not been uniformly received. For the more politically committed director, its montage of conflicting views has been a clear pointer to a way of presenting a theatrical case - of documenting a polemic. To many a theatre director, however, the jokes, the music-hall routines, and the black comedy, were the memorable features. After all, if a director is not interested in political theatre, then it will be the more superficial elements of such a production which he will first notice. To him, 'Oh What a Lovely War' is little more than an indication of how facts can be made palatable, and if he decides to create his own documentary play, he is likely to lard it with all sorts of burlesque or other 'entertainment', and to mistrust any statement implicit in the material. This seemed to happen to Alan Plater when he worked at Hull without benefit of collaboration; in 'Close the Coalhouse Door', Sid Chaplin's experience of mining and his commitment to the men must have been a more important strength than is usually noted. At a different level of sophistication, the same is true of Peter Brook in 'US': he could not afford to commit himself to the condemnation of the U.S. that his collaborators' researches suggested.[1]

The difficulty persists because the view has grown up, unchallenged, that 'documentary' is a genre, along with, presumably, tragedy, comedy, and so on. Such a view has, throughout this survey implicitly been challenged. To the film-maker (whether for cinema or television) there is, at least in

the first instance, a reasonably clear distinction between shooting with actors in the studio or on locations selected for artistic reasons, and shooting people going about their daily tasks. (It is not our purpose here to consider all the ways in which this distinction may be blurred.) In the theatre, there is reconstruction from the outset. Political speeches are spoken anew, 'vox pop' is re-created from transcripts, meetings and events are re-enacted. With the best will in the world, and the rigorous approach of a Cheeseman even, there is inevitably some invention, and always, and from the outset, there is interpretation. No doubt it would be possible partly to meet this objection by some sort of schema for subdividing and classifying the genre, from 'total documentary' (some of Cheeseman's work) to 'factually-based drama' (say, 'And Was Jerusalem Builded Here') with, as an intermediate, 'factual dramatisation with documentary inserts' ('Will Wat, If Not, What Will?'), but it is difficult to know what would be gained by such categorisation. Most of the plays we have looked at would, in any case, have to be lumped into the intermediate class. Besides, in such a scheme, Cheeseman's plays would rub shoulders with the edited 'courtroom' documentaries of 'In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer', 'The Chicago Conspiracy' and 'The Oz Obscenity Trial', which seems a fairly gratuitous coupling together.

It is for such reasons that I have preferred the phrase 'documentary play' and used this in a wide sense to cover plays based on documentary sources, usually with some documentation existing within the text. At the same time, I have limited the plays I am prepared to accommodate within this term. I excluded for example a number of London-performed 'documentary biographies', especially 'Portrait of a Queen'. The limits are drawn by the perspective the author holds, and the purpose for which he uses documentation. The two are of course interrelated; how an author uses documentation alerts us to the perspective within which he writes. In the best of the plays we have considered, documentation has existed for two related purposes: to encourage audiences in a belief that what they are watching relates to real events on a social scale, and to show interaction, cause and effect, between individuals.

In the first place, documentation is used to establish a particular state of mind in the audience. The process may begin with the theatre programme, and many of our regional theatres such as the Octagon have produced, like Piscator, elaborate booklets full of reprinted source material.[2] When the play includes projections of nearby streets and buildings and refers in the script to local personages, factories or ships, the process is taken a stage further, and the audience begin to nod in recognition: 'Yes, that's how it was'.

For some regional theatres the process has gone little beyond this point, except to narrate some local story which forms the factual basis of the play, and yet audiences have responded enthusiastically, hungry for an affirmation of their corporate identity. However, the term 'documented polemic' is useful to describe those plays which go farther in their documentation and use it to argue a case. Plays such as 'The Chicago Conspiracy', 'George Davis is Innocent, OK', and 'Fight for Shelton Bar' have a great deal in common with Piscator's work when they substantiate their claims by presenting the evidence in its own right, and do not assimilate it into a naturalistic framework.

It is no accident that there are a number of documentary plays which are set in courtrooms either as trials or inquiries (and that we hear echoes of those emblematic trial plays of the post-revolutionary Russian theatre), for the best of them turn the theatre in any case into a courtroom, with audience as jury. 'Martin Luther King' presented the case against slavery and the oppression of negroes today, and it did so by letting slave-owners and Ku Klux Klan, slaves and Freedom Marchers, have their own say. If the former condemned themselves, it was out of their own mouths.

The successful contemporary documentary plays have rediscovered the use of montage. Piscator learnt how to use juxtaposition in order to show the dialectic of a social process. Out of the clash of documents, representing the clash of views held by people who, like Tsar and Lenin, in history never met, he showed the beginnings of a synthesis of a new social order. On a much more modest scale some of our documentaries have understood how juxtaposition can substitute for dramatic conflict in the conventional sense, and create an equivalent tension. In 'Down the Arches' there is the strange clash (as much in the spectator's mind as on stage) between the 150 year old vision and the sordid but utilitarian remains; at Stoke the tension between the private and public face of Hugh Bourne, or between the theatrically close but geographically distant wives and soldier husbands gives the dramatic impetus to their respective plays. In the more politically conscious 'Fight for Shelton Bar', 'Times are Getting Hard, Boys', 'George Davis is Innocent, OK', the juxtapositions are of more obvious and straightforward clashing views, such as the different interpretations of the bank raid in the last play. The resolutions, too, are simpler, seem more easily achieved, and tend to be theatrically more successful.

The least successful documentary plays are those where the documents are so embedded in the play's framework that we do not hear the voices of the protagonists themselves, we hear only the playwright. How this came about, we examined in relation to some of the plays at Sheffield, Bolton and Greenwich. Cheeseman's view of the middle-man playwright standing between the original

utterance and the modern audience is near the truth. But there is the exceptional, sensitive, compiler, like Hooper, who has the abnegation for the job, (but does not abdicate, as Dewhurst maintained). More often, as for Hale and Cullen, source material is little more than a jumping-off point for an exploration of group psychology which may, like 'Spithead' be well worthwhile, but is not documentary. Hale understood this; at Sheffield there seems to have been a growing gap between Colin George's desire to stage documentary plays, and Cullen's wish (and ability) to write them. At Bolton there is the whole compass: from the social history of 'Bolton Wanderers': to the adventure story of 'The Bolton Massacre' which, on the evidence of the script, could as easily have been written by a Cullen as by the group process actually used.

To do without a playwright and simply to quote sources, does not , of course, guarantee objectivity. At Stoke, Cheeseman's editing creates a point of view just as surely as does the editing of film or television actuality. When a writer is involved, the process seems to go farther, to become editorialising, as we find in moments of 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night', in 'Cato Street' and in 'US'.

At an extreme, and not really documentary plays, are those by Hochhuth. They purport to be authentic, and appear to substantiate this claim by the documentary detail of their background, but in the centre is invention: a straightforward confrontation written in a style which owes as much to Ibsen as to any more recent playwright. Hochhuth is attempting to explore psychological motivation, but instead of confining himself to the theatrical truth which can be contained in invented characters, he expects us to believe him on the motivation of real people. Had he, instead of attempting to ascribe motive, been content to present separate views, say of Pope, Nazis, and Jews, their juxtaposition might well have been extremely compelling (as it is in 'The Investigation') and related immense social consequences to private decisions on the part of many individuals. The difference with Weiss is that he is concerned to show that we too must still bear some of the responsibility; Hochhuth is shifting the blame. Where Weiss sees the pressure of social roles on the individuals who inhabit them, Hochhuth sees individuals who should fit their place in the allegory he is creating.

