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THE AUDIENCE AS CRITIC

A study of audience responses to popular theatre

by

Jennifer E Pinchen

A Doctoral Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy of the Loughborough University of Technology 1990

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ABSTRACT

To begin with, the role of theatre, and especially popular theatre, is contextualised within the theory of art and society and the debate about 'popular' and 'mass' culture. The thesis attempts to reassess the possibilities for positive and dynamic relations between audience and theatre within this context, through an investigation of some actual relationships between them. What is defined as 'mainstream' theatre is the basis of the research. The three major productions studied are A Day in the Death of Joe Egg by Peter Nichols, Bloody Poetry by Howard Brenton, and Blood Brothers by Willy Russell. Qualitative research on audience responses for each play resulted in 37 in-depth interviews.

A chapter is devoted to the problem of methodology for such a qualitative study; in particular, to the lack of any model method for analysis. The interview material is presented and discussed play by play. Initially, a broad 'consensus' view of each play, provides a background to the description and analysis of responses. Analysis is carried out under the headings of different 'cultural profiles', determined in relation to the play as 'accordant', 'discordant' or 'neutral' in orientation. The influences of such cultural profiles are shown in some cases to predetermine the perceived meaning or effect of the play, independently of the executants' intentions. Some responses are more readily understood as determined most importantly by a personal 'inner history', which can be even more resilient to change. Despite the predominance of habitual notions, it is found that particular kinds of theatrical technique are more successful than others in overriding biases corresponding to cultural profile. This is especially true of theatricality which raises the emotional identification of respondents with characters or events on stage without mobilising stereotypes.

Findings indicate the importance of the cultural profile and personal history of audiences in any theory of the theatre's social function. The innate conservatism which characterises cultural profiles is seen to be a crucial factor. Conclusions suggest a need for models which do not rely on preconceptions or hidden assumptions about audience response. In addition, the emphasis which emerges on the autonomy of audience as critic and creator raises questions about the function and aspirations of certain types of theatre.
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CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

Aims

The motivation behind this research is the conviction that the literary and performance arts of our western society do, or can, have a real relevance to the people, and not just those people especially trained in their production and appreciation. The actual relations between the arts and the people are therefore the object of study.

Theatre seemed to provide the most readily accessible point of contact with a public at large which was likely to comprise, at least to a certain extent, 'the ordinary (wo)man in the street'. An important research aim is to investigate the responses and satisfactions of a fairly wide cross-section of people. This reflects a concern with the role of theatre for a 'population at large', rather than a restricted elite. It should become clear that the use of the terms 'elite' and 'elitist' are justified because of the difficulty of finding more appropriate vocabulary for some of the attitudes which will be reported (e.g. see especially, Commentary on Bloody Poetry).

Some cultural homogeneity of audiences is necessary, however, in order to be able to see the role of theatre within a cultural context. It was, for instance, beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the varieties of cultural context which would have resulted from studying West End productions. I had some initial involvement in a Society of West End Theatres project, helping to conduct a survey of West End theatre audiences run by Caroline Gardiner of City University in 1984. This experience showed that the number of overseas visitors made West End audiences too cosmopolitan to be suitable for this research.

To these ends then, the type of theatre studied was restricted to 'mainstream' theatre in major regional playhouses; that which is readily available locally to a large public. Fuller definitions of 'mainstream' follow, below and in Chapter Three.

There is a long tradition of "the association of the idea of the general perfection of humanity with the practice and study of the arts" [Williams 1968 p59]. It is the aim of this study to identify those factors in the relationship between stage and audience which are most
crucial to this association. To do this, the relative importance of the 'message' of the play, the theatricality which presents it, and the cultural profile of the audience experiencing it, is addressed. As part of this discourse, a subsidiary aim is to consider whether the ways in which theatre producers pursue the association with the 'general perfection of humanity' are in contrast to the associations audiences themselves may make.

It is an important premise of this work that the subject of study is not 'the play', to which the audience then respond. It is the dynamics of the relationship between the two. As a subject, this is not easily definable because of its subjectivity. Faced with the problem of rendering these dynamics into some reportable, discussable form, the views of the audience themselves are the only logical definitions to use. The formulation of an appropriate methodology for this research has proved problematic. As far as possible, the methodology has been specifically formulated to approach the audience in a way which might reveal more about the nature of their role as critic.

The type of theatre studied
In attempting to define which kind of theatre this work is concerned with, the question of how we define 'theatre' at all comes into play. Some definitions of 'theatre' [e.g. Bentley 1965 p150] might not include the kinds of dramatic activity seen in fringe, street, community, agit-prop, or improvised theatre. These may be set up specifically to work outside the kind of conventions which define the type of theatre with which this study concerns itself. The artistic director of Welfare State, makes this clear:

They [theatre buildings] are closed systems. Our research is into nascent ritual (using theatre) as part of a way of living rather than a repeated dramatic production, where theatre is an end in itself [Kershaw 1983 p29].

The activities of some drama groups might easily be defined as political events, neighbourhood celebrations, etc., rather than 'theatre'. They may have an obvious 'social reality' i.e. an immediate aim and function e.g. Unity Theatre's involvement in Tenants Defence League in support of rent strikes, 7:84's involvement with factory sit-ins and the miners' strike. Or they might specifically concern themselves with minority groups - e.g. Gay Sweatshop, Temba Black Theatre, Tara Arts Asian
theatre group. Study of these kinds of dramatic activity was not appropriate to the aims and assumptions of this research. It is a fundamental assumption of the thesis that there are aspects of theatre which are important to audiences other than those which respond to specific 'problems' (unfair rents, discrimination against gays or blacks). An important aim is to seek insights into these less-obviously functional satisfactions for audiences. The study of responses to theatre with a particular kind of 'problem-solving' role, then, would tend to obscure the kinds of satisfactions in which we are interested.

In addition, although the selection of theatre-goers who were interviewed can still be seen as the selection of an exclusive group (all theatre-goers are in a minority), it is less exclusive than that for theatre aimed at particular localities or minorities.

Shakespeare and other established 'classics' (e.g. Chekhov, Ibsen, Brecht) were also avoided because of a predeterminedly defined role. They have an established 'identity'; audiences have a particularly clear idea of the status and significance of such plays before they experience them. Some degree of 'stereotyped' response would therefore be likely to detract from concentration on the original aims (e.g. a response conditioned by familiarity with Shakespeare as an 'A' level text).

For these reasons, the main productions studied have been performed in the main houses of large, well-established provincial theatres. The plays were performed by the resident companies of the theatre (rather than visiting travelling theatre groups etc.) as major productions in the seasonal programme of a city's major playhouse. This is what may be termed 'mainstream' theatre, because it is presented within a generally well understood context. That is to say that the theatre buildings themselves and the events staged within them, are likely to be recognised as performing a particular role and function by most of the population. At least, this can be said of them in a way that it cannot of the halls, schools and outdoor spaces used by travelling theatre companies, agit-prop or street theatre, or even small 'studio' auditoriums of larger theatres.

It seemed reasonable to suppose that this kind of theatre, more than most, assumes a relevance to the population at large in the city which supports it. One reliable indication that this is the case is the
widespread subsidizing of such theatre by the Arts Council and City or County councils. Details of subsidy given to theatres in this study were not available. However, unpublished statistics consulted at the Arts Council Library, Picadilly, London, reveal close monitoring of figures required for grant decisions by the Arts Council. e.g. **Table II: Home based audiences (Main Auditorium) by Theatre**, showing number of performances, total seats sold, percentage of capacity, average attendance per performance, total receipts £, ticket yield and ticket price for Leicester Haymarket 1979/80 -1982/83 and similarly **Table VI: Home based audiences (Studio) by Theatre**. Also concerned with assessing the claim for subsidy is **Leicester: Haymarket Theatre Audience Survey** Leicester City Council Recreation Committee, February 1982 7pp. This survey covered frequency of attendance, mode of travel, place of work, place of residence and age. It was commissioned to determine where most of the theatre’s patrons were coming from, and therefore, where finance should come from; the City council, County council or some other source, when grant aid was being decided for Leicester Theatre Trust.