The place of character in documentary drama is interesting because the emphasis is on the interrelationship with events. Relationships between characters are not so important. Closest to the central character of the earlier agitprop drama are the Braddocks. They are shown from the start as the champions of the ordinary man, and of the audience, in the face of hostile forces. What we see amounts to a dialectic between the central character pair and the opposition dramatised in the montage of scenes which repre-

sents social forces. 'Crompton's Mule' offered a similar dialectic between Crompton and those who wished to destroy or steal his invention. The dialectic, between character and montage replaces the conventional development of plot, but in'Crompton's Mule' we saw the pitfall of such a method, that it all too easily reverts to no more than an episodic biography. The temptation then is to play up the individual, tragic aspects at the expense of the wider social focus.

We can say that documentary drama is concerned mainly with people as they play social roles, but it may allow us glimpses (as we get at Stoke) of the individuals behind the role. Oppenheimer is important because he is a physicist; the Chicago 'conspirators' are important insofar as they are propagators of an alternative culture.

With such characterisation, a new style of acting is necessary. No consistent theory of it has been developed, nor any study of the possibly different requirements of Meyerhold, Piscator and Brecht, let alone modern directors. All we can do here is note how, in general terms, similar styles have been created by a number of different theatres. This is particularly so in the 'trial' documentaries. 'Oh What a Lovely War' calls for a mixture of styles, but there are moments of 'tribune' acting. The main feature of the style is that it depicts attitudes, which may change from one moment to the next in the face of changed circumstances, rather than a fixed, but ppssibly developing, psychological type.

Cheeseman's work is, again, most interesting for his concept of the 'emotional barrister'. The actor's job is to present emotions, not as they are part of the expression of a rounded, motivated character, but as they exist in relation to a precise and often transient context. It is as though we are being shown 'At this point, such a person - the person I am standing in for - might feel like this'. What Cheeseman's and the 'tribune' styles both accept is that the actor should show man as a role-player. They are concerned with the commonalty of attitudes or emotions in response to circumstances and situation, rather than the psychological development of characters who initiate, monitor, and attempt to shape events.

Alongside the social, rather than the psychological, perspective of the documentary plays has been a view of history from the underneath: from the ranks, not from the throne. Now, Lania, in his essay on documentary drama for the 'Rasputin' programme asserted that history has relevance in the theatre only insofar as it is related to the present. It is no accident that so many of our regional documentaries have concerned themselves with either the Civil War period, or with the so-called Industrial Revolution. In the Civil War, the relationship between democracy and property ownership was

under debate, as it is now. The squatters at the performance of 'Comrade Jacob' certainly understood this. In the growth of industrial Britain lie the roots of many of our current problems. Even Steve Gooch's interpretation of the 1381 Peasant Revolt made it seem more like a revolution currently being waged. Of all times in our history, those chosen offer the most to our present-day concern with the consciousness of 'ordinary' working people.

Cheeseman has suggested that documentary theatre is inevitable in a scientific age,[3] but this should not lead us to relate it directly to the growth of modern technology. Rather it is a means to dramatise and attempt to understand the enormous social changes of the last 200 years, many of them initiated by technological innovation. At its best, documentary drama faces, and makes its audience face, life and death questions concerning a whole community. By dramatising a real or potential threat, such plays affirm the importance of a living community bound by shared values and beliefs. Sometimes, as they do this, they achieve the quality of myth.

In this affirmation, lies the root of the particular audience response that we have frequently noticed. It is that peculiarly intense emotion generated in some audiences, much stronger than the usual reaction to a play, which seems to be a feeling of total identification with the staged events. We have noted it particularly in relation to 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night' and to 'Settle Us Fair', and also in connection with 'The Jolly Potters' and 'Bolton Wanderers' (at least at the beginning of its run). It raises the question of why strong feeling should be associated with documentary drama, when a more dispassionate response might be expected. We have seen in relation to Piscator's theatre that it is not simply the factual nature of the material which determines the response, but its orchestration in relation to feelings which are already latent within the audience. The local documentary plays which have had such strong emotional effect have made their audiences feel like protagonists. They identify with, and support the cause of the sympathetic group of characters on stage, who are believably, because of the documentation, their neighbours, their relatives, or even, their ancestors. Audience and stage protagonists fight the same battles as one: the audience believe they are one.

For all the strong local appeal of some documentaries, overall the number of these plays, after a peak around 1968-9, has fallen steadily. One main problem, in the regions, has been the difficulty of repeating a success. At a deeper level, perhaps the decline is because wider events have forced us to look with a more jaundiced eye on documentation, whether on film or television, or in the theatre. It no longer seems such proof of an argument's validity: we have learnt not to trust 'facts'. Instead, we have seen a

return to more committed forms of theatre in which the editorialising is plain to see, and the purpose of factual quotation clear. The work of John McGrath's 7:84 Theatre Company is one of the best examples, and plays such as 'The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil', and the less successful 'Lay-off' are straightforward polemical plays, which nevertheless have a basis in documented fact. The influence of documentary drama suffuses the work of many fringe companies, such as the underpinning in contemporary history of Belt and Braces' 'Weight' or Common Stock's 'Miss', to name but two. Even the surrealistic, mock-shocking work of Howard Brenton in 'Christie in Love' and, with others, in 'Lay By', uses a factual starting point to begin an investigation which questions, in effect, how seemingly respectable people commit acts of violence. Similarly, Charles Marowitz used the case of James Hanratty as 'a springboard into the very much wider issue of British justice'[4] in the Open Space production of 'Hanratty in Hell'. Even Peter Shaffer's 'Equus' is given at times the appearance of a realistic psychological investigation, and the play was, apparently, triggered by an actual event, although it might be suspected that this is quoted to avert censure. More seriously, Edward Bond's 'The Fool' uses the basic events of the poet, John Clare's, life to mount a critique of a wealth-oriented society. In a somewhat different manner, Peter Nichols in 'Forget-me-not Lane' and John Mortimer in 'Voyage Round My Father' use personal recollection as though it were documentation, but the intention is more of a biographical nature.

It looks as though the mainstream of British theatre (if that is any longer an appropriate description for the West End, including the subsidised companies, and provincial Repertory under its new name of Regional Theatre) will remain relatively untouched by documentary drama. The reasons are not hard to find: theatre of commitment is unfashionable; politics are as much of a hot potato as ever; and only in a few instances do audiences have the kind of loyalties which might support another 'Stirrings' or 'Settle Us Fair'. Documentary drama has vastly enlarged the horizon for theatrical subject matter and the manner of its treatment, but it is the modern Fringe which, while moving beyond it, is most in its debt.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1. See for example, M. Meyer, 'Introduction to"Miss Julie" in 'Strindberg; the Plays', Vol.1 p.95 and ff. Mercury Books 1964.
2. T. Cole and H.K. Chinoy, 'Directors on Directing', Owen 1970, p.133.
3. Strindberg in Meyer, op. cit., p.104.
4. C.D. Innes, 'Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre', C.U.P. 1972. E.g., p,65.
5. Irving Wardle, 'Theatre Outside London', in a programme of the same title for 'A day of entertainment, demonstration, and discussion'. Nottingham Playhouse/Methuen, May 3rd. 1970.

Chapter 1: Russia: the affirmation of contemporary events.

1. V. Meyerhold, quoted in E. Braun, 'Meyerhold on Theatre', Methuen 1969, p. 167.

2. Ibid., p.162.

3. G.P. Noyes, 'Masterpieces of the Russian Drama', Vol.II, Dover 1960, p.888.

4. Ibid., p.803.

5. Ibid., p.848. Braun's synopsis of the play (op. cit., p.161) appears to miss the irony exemplified by this passage from the play.

6. Noyes, op. cit., pp.879-81, and Braun, op. cit., p.166.

7. Rolf Hochhuth, 'The Representative', Methuen 1963. The description, p.210, uses phrases like 'mephitic smoke', 'infernal atmosphere'. The play is discussed here on pp.69-72.

8. Braun, op. cit., reprints a photograph of the model for 'Mystery-Bouffe' which also occurs in several earlier works. Opp. p.145.

9. 'Parade' by Jean Cocteau; costumes and setting by Picasso; choreography by Leonid Massine. Performed by Diaghilev's Russian Ballet, Théâtre du du Châtelet, Paris, 1917. There are production photographs in Moussinac, 'The New Movement in the Theatre', Batsford 1931.

10. Ewan MacColl's 'Uranium 235' (see pp.55-57) contains a 'Ballet of Atomic Fission'. Here, by characterising atoms, the production illustrates an abstraction rather than emblemising the relation between man and his tools.

11. The sources used here are:
    i) A. Holitscher, 'Drei Monate in Sowjet Russland', Fischer Verlag, Berlin 1921, which contains an eye-witness account. Huntly Carter paraphrases it in 'The New Theatre and Cinema in Soviet Russia', but he omits Holitscher's condemnation of the spectacle for being conducive to counter-revolution.
    ii) Fourteen production photographs, presumably of daytime rehearsals, in R. Fülop-Miller and J. Gregor, 'Russian Theatre, its Character and History', Harrap 1930.
    iii) K.N. Derzhavin in 'Zhizn iskusstva', 1925 No.45, tr. E. Braun, in 'Art in Revolution', Arts Council programme of Hayward Gallery Exhibn., 26.2.1971.

12. N. Evreinov, quoted in Oliver Sayler, 'The Russian Theatre' Brentano, 1923, p.2.

13. Accounts of the pageant have been collected by Brooks McNamara, ed., in The Drama Review, Vol.15, No.3a (T51) Summer 1971, pp.60-61.
The pageant re-created the events of an I.W.W.-led strike among the silk factories of New Jersey. Its immediate purpose was to rally the strikers, and an impression can be gained from this newspaper report:
'...that mill, wonderfully portrayed on canvas in the first scene, suddenly ceased its grinding whirr and shot from its belly that mass of eddying, struggling human beings loudly chorussing their exultant war songs as they proclaimed themselves on strike... As a spectacle it was perfect. Nowhere was there a suggestion of "acting", of going through "a part". The people on the stage had long ago forgotten the audience. The audience had long ago forgotten itself. It had become a part of the scene. All simply lived their battles over again.
Interestingly, another review compared the pageant with a 'human document', a term clearly pre-dating the use of 'documentary'. (See p.47)
The Pageant seems isolated from later American workers' theatre; in any case, a study of labour pageants and their influence on documentary theatre is an area outside our scope here, but one which deserves attention.

14. Figures are very varied. The lower figure is Braun's (Arts Council, op. cit., p.61) but he gives no source. The higher, probably a guess, is Holitscher's.

15. Derzhavin, op. cit., p.59

16. Holitscher, op. cit. p.132.

17. Tairov, 'Proklamatsii Khudozhnika', 1917, quoted in Gorchakov, 'The Theatre in Soviet Russia' OUP 1957, p.98.

18. Holitscher, op. cit., p.127.

19. See Braun, 'Meyerhold on Theatre', p.170. But Gorchakov, op. cit., p.136, attributes the adaptation to Georgy Chulkov. Perhaps he means the translation.

20. Meyerhold, quoted in Braun, ibid., p.170-1.

21. Leo Wiener, 'The Contemporary Drama of Russia', p.171ff.

22. Quoted in A. Van Gyseghem, 'Theatre in Soviet Russia', Faber 1943.

23. N. Krupskaya, quoted in Braun, op. cit., p.164.

24. Shklovskii, quoted in Gorchakov, op. cit., p.420.

25. Braun, op. cit., p.163.

26. Ibid., p.164.

27. Meyerhold, quoted ibid., p.170.

28. Meyerhold, quoted ibid., p.172.

29. Huntly Carter, 'The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre', Brentano 1929/ Blom 1970, p.261.

30. P. Markov, 'Soviet Theatre', Gollancz 1934, p.143.

31. Meyerhold, quoted in Braun, op. cit., p.206.

32. Details of 'Earth in Turmoil' and 'Give Us Europe' are from Braun, op. cit., pp.188-194.

33. Huntly Carter, 'The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia', 1924, gives an account of these 'theatre circles'.

34. See e.g., Markov, op. cit., p.140.

35. See Huntly Carter, 'The New Theatre...'

36. Gorchakov, op. cit., p.145.

37. See H.W.L. Dana, 'Handbook on Soviet Drama' American/Russian Inst., N.Y.1938.

38. Markov, op. cit. , p.139.

39. Gorchakov, op. cit. p.144.

40. S. Eisenstein, 'Montage of Attractions for the Production of Ostrovsky's "Diary of a Scoundrel"', in B.F. Dukore, 'Dramatic Theory and Criticism', Holt, Rinehart & Wilson, NY 1974.

Chapter 2: Germany: documented polemic for revolution

1. For a useful account of the abortive German revolution, see R.M. Watt, 'Kings Depart'. He records how the new President, Eisner, nationalised the Munich theatre and asked that the leading roles should be apportioned more equitably. The playwright, Toller, was Eisner's deputy.

2. For a contemporary account, see K. MacGowan and R.E. Jones, 'Continental Stagecraft', NY 1922/ rep. Blom 1964.

3. For a chronology of the Volksbühne, see Theatre Quarterly, Vol.2 No.5, Jan - Mar. 1972. (The relevant section is on p.60. See esp. entry for 1924)
A survey of expressionist theatre as part of a wider movement is contained in J. Willett, 'Expressionism', Weidenfeld, whose earlier 'The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht' is also useful.

4. C.D. Innes, 'Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre', C.U.P. 1972.

5. Huntly Carter, 'The New Spirit...', p.305. Lutz Becker in 'Erwin Piscator, Political Theatre 1920 - 1966 (Ed. L. Hoffman, Arts Council) writes that Piscator came'into contact with' Meyerhold in the season 1923 - 4.(p.17)

6. Hubert Witt (ed.) 'Brecht As They Knew Him', Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.

7. See Piscator, 'The Proletarian Theate: its Fundamental Principles and its Tasks' in Hoffman, op. cit.

8. Innes, op. cit.pp.27-9

9. Richard Stourac, 'German Workers' Theatre' in New Theatre Magazine, Vol. XII No.3.

10. N. Hern, 'The Theatre of Ernst Toller' in Theatre Quarterly, Vol.2 No.5, Jan - Mar. 1972, p.73.

11. P. Spalding, 'Anger Beforehand', Norfolk Drama Bulletin, 1968, No.12, p.3.

12. For a discussion of 'The Investigation', see pp. 76-7.

13. In German, 'Revue Rote Rummel' which could perhaps better be translated as 'The Red Row'.

14. 'Trotz Alledem' was a slogan of the murdered Spartacist leader Karl Liebknecht. As Piscator was at that time director of the Völksbuhne, the title might have had a double significance, for the theatre's originator, Otto Brahm, in an early article criticising German Theatre, had quoted an ironic verse of Grillparzer. The opening phrase of the verse anticipates the revue's title and the sentiment would appeal to Piscator: 'Despite all (Trotz allem) your theatrical advisers' efforts/Three things are lacking for the German Theatre/For which you still must look in the end:/Actors, dramatists and an audience'. Quoted M. Boulby, ed., in a preface to'Die Weber', Harrap 1962, p.15.