These indications of an assumption of relevance to a population at large, are supplemented by evidence, gathered in the course of this work, from professionals who say their theatre aspires to such a role (Playwrights, Howard Brenton (*Bloody Poetry*) and Anthony Minghella (*A Little Like Drowning, Whale Music*), questioned at Open Forums held while their plays were in production at Leicester Haymarket, Artistic Director of the Haymarket (Michael Meacham), who agreed to be interviewed for this research and playwright, Denise Deegan, who also consented to be interviewed about her West End success, *Daisy Pulls it Off*, which had been the subject of a SWET survey).

**Research methods used**
The mass of research material which will be referred to was collected from 83 respondents in all, contacted in the course of 37 interviews (listed in Appendix A). These produced at least 20 hours of recordings representing about 200,000 words of transcripts. The research is qualitative rather than quantitative, taking the form of a series of in-depth interviews. The reasons for this preference, together with a detailed consideration of appropriate research methodology are to be found in Chapter 3. This also describes the interviews which were carried out, usually one to one, in the respondents’ own homes, and
within a few days of their having seen the performance. The formulation of a method of content analysis for the material collected is described at the end of the chapter.

Outline of the thesis
After a brief introduction to the historical background, Chapter 2 introduces approaches to culture and the arts which form the context of the research. Discussion in this section is formative in the definition of terminology used in the research and is intended as a guide to the meaning of terms as they are used in the thesis.

The process of collecting and reporting audience responses in itself cannot help but be on some level an interpretative one - if only in the sense argued by Holub [1983 p102], that it is not possible to place oneself outside of conventions of perception and assumptions in order to be unconstrained by the possibilities built into a system of intelligibility. What can be done, however, is to acknowledge those assumptions which one is conscious of having worked with, and which will affect the angle of approach in important ways. Chapter 2 attempts to provide this perspective and perhaps reveal some of the underlying assumptions. It is hoped that offering some sense of my own understanding of the basic concepts and terminology in the field will reveal a sense of the 'position' from which I have worked.

Methodological problems have featured quite strongly in this work, and some time is spent outlining these in Chapter 3. Discussion of the research data proceeds according to the principles determined in this chapter. The second part of the thesis deals with the research data collected in the series of in-depth interviews with members of audiences. The plays respondents had seen were *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* [Nichols 1967], *Bloody Poetry* [Brenton 1985] and *Blood Brothers* [Russell 1985] (some reference is also made to *Our Day Out* [Russell 1984], but see p63). For the purposes of clarity from the outset, it is worth noting here that respondents' contributions are indicated in upper case throughout e.g. CRAWFORD, to distinguish them from other references which are given in square brackets e.g. [Althusser 1971].
CHAPTER TWO : THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Historical Perspective
A sense of the historical background to ideas of popular culture is useful for this study. It gives an important perspective to what could otherwise be simply explained as habitual notions. The reference to a tradition of ideas of culture is not meant merely to trace a progression of theoretical debate, it is necessary to an understanding of actual relations between 'ordinary people' and 'culture'. It allows the audience responses discussed in this work to be seen not simply as the result of some temporary persuasion, but as a part of some deep-seated expectations of the arts as a cultural experience. It can make the difference between seeing respondents as dupes of a mass media society, or as people bringing important cultural expectations to the experience.