15. Innes, op. cit., p.46.

16. Piscator, in Hoffman, op. cit., p.41.

17. Piscator, quoted in René Lauret, 'Le Théâtre Allemand d'Aujourd'hui', Gallimard 1934.

18. Piscator, 'Das Politische Theater', Schultz Verlag, Berlin, 1929, Ch.8.

19. Ludwig Hoffman, 'Das Deutsche Arbeiter-Theater', quoted in Innes, op. cit., p.50.

20. Piscator, 'Das Politische Theater', p.67.

21. Innes, op. cit., pp.51-2.

22. Piscator in 'Erwin Piscator, Political Theatre 1920 - 1966', (Hoffman) p.43.

23. Innes, op. cit., p. 91.

24. See, e.g., Stourac, op. cit., pp. 5-10.

25. Piscator, in programme for 'Nachtasyl' (The Lower Depths) quoted in Innes, op. cit., p.82.

26. See M. Gorelik, 'New Theatres for Old', Dobson, 1947, p.420. It is interesting to compare this with Innes' interpretation of the staging, op. cit., p. 84.

27. If we adopt such a usage, one possible confusion must be noted, that the two dimensional art-work normally associated with Piscator's designer, John Heartfield, is commonly called 'photo-montage'. In our terms, this would be better as 'photo-collage'.

28. Blätter der Piscatorbühne, No.1, November 1927. Berlin, Piscatorbühne.

29. P.B. Wadsworth, 'Piscator: Rebel', Theatre Guild Magazine, June 1930, quoted in Gorelik, op. cit., p.421.

30. Lania, 'Drama and History' in Blätter der Piscatorbühne No.1.

31. Piscator, 'Das Politische Theater', quoted in Gorelik, op. cit., p.422.

32. Gorelik, op. cit., p.422.

33. Upton Sinclair, 'Oil, a Play', published by the author, 1929.

34. Bertolt Brecht, 'On Form and Subject Matter', in 'Brecht on Theatre', tr. J. Willett, Hill and Wang, NY.1964, pp.29-30.

35. Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', ibid., pp.33-8

Chapter 3: The U.S: the documentation of social problems

1. Theatre Arts XV, Nov. 1931.
2. Ben Blake, 'The Awakening of the American Theatre', Tomorrow Pubs. NY 1935, quoted in Gorelik, op. cit., p.401.
3. M. Goldstein, 'The Political Stage', NY OUP 1974, p.21.
4. Ibid, p.34.
5. H. Flanagan, 'Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre', Harrap NY 1929. The extract quoted is on p.100.
6. In Braun, op. cit., the play's title is translated as 'Give Us Europe'. It was a free adaptation of two novels by Ilya Ehrenburg. When performed on June 15th, 1924, the jazz rhythms, heard for the first time in the Soviet Union, were roundly condemned. At the time of Hallie Flanagan's visit, Meyerhold had abandoned the use of documentary inserts, and was rehearsing his famous production of 'The Government Inspector'.
7. New York Times, May 10th, 1931, quoted in J. de Hart Mathews, 'The Federal Theatre 1935-39', Princeton U.P,, 1967, p.21.
8. Theatre Guild Magazine.
9. Goldstein, op. cit., lists quantities of these plays, with synopses.
10. Ibid., p.34.
11. H. Clurman, 'The Fervent Years'.
12. See especially H. Flanagan, 'Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre', rep. Blom 1971, and J. de Hart Mathews, op. cit.
13. Flanagan, ibid., lists the repertoire.
14. Quoted in de Hart Mathews, op. cit., p.295
15. Flanagan, 'Arena',
16. Arthur Arent, 'Techniques of the Living Newspaper', reprinted in Theatre Quarterly, Vol. I, No.4, Oct - Dec. 1971, p.57.
17. Arnold Goldman, 'Life and Death of the Living Newspaper Unit', Theatre Quarterly, Vol.III, No.9, p.70.
18. Ibid., pp.69-71.
19. Arent, op. cit., p.57.
20. I.e., Works Progress Administration, the central agency for relief projects.
21. Quoted in de Hart Mathews, op. cit., p.33.
22. Flanagan, 'Arena', p.67.
23. The published script (Random House) has 26 scenes, but in the mimeographed version, a copy of which was kindly lent to me by John Allen, a note by 'JL' - Losey - states that the Cotton Patch scene was omitted in production because it could not be played with 'the necessary simplicity. The NY version grouped the episodes into twenty scenes.
24. Quotations of 'Triple-A Plowed Under' are from the mimeographed script. Such copies were produced especially for other theatres to recreate the original production.
25. Arent, op. cit.
26. 'Daily News' August 21st, quoted in Arent, ibid. pp.58-9
27. Arent, ibid., p.59.
28. 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre' in 'Brecht on Theatre'. p.37

29. J. Losey, quoted in Goldman, op. cit., p.76.

30. Arnold Sundgaard's 'Spirochaete' is the last Living Newspaper listed by Hallie Flanagan. Although it appears in'Federal Theatre Plays', it hardly qualifies as a Living Newspaper, since it is a dramatised history of the fight against syphilis.

31. 'Power' in 'Federal Theatre Plays', rep. Da Capo, NY, 1973.

32. Not, as Goldman states, op. cit., at the end of the play.

33. There is an interesting parallel in William Wellman's film, 'The Wild Boys' (1933). After describing in documentary style the problems of vagrant unemployed in their search for work, the film avoids a resolution arising from their combined strength, which it has already demonstrated in a confrontation with the railway police. Instead, it opts to solve the problems of the central trio (and them alone) by the action of a sympathetic and benevolent judge.

34. Quoted in Flanagan, 'Arena', p.185

35. Goldman, op. cit., p.78, quotes from a letter on the subject from Arent to Morris Watson.

36. 'One-third of a nation', mimeographed copy.

37. William Whitman, 'Bread and Circuses', NY OUP 1937.

Chapter 4: Britain: fitting the pieces together

1. Sunday Worker, quoted in Innes, op. cit., p.55.
2. Ness Edwards, 'The Workers' Theatre', Cymric Federation Press, Cardiff 1930.
3. Recent documentary plays on these subjects are 'Will Wat, If Not, What Will?' by Steve Gooch (the Peasant Revolt); 'Comrade Jacob' by John McGrath (the Digger movement and land enclosures); 'The Jolly Potters' by Peter Cheeseman and the Stoke company (Chartist uprisings); 'Close the Coal-house Door', by Alan Plater (the miners' struggles).
4. Ewan MacColl in Theatre Quarterly, Vol.III No.9, p.58.
5. Joan Littlewood came into contact with Ernst Toller when she acted in his own production of 'Draw the Fires' at Manchester Repertory Theatre. It opened on February 10th, 1935, but it is not clear whether Theatre of Action was yet in operation.
6. Meyerhold's development of Biomechanics is described in Braun, op. cit. Laban had settled in Britain after emigrating from Nazi Germany.
7. The 'Shock Troop' of the Workers Laboratory Theatre changed its name to Theatre of Action in 1935.
8. Goldstein, op. cit., pp.47-9.
9. Forsyth Hardy, 'Grierson on Documentary', Faber 1966, p.13.
10. Paul Rotha et al., 'Documentary Film', Faber 1970, (1935) p.94.
11. Grierson, quoted in Hardy, op. cit., p.18.
12. Ibid., p.138.
13. Rotha, op. cit., p.261.
14. Unity Theatre Handbook, 1939, and Malcolm Page, 'The Early Years at Unity' in Theatre Quarterly, Vol.1, No.4, p.60. Unity's continuity has caused it to overshadow other contemporary groups. There was for example, Montagu Slater's 'Easter 1916' performed by Left Theatre and the North London Area Committee of the A.E.U., first at Islington Town Hall on December 5th. 1935 and three days later at the Phoenix Theatre. It was produced by Andre Van Gyseghem, and both he and Slater later joined Unity and worked on 'Busmen'. 'Easter 1916' was published in 1936.
15. The first was 'Private Hicks' by Albert Maltz.
16. Interview with John Allen, 1974. He also lent me an original copy of 'Busmen'.
17. This apparently came to the Lord Chamberlain's notice, to his displeasure.
18. Apart from one or two typing errors which I have corrected, this is as the original carbon copy. The relationship between Boy and 1st woman is not made clear.
19. John Collier, Theatre Arts, July 1947.
20. Paul Rotha, 'An Account of the American Stage Sensation, "Living Newspaper"' in World Film News, Vol.III (London 1938)
21. A brief account of political censorship is contained in Richard Findlater, 'Theatrical Censorship in Britain', Panther 1968, esp. p.181 and ff.
22. See accounts in Norman Marshall, 'The Other Theatre' p.101 (36 hours) and Page, op. cit., p.64.
23. There is very little material at Unity itself. Much seems to have crossed the Atlantic into American libraries.
24. Page, op. cit., p.64.

25. Howard Goorney, quoted in 'Grass roots of Theatre Workshop', Theatre Quarterly, Vol.III No.9, p.66.

26. See Goldman, op. cit., p.83 and New Theatre, August 1946, Vol.3, No.3.

27. Members of the ABCA group were responsible for staging Bridget Boland's 'Cockpit' in 1948. A further influence was on 'Exercise Bowler' written by a group (from ABCA?) under the nom-de-guerre of 'Tommy Atkins', in which a Pirandellian group of soldiers interrupt the 'performance' of a conventionally 'stiff-upper-lipped' play about war, to have the actors play it 'as it really is'. Significantly, the soldiers come not from a mysterious backstage hinterland, but democratically from the audience.

28. Scots Theatre No.3, November 1946. Pub. Glasgow Unity Theatre.

29. Quoted in New Theatre, Vol.3, No.1.

30. MacColl, 'Uranium 235', MacLellan, Glasgow, p.72.

31. Ibid., p.92.

31A. An interesting - if gauche - precursor of 'U235' is 'Johnny Noble', also by Ewan MacColl. Staged in 1944, it has a central 'Everyman', an unemployed trawlerman who tramps for work, while his true love sits faithfully at home. Johnny gets work as a 'deckie' on a boat running the blockade to Republican Spain during the Civil War. As a result, he learns that he is 'not alone' - others are fighting the same fight. He spends the years 1939 - 45 in the British Navy, and the end of the play looks to the imminent future when the war will be over. A man says to Johnny: 'It's time you remembered why the war was fought. There's a job to be done, Johnny... You've two hands and a brain and there's plenty of you. Take the world in your hands, Johnny, and wipe it clean. It's up to you, Johnny' - and Johnny turns to the chorus (and also, presumably, to the audience): 'Do you hear that? It's our world. It's up to us. We can do it, can't we.' The echo, from labour plays of fifteen years previously, is a clear one, and for all the now-apparent naivety, must have struck a welcome note at the time. Donald Roy at Hull University drew my attention to this play.

32. The confusion which had grown up around the term 'documentary' is illustrated by a school book 'Show with Music' (1950) in which Robert Newton explains how drama groups may make up plays from improvisation. From his examples, it is clear that he defines 'documentary' as a musical play expressing personal attitudes towards a factual subject or theme such as 'Town and Country'.

33. On October 13th. 1947.

34. Accompanying booklet to 'The Ballad of John Axon', Argo, DA 139.

35. E.g., BBCTV series, 'Looking at Documentary. No.1: The Realists', broadcast 9.11.1975. Also, Glasgow University Media Group, 'Bad News' Vol.I Routledge /1976.

36. 'Culloden', BBCTV, December 1964.

37. Daily Express, April 19th. 1960

38. Theatre Workshop, 'Oh What a Lovely War', Methuen 1965, p.27.

39. Ibid., p.49.

40. Ibid., p.67.

41. Ibid., p.76.

42. Ibid., p.89

43. Cf. p.28. The numerical discrepancy may well be the result of differing British and German views of what constituted the Battle of the Somme. Whichever figure is chosen, the implication is the same.

44. A major problem of staging 'Oh What a Lovely War' is to organise the multitude of hats and helmets.

45. 'Oh What a Lovely War', p.61.

46. July 1963. The length of its London run was approximately 400 performances.

Chapter 5: Documentary drama in London

1. February 16th.
2. ?April, 1961. The script is published in Gambit No.3.
3. Caryl Brahms, Plays and Players (P&P), July 1961.
4. The production is reviewed in P&P, Sept., 1962.
5. P&P, Jan., 1965, p.14.
6. 'The Storm over the Deputy', ed., Eric Bentley, Grove Press, 1964. ('The Deputy' is the play's usual title in the US.)
7. Rolf Hochhuth, 'The Representative', tr. R.D. Macdonald, Methuen 1963, pp.85 - 6.
8. Published in abridged form as 'The Private Life of the Master Race', tr. Eric Bentley, Gollancz.
9. I owe the comparison to R.C. Perry,'Historical Authenticity and Dramatic Form: Hochhuth's "Der Stellvertreter" and Weiss's "Die Ermittlung"', Modern Language Review, Vol.64, 1969, pp.828 - 39.
10. Charles Marowitz, P&P, December 1963.
11. Richard Gilman, '"The Deputy" arrives', The Commonweal, 20.3.1964, rep. in 'The Storm over the Deputy', op. cit.
12. It would be a labour of love to check the historical minutiae. The exact accuracy of Hochhuth's detail is not important to this argument.
13. Hugh Leonard, P&P, Dec. 1963.
14. Marowitz, op.cit.
15. Rolf Hochhuth, 'Soldiers', Grove Press 1968, p.124.
16. Published Calder & Boyars 1971. The play is unperformed professionally both in this country and the US.
17. P&P, May 1964.
18. Subsequently pub., Faber 1965.
19. Simple chairs and table are in 'close-up' before a relatively large screen. A slide of the production held by Theatre Projects Ltd. compares with photographs of the original Fed. Theatre's L.N.'s.
20. P&P Jan 1965 pp. 41-2.
21. Aldwych Theatre, 19 March 1961.
22. P&P, March 1964.
23. June 22nd, 1964
24. P&P, July, 1965. Frank Cox quotes Hobson's remark.
25. William Francis, 'Portrait of a Queen', French, p.29.
26. 'An Evening With G.B.S' compiled by Michael Voysey, 1966 Edinburgh Festival and subs. in London; 'Aubrey's Brief Lives', adapted and compiled by Patrick Garland, Hampstead, January 16th., 1967.

27. For a discussion on the relationship between Weiss's language and the trial records, see R.C. Perry, op.cit.

28. Perry, ibid., and also in Jack D. Zipes, 'Documentary Drama in Germany: Mending the Circuit', Germanic Review, Vol. 42, 1967, pp. 49 - 61.

29. Again, I am indebted to Perry, op.cit.

30. Hochhuth, 'The Representative', p.205.

31. Peter Weiss, 'The Investigation', tr. A. Gross, Calder & Boyars, 1966, p. 10.

32. Peter Brook et al., 'US', Calder & Boyars 1968, p.25.

33. Ibid.

34. The difference was obvious in performance and noted by several critics, e.g., Wesker in 'US' ibid, p.203.

35. For a discussion of the relationship of group dynamics to play creation, see Brian Clark, 'Group Theatre', Pitman 1971.

36. 'US' p.128.

37. 'US' p.51.

38. 'US' p.95.

39. Marowitz, International Times, quoted in 'US' p.195.

40. Wesker, 'Open Letter to the Team', quoted in 'US' p.203

41. Brian Magee, Listener, Nov. 3rd, 1966, quoted in 'US' pp.189 - 193.

42. 'US' p.143.

43. 'US' p.13.

44. D.A.N. Jones, New Statesman, quoted in 'US' p.189.

45. 17th. Oct. 1966. Later published by Methuen, tr. Ruth Speirs, 1967.

46. There are slightly conflicting accounts of the Censor's attitude to 'In the Matter...', in Peter Ansorge's review, P&P, Dec.1966, and in R. Findlater, 'Banned: Theatrical Censorship in Great Britain', Panther 1968, p.202.