The type of theatre with which the current work concerns itself depends upon the rise of a sufficiently affluent middle class who pay to go to the theatre. These audiences, for whom theatre-going can be seen as part of other social aspirations rather than simply as part of a common tradition of popular entertainment, do not have a real continuity from before the industrial revolution. New practices brought with them radical changes in the distribution and organisation of communities on a scale which demanded completely new value systems and hierarchies. This is perhaps where a decisive split between culture and popular art first becomes conceivable. A distinctive popular entertainment industry, of melodrama and music hall, grew to cater for the new masses. The music hall, which had its hey-day in the Edwardian period, is a prime example of the significant line of growth and change which developed from industrial-urban culture, but which nevertheless maintained many elements in common with earlier folk culture [see Hall and Whanel 1965 p55]. Traditions behind it included popular spectacles and shows, the gin palaces, pleasure gardens and song-and-supper rooms of the late Victorian era. It was, part of the very life of 'the community' - though that community was now much more stratified than any of the earlier 'organic' societies [ibid.p56].

Despite this vital relationship with the community, another major shift was that this was no longer the art of the community, it was an art of the performer: "The community had become an 'audience': the art had been
individualised" [ibid.]. Like Hall and Whanel, I would choose not to sentimentalise the music hall as a late expression of folk culture, but rather to see it as transitional between an earlier folk and later popular art where a separation between audience and stage begins. Schechner associates the shift towards entertainment, as opposed to ritual function in theatre with such a separation [Schechner 1976 p207] and this development can be seen as decisive. It enables the evolution of a relationship in which the audience becomes the punter, paying to be pleased by the entertainment business. The beginnings of such a relationship can be seen in the tendency of the music hall to market itself by playing to the gallery and to rely on spectacle and novelty to attract audiences. This allows us to see music hall then, as heralding a new era of theatre as a distinctly commercial enterprise.

As the growing populations of workers in the new industrial centres swelled music hall audiences, a new class emerged; the bourgeoisie, made rich by the rapid expansion of capitalist enterprises in industry. This burgeoning middle class sought to emulate the aristocracy, who had been so pre-eminent in the 18th century, through patronage of the stage with their new found wealth. In attempting to buy their way into the higher echelons of society, this middle class were seeing theatre as a status symbol and commodity. This idea of theatre as an aspect of prestige, so evident in Edwardian times, is one which has a continuing importance to the development of post-war policies for the arts.

Ideas among the public and the profession about the role, status and aims of modern British theatre have been shaped by what may be broadly distinguished as three kinds of important post-war influence. The profit-motivated pressures of commercial theatres, most importantly and influentialy centred in the power of the West End were and remain crucial. But the emergence of state subsidy and policy for the arts in the form of the new Arts Council, at a time when the ideals of the Welfare State were to the fore, also introduced the oppositional motives of the 'Welfare' model and the 'Glory' model.

The post-war Arts Council has its genesis in the CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) which, originally a small organisation, was one of those formed during the first months of the war in 1939 for the dissemination of entertainment and the arts to troops.
and factory workers. The CEMA began its operations "as a kind of welfare agency" [Pick 1983 p147], in which drama was a means of general enlightenment and a popular amateur activity. Thus it was initially concerned with the encouragement of amateurs, but abruptly changed its policy in the middle of 1940, to promote professional theatre as a facet of national glory - "the best maintained at its peak for the discriminating" [ibid]. At this stage, West End productions were prepared to cash-in on the advantages of being association with this socially and educationally purposeful body [ibid p145]. Nevertheless, in view of the changing role and influence of the CEMA, West End theatre people were anxious that any peacetime Arts Council would revert to a populist, welfare, stance and that a National Theatre might be run on different lines to the West End; with a concern for the entirety of the population which was antithetical to that of the West End establishment.