47. Ansorge, ibid.

48. Penguin, 1966.

49. Ibid., p.112.

50. John Russell Taylor, P&P, Jan. 1967, p.48.

51. Dec. 1966, pp. 60-61

52. Ronald Parr, P&P, Feb. 1970, p.51.

53. In P&P August 1966 and again, Jan. 1967.

54. 'The Cato Street Conspiracy', John Stanhope. Pub. Cape 1962.

55. I was fortunate in being able to read a copy of the Cross version entitled, 'Chicago: a scenario for a documentary/extravaganza', and lent to me by Colin Mortimer.

56. 'Open Space Plays' selected by Charles Marowitz, Penguin, p.118.

57. Ibid., p.79.

58. At the Aldwych's World Theatre Season, Apr. 1969, performed by the N.Y. Negro ensemble.

59. Duchess Theatre, Sept. 1969.

60. Lyric Theatre, May 7th, 1970.

61. P&P July 1970, p.30.

62. ?April 1971.

63. Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, April 1971.

64. RSC at The Place, October 1971.

65. There are interesting comments and observations on the misleading nature of 'Occupations' if taken as a documentary, in a series of articles and letters in the Morning Star between 12th and 28th Oct. 1971. It includes a reply by director Buzz Goodbody.

66. Oct. 8, 1970.

67. Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, May 17th. 1971. Dir. Bill Bryden.

68. 'The Burned-Out Mountain', Guardian, 28th. Jan. 1970.

69. Oct.,1971.

70. Rep. in C. Oman, 'The Great Revolt of 1381', OUP, 1969. This appears to have been Gooch's main source for the narrative outline.

71. Steve Gooch, 'Will Wat, If Not, What Will?', Pluto Press, 1975, p.17.

72. Pub. History Workshop Pamphlets, 1973.

73. First performed, The Leys Hall, Dagenham, March 1974. Transf. to Half Moon, April.

74. The performance I saw was at the Half Moon, and quite possibly the play had had more moments of serious impact in front of the audience of car-workers in Dagenham.

75. Brecht, 'The Street Scene' in 'Brecht On Theatre', ed. John Willett, Methuen.

76, The play, if not the script, had a happy ending. Davis's case was re-opened and he was freed. It would, of course, be wrong to attribute this to the play, but there can be little doubt of its value in boosting the Campaign's morale, and helping to win support.

77. Kipphardt is also influenced by Brecht, but in 'In the Matter...' this influence is confined to the language used for the invented monologues.

78. 'Light Shining in Buckinghamshire' was scripted by Caryl Churchill, but the production owed a great deal to the imaginative ensemble playing of the Joint Stock company.

Chapter 6: Stoke-on-Trent

1. Alan Cullen, 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night', Methuen, 1974. (See the director's introduction, in which, incidentally, Colin George mistakes the year of 'The Jolly Potter's' production.)
2. Details of the Victoria Theatre's origins are from 'A Community Theatre in the Round', Peter Cheeseman, Theatre Quarterly, Vol.1, No.1, 1971, and my own acquaintance with Stephen Joseph in 1963-4.
3. Keith Dewhurst, 'The Burned-out Mountain', Guardian 28.1.1970.
4. Dates from programme brochures and other information supplied by the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent.
5. Peter Cheeseman, 'The Knotty', Methuen 1970: Introduction, p.xi.
6. These and the historical antecedents were cited by Cheeseman in an interview with the writer, 11.10.1974. He stated that he had had no previous practical experience in the documentary or similar form, and had first met Joan Littlewood personally in 1973. The university tutor was W.H.G. Armitage of Sheffield University.
7. Interview cited.
8. Cheeseman, op. cit., p.xiv.
9. Ibid., p.xiv.
10. 'Production Casebook No.1: The Staffordshire Rebels', in Theatre Quarterly, op. cit. This is a transcript of a BBC recording made in rehearsals. P.88.
11. Ibid. p.88.
12. From an unpublished letter by Cheeseman to The Guardian, 9.9.1971, replying to a reference by the paper's critic, Gareth Lloyd Evans, to the work at Stoke.
13. Cheeseman, op. cit., p.xii.
14. Stoke Evening Sentinel, review entitled, 'Inspired story of Potters' fight for justice', 14.7.1964.
15. Cheeseman was later to castigate such acted comment. See, e.g., Theatre Quarterly, op. cit., p.93 and Cheeseman, op. cit., p.87.
16. See pp. 163-5.
17. Theatre Quarterly, op. cit., p.88.
18. Sound cues are marked, but not their content, except of course where there is voice over.
19. Theatre Quarterly, op. cit.
20. Ibid. p.88.
21. Ibid. p.98.
22. Ibid. p.88
23. E.g., Bertolt Brecht, 'The Horatians and Curatians', tr. H.R. Hays, Accent, Vol.1.No.8, Autumn 1947.
24. Stoke Evening Sentinel, 13.7.1966. 'Memorable tribute to "Old Knotty" by the"Old Vic"'.
25. 'The Knotty', op. cit., p.46.
26. Ibid. p.55.
27. Ibid. notes, p.90.

28. Ibid. p.45.
29. Benedict Nightingale in The Guardian, 13.7.1966.
30. 'The Knotty', op. cit. notes, p.86.
31. The Guardian, 13.7.1966.
32. Stoke Evening Sentinel, 13.7.1966.
33. 'The Knotty', op. cit. p.11.
34. Ibid. notes, pp.85-6.
35. Ibid. p.49.
36. Ibid. p.51.
37. Miles Malleson, 'D Company', Henderson 1925. (The men's work in this case is, of course, as soldiers)
38. 'The Knotty', op. cit. notes p.91.
39. Stoke Evening Sentinel, 17.7.1968.
40. Robert Waterhouse in The Guardian, 17.7.1968.
41. Evening Sentinel 17.7.1968.
42. The 'stagecoach' was created with no more than stools and a sound effect, but - in a nicely comic fashion - it warmed the audience to 'The Knotty's' style of presentation.
43. The Financial Times, 20.1.1970.
44. Sunday Times, 25.1.1970
45. Such as Hamish Henderson's 'Ballads of World War II'.
46. The Guardian, 19.5.1971.
47. John Peter in the Sunday Times, 27.1.1974.
48. A heavily edited version (35 mins) broadcast on BBC2, 18.11.1974.
49. Sunday Times, 27.1.1974.
50. Ibid.
51. Reported by Cheeseman in the interview cited.
52. Evening Sentinel, 23.1.1974.
53. The Guardian, 23.1.1974, 'Bar Sinister'.
54. Sunday Times, 27.1.1974.
55. See p.59.
56. Stoke Evening Sentinel, 13.7.1966.

Chapter 7: Sheffield, Bolton, Greenwich

1. Background information to the Sheffield plays is from informal talks with Colin George, and from 'The Stirrings in Sheffield' by Denys Corrigan, Sheffield Repertory Co. Ltd., 1971, an account of the Playhouse 1959 - 71.
2. Alan Cullen, 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night', Eyre Methuen, 1974, Director's Introduction.
3. The electrifying rapport between audience and stage was very apparent when I saw this production myself, long before I met Colin George.
4. Interview with Colin George, May 1971.
5. Cullen, op. cit., Author's Introduction.
6. Typescript of original production. The melodramatic 'Are you a villain?' was softened later, as the published version shows.
7. Several photographs of the production were on display at the old Playhouse in Sheffield just before it closed. See also Corrigan, op. cit., Pl.37.
8. Corrigan, op. cit.
9. Bolton Evening News, 26.6.1968.
10. Ibid.
11. Bolton Journal and Gazette, 6.6.1969.
12. Robin Thornber, Plays and Players, July 1970, p.52.
13. Bolton Evening News, 20.5.1970.
14. Thornber, op. cit.
15. Bolton Journal and Gazette, 22.5.1970
16. Thornber, op. cit. (But the run appears to have been planned, optimistically, for a longer than normal run.)
17. Bolton Evening News, 31.3.1971.
18. Ewan Hooper and Ernest Marvin, 'A Man Dies', Darton 1969(1964)
19. With the writer, July 1971.
20. Kentish Independent, October 1969.
21. John Hale, 'Spithead', in 'Plays of the Year - 38', ed. J.C. Trewin, Elek Bks.
22. 'Down the Arches' opened on 27.10.1970.
23. J.W. Lambert, Sunday Times, 1.11.1970.
24. Globe, 30.10.1970.
25. The Education Secretary for the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, interviewed in Cue, the magazine of the Greenwich Theatre, No.16, Jan. 1971.
26. In Cue No.18, Summer 1971, which also contained a postal debate on the theatre's policy.
27. 'But the credit for Brunel he (Pudney) says must go to Ewan Hooper... who... put him up to it, and - when he didn't much like the end product - suggested that Pudney add another dimension and turn the great Victorian engineer into the subject of a musical.' Michael White, Guardian, 6.4.1972.
28. Ibid.
29. John Mortimer, 'Voyage Round My Father' was adapted for the stage by the author and first performed at Greenwich on 24.11.1970.
30. Claude Whatham, 'A Play About Real People' in Cue No.15, September 1970.
31. Ewan Hooper, 'Theatre of Pap', ibid.

Chapter 8: 'Documentary' in the regional theatre

1. Sid Chaplin in the Fortune Theatre programme.
2. Alan Plater, 'Close the Coalhouse Door', Methuen 1969, p.ix.
3. Terry Coleman, 'The Navvies', Penguin 1968.
4. Author's introduction to the draft script lent to me by Derby Playhouse.
5. John Elsom, 'The Theatre Outside London', Macmillan, 1971, p.201.
6. John Mapplebeck, Sunday Times, 21.6.1970.
7. Ibid.
8. 'And Was Jerusalem Builded Here', opened May 24th. 1972, directed by Bill Hays.
9. BBC Radio 3, 9.12.1973.
10. February 17th.,1970.
11. September 7th. 1971.
12. Ipswich Evening News, 21.10.1970.
13. April 1971. Doc Watson is now (1977) working at the Marlowe Theatre and has created a documentary on the Kent hop-pickers for a community touring company, and one on Kentish smugglers for a T.I.E team.
14. December 1st. 1971.
15. Plays and Players, February 1970, p.50. Much of my information is from Michael Anderson's review, as I have been unable to obtain scripts of 'Wesley' (or 'The Bastard King') from either the Northcott, or from Mr. Emery.
16. On p.92.
17. I have had to rely for my description of this play on 'Change Ringing in Bristol' by Barbara Berrington, TABS, Dec. 1972, Vol.30.No.4, pp.124-6, & David Illingworth,'The Ring Road Show', New Theatre Magazine, Vol.12, No.3.
18. See 'Workers' Plane' (David Foot), Guardian, 26.6.73.
19. These and other details are from a conversation with Keith Darvill.
20. In a subsequent television treatment of the script which I was able to read.
21. The Guardian, 24.4.1966.
22. Retitled 'A Life in Bedrooms', the play was performed two years later in London at the Queens Theatre on June 12th. 1969.
23. Cordelia Oliver, The Guardian, 29.1.1968.
24. Arguably, two plays succeeded 'Close the Coalhouse Door' at Newcastle, in the University Playhouse: Peter Terson's 'Prisoners of the War' in which an autobiographical central character links scenes from civilian life during 1939-45; 'The Grace Darling Show' which attempted in rambling, episodic fashion to show how Grace Darling was exploited by a society hungry for heroes. In a mixture of styles reminiscent of 'Margaret Catch-pole', it attempted to contrast the real person with the myth of song, melodrama and music-hall. See Bill Walls and Ed Wilson, 'Portrait of a Company: University Theatre, Newcastle' in Theatre Quarterly, Vol.3 No.7, July-Sept 1972, pp.30-32.
25. Winstanley's group dug on(St)George's Hill near Farnham.
26. Plays and Players, January 1970, p.27.

Chapter 9: Documentary and stage design

1. Colin George, 'Director's Introduction' in A.Cullen, 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night', Methuen 1974.
2. On this analysis, television makes each viewer monarch in his own home. We all share a lordly viewpoint which tends to detach us from war, hunger, strikes, and so on.
3. The gold-coin fox-trot is in Toller's 'Masses and Man', but it is typical of the kind of transformations taking place on the agit-prop stage. cf. Richard Stourac on German Workers' Theatre in New Theatre Magazine, Volume XII, No.3.
4. E. Braun, 'Meyerhold on Theatre', Methuen 1969, p.185.
5. Steve Gooch and Paul Thompson, 'The Motor Show' at the Half Moon Theatre, 9.4.1974, and published by Pluto Press, 1975.
6. Stephen Joseph's desire to re-establish the actor as the true centre of dramatic attivity led to the conference at Manchester University recorded in Joseph, 'Actor and Architect', M.U.P., 1962.
7. Peter Cheeseman, (ed) 'The Knotty', Methuen 1970, p.18.
8. Ibid., p.86.

Conclusion

1. Cf. Kenneth Tynan, 'Director as Misanthropist: on the Moral Neutrality of Peter Brook, Theatre Quarterly Vol.7 No.25, 1977, esp. pp.23-4.
2. See p.159 above. The programme for the Leeds production of 'And Was Jerusalem Builded Here' enclosed a facsimile copy of the Leeds Mercury which reported the Luddite trials.
3. Peter Cheeseman, intro. to 'The Knotty', Methuen, p.vii.
4. Charles Marowitz, interviewed by Sue Lawley, 'Tonight', BBCTV, July 5th. 1976.

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Eric Bentley, 'The Storm Over the Deputy', Grove Press 1964.
Barbara Berrington, 'Change Ringing in Bristol', TABS, Rank Strand Electric, Vol.30 No.4, Dec.72, pp.121-7.
Edward Braun, 'Meyerhold on Theatre', Methuen 1969.
Bertolt Brecht, (tr. John Willett)'Brecht on Theatre', Hill & Wang NY 1964. (Now rep. Eyre Methuen)
Huntly Carter, 'The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre' Brentano 1929/Blom 1970
" " , 'The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia', Chapman & Dodd 1924
Peter Cheeseman, 'A Community Theatre-in-the-Round', Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 1 No.1, Jan-Mar 1971, pp.71-82.
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R. Fülop-Miller & Joseph Gregor, (tr. P. England) 'The Russian Theatre, its character and history',Harrap 1930.
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Arnold Goldman, 'Life and Death of the Living Newspaper Unit', Theatre Quarterly, Vol.3 No.9, Jan-Mar 1973 pp.69-83
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N. Gorchakov, 'The Theatre in Soviet Russia', OUP. 1957. (tr. E. Lehrman)
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" " , 'The Theatre Nobody Knows', Theatre Survey, US,American Socy. for Theatre Research, Vol.6 No.1 May 1965, pp.65-82.
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" " 'Expressionism', Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1970.
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PLAYS CONSULTED

Not all plays listed here are referred to in the text, but I have included them because of their interest. This particularly applies to documentary plays by T.I.E. companies, and I have included those which have come to my notice. There are no doubt many others which should be included in a list of T.I.E documentaries, which this does not pretend to be.

Unpublished plays which have been made available to me are marked with an asterisk.
Where I have referred to notes made after watching one or more performances, the play is marked ‡.
Where the date of first performance is not readily available, I have included it in brackets.

Pre-war

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Post-war

Arthur Adamov, 'Le Printemps '71', Gallimard. (1st British perf.: Unity, Sept. 1962)

Michael Almaz, 'The Anarchist', Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, April 1971.*

John Arden & Margaretta D'Arcy, 'The Hero Rises Up' (7.11.1968), Methuen 1969.

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Stan Barstow (dram. by Alfred Bradley) 'A Kind of Loving', Nov. 1965.*

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Leila Berg, 'Raising Hell', Theatrescope (Salisbury T.I.E.) ?Feb.1973.*

Gordon Bewley, 'Silk', Derby Playhouse, 28.3.1971.*

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" " , 'The Mother', Grove Press, 1965.
" " , 'Senora Carrar's Rifles'.*

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" " " , 'The Burning Mountain', " 13.1.1970.*
" " " , 'Hands Up, For You The War Is Ended!', Stoke, 18.5.1971.*
" " " , 'Fight for Shelton Bar', Stoke-on-Trent, 22.1.1974.*

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" " " , 'The Carmakers'.*
" " " , 'The Emergent Africa Game', 1968.*
" " " , 'You Must Be Joking' (Belgrade Theatre) 17.9.1971.*‡

Ted Craig & Margaret Ollerenshaw, 'The Railway Borough', Crewe 25.2.1969.*

Jonathan Cross, 'Chicago: a scenario for documentary and extravaganza' (See Alan Burgess & Charles Marowitz).*

Alan Cullen, 'The Stirrings in Sheffield on Saturday Night', Sheffield Playhouse, 31.5.1966*; Eyre Methuen 1974. ǂ
" " , 'Ring o' Roses', Sheffield Playhouse, 18.7.1967.*
" " , 'The Life and Times of Charles Peace', Playhouse, 16.7.1969.*
" " , 'Britannia's Boys', Playhouse, 20.5.1971. * ǂ

Keith Darvill, 'Times Are Getting Hard, Boys', Glasgow Citizens, ?1966.*
" " 'Clydesiders', 10.5.1967.*

Christopher Denys, 'Riches, Rags and Rotherham', Rotherham Civic Theatre (am. prod.) 30.8.1971. ǂ

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Simon Dunmore, 'The I.K. Brunel Show', Plymouth Theatre Co., Oct. 1976.*

Stephen Fagan, 'The Braddocks' Time', Liverpool Everyman, Oct. 1970.*

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William Gibson, 'The Miracle Worker', French.

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" " , with Paul Thompson, 'The Motor Show', Half Moon 9.4.1974; Pluto Press 1975.

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Ranald Graham, 'Aberfan', Edinburgh Traverse Theatre, Jan. 1968.*

Trevor Griffiths, 'Occupations', Stables Theatre, Manchester, 28.10.1970; Calder & Boyars 1972.ǂ

Bill Grundy, 'Up the Rams', Derby 22.9.1970.*

John Hale, 'Spithead', Greenwich Theatre 18.11.1969; Plays of the Year 1938, Ed., J.C. Trewin, Elek Books 1970. ǂ

Michael Hastings, 'The Silence of Lee Harvey Oswald', Hampstead Theatre Club, 22.11.1966; as 'Lee Harvey Oswald', Penguin Books, 1966.

Kaj Himmelstrup, 'Welcome to Dallas, Mr Kennedy'; Calder & Boyars 1971. (ǂ - student perf.)

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" " 'Soldiers', Grove Press 1968.

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" " , 'Martin Luther King', Greenwich Theatre, 21.10.1969.* ǂ
" " , 'Down the Arches', Greenwich 27.10.1970.*ǂ

David Illingworth, 'The Oz Trial'. ǂ
" " , 'The Great West Show, Bristol New Vic 30.5.1972. ǂ

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Bernard Krichefski, 'The Fire Next Time', Theatrescope (Salisbury T.I.E.) ?1970.*

Paolo Levi, (tr. and adapted by Robert Rietty), 'The Pinedus Affair', Pembroke Theatre, ?April 1961. Pub. Gambit No.3 1961.

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" " 'The Napoleon Show', " " " , 1969.*
" " 'The Bullhead Gang', " " " , 1970.*
" " 'The Vikings', " " " , 1971.*

Ewan MacColl, 'Uranium 235', MacLellan, Glasgow, ?1950.
" " , 'Johnny Noble', 1944.*

" " with Charles Parker, 'Ballad of John Axon', Argo DA139.

Philip Mackie and Richard Argent, 'Kindly Leave The Raj', University of Lancaster, Nuffield Theatre Club, 24.6.1969.*

John McGrath, 'Comrade Jacob', Gardner Arts Centre, Brighton (Sussex Univ.), 24.11.1969.*
" " , 'Lay-Off' , 7:84 Co., touring.‡
" " , 'The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil',(BBCTV).‡

John Mortimer, 'Voyage Round My Father', Methuen 1971.

'Music Hall 1870 -', Marlowe Theatre 18.8.1970.*

Alex Paterson, 'They Have Said' (a compilation), Byre Theatre, St. Andrews, July 1966.

Robin Pemberton-Billing (in collaboration with Bolton Octagon Theatre Co.),
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" " " " " " " " "
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Alan Plater, (based on stories by Sid Chaplin) 'Close the Coalhouse Door', Newcastle Playhouse 9.4.1968; Methuen 1969. ‡
" " , 'Don't Build a Bridge, Drain the River', Hull Arts Centre 20.1.1970.*

John Pudney, 'The Little Giant', Greenwich Theatre, April 1972. ‡

Albert Rhodes, 'Don't Whistle for Me', Chesterfield Civic Theatre, 17.2.1970.*

Robert Shaw, 'Cato Street', Young Vic, 15.11.1971; Chatto & Windus 1972. ‡

Elsa Shelley, 'Pick-Up Girl', New Lindsay Theatre Club 1946.*

Tim Shields & John Roche, 'Bolton Wanderers', Octagon Theatre 19.5.1970.*

Alan Sillitoe, 'Saturday Night & Sunday Morning'(dramatised by David Brett), Nottingham Playhouse 15.4.1964. ‡

Don Taylor, 'The Roses of Eyam', Northcott Theatre, Exeter, 23.9.1970.* Also BBCTV2, 9.6.1973. ‡

Peter Terson, 'The 1861 Whitby Lifeboat Disaster', Victoria, Stoke-on-Trent, 5.3.1970.*

Théâtre du Soleil, '1789', Roundhouse 11.10.1971; Gambit Vol.5 No.20, Calder & Boyars 1971. ‡

Theatre Workship, 'Oh What a Lovely War', Theatre Royal, Stratford E. July 1973; Methuen 1965. ‡

Paul Thompson, 'Captain Swing at the Penny Gaff', Unity Theatre 19.2.1971. ‡

David Turner, 'Bottomley', Belgrade Theatre, 31.3.1965. *‡ (Factual biography)

Doc Watson, 'Walpurgisnacht', Ipswich Arts Theatre, April 1971.*

W.J. Weatherby, 'Breaking the Silence', Liverpool Playhouse, ?Nov. 1969.*

Peter Weiss, 'The Investigation', tr. Alexander Gross, Calder & Boyars 1966.
" " , 'The Song of the Lusitanian Bogey') Tr. Lee Baxandall,
'Discourse on... Vietnam') Atheneum, NY.1970.

Charles Wood, 'H, or monologues in front of burning cities', Methuen 1970.

Phil Woods, 'Settle Us Fair', Hull Arts Centre 16.6.1970.*
'In Place of Strife', Octagon Theatre Bolton, 30.3.1971.* ‡

David Wright, 'Hang Down Your Head and Die', Oxford Playhouse 11.2.1964.* ‡
'The Stiffkey Scandals of 1932' Edinburgh Traverse Theatre 1967.*
'Would you look at them smashing all the lovely windows', 1968.*

Additionally, I have had access to theatre programmes for the bulk of the above plays.