Despite such fears, the glittering ritual associated with high society which had surrounded the Edwardian West End did not fade so easily as did the opulence of fashion in the austerity years, particularly so long as it continued to be championed by the likes of Noel Coward and his followers (see Pick 1983 p152-156 and Chpt 10 passim). The fact that the West End continued to be synonymous with top class theatre partly explains how the post-war Arts Council could fall into an uneasy partnership with the West End 'Group'; that consortium of managers (Prince Littler, Binkie Beaumont) who wielded a massive influence on the theatrical life of the country at the time. In this context, the concern to see state subsidy as supportive of the best of British theatre - Pick's 'Glory Model' [Pick 1983 p157] - took precedence over any 'Welfare Model' role for the Arts Council, as envisaged by its founding fathers, as an agency of general enlightenment and welfare, to stimulate all arts equally and encourage the artist to see himself as servant of some tangible social ideal. The Chancellor, Hugh Dalton's 'understanding' with Covent Garden that Government funding to the Arts Council was given provided that 'Opera is not let down' [ibid., see also Dalton's letter to chairman of Covent Garden Board, reproduced on p158] is cited as early evidence of this prevailing tendency.

In Pick's [1983 p160] view, the failure to assert more progressive Arts Council policy and funding along Welfare lines 1949-56 amounted to the virtual abandonment of national drama to 'The Group'. Beside the
continuing influence of the commercial West End, even the 'revolution' of 1956, heralded by the success of *Look Back in Anger* [Osborne 1981] failed to have a radical effect on such power-broking. The new realism of the kitchen sink dramatists was variously cited as a justification of state subsidy and an overthrow of the old West End theatrical rank and privilege. In fact in retrospect, it can be argued that the West End itself also promoted the popularity of the kitchen sink dramatists, who were taken up by provincial and subsidised theatre after their West End successes, as much as the reverse being true. The expensive ritual of the West End experience remained the apex of theatrical activity which only the differential of seat pricing induced by subsidy of other theatre even marginally challenged.

It was not until the beginning of the 1960's that there were signs of an emerging alternative theatre which could form substantial opposition to the West End style. Arnold Wesker's Centre 42 was one of the first of a loosely knit amalgam of small-scale touring drama groups which by the early seventies had come to be a significant item in Arts Council figures under the heading of 'Alternative' theatre [Pick 1983 p169]. In London, Bernard Miles achieved surprising success with his Mermaid Theatre run on different lines from well-established practices of theatre management, and more importantly, with a general philosophy which contained the germs of a revival of a form of popular theatre. This comprised an almost complete lack of professional specialisation, with members of the company trying their hand at all aspects of preparation, and a strong sense of working for the cause, successfully instilled by Miles to the extent of his being able to engage artists for mere token payments. Discarding proscenium arch conventions, which they considered to be exhausted, the company followed the simpler styles of staging and production they believed were now necessary.

Some alternative companies were recognised as successfully developing new popular styles and finding responsive audiences in untheatrical new locations, but once again, the suggestion of a missed opportunity presents itself. The conservative influence of Arts Council supported theatre either alienated or assimilated alternative types of theatre. McGrath is among those who prefer to remain largely outside mainstream regional subsidised repertory theatre, considering its obligations to be inimical to the autonomy essential to the theatrical ends he pursues. To
this end, he locates his theatre in theme, as well as often in actuality, in working class communities and traditions, while acknowledging that this can also have its problems. His essay about northern working mens' club entertainers [McGrath 1981] recognises the prejudice and chauvinism which can sometimes characterise such cultural traditions. It reveals his awareness of a narrow-mindedness and a propensity to 'isms' in working class communities, pointing out that he is not trying to replace one set of 'isms' for another. To avoid this, he stresses that his theatre attempts to be a critical engagement with working class values. In a sense, he trades the restrictions of one kind of cultural and ideological background, for another.

Other attempts to break out of the West End mould can also be seen to have been undermined by a climate supportive of established mainstream theatre. Those who, like the Portable Theatre group, started out producing theatre which drew much of its energy from the counter-cultural ideology of the late 60's [see Taylor 1971] have since abandoned some of their nihilism. Brenton, for example, moved on to the idea of using accepted forms, in order to disrupt them [see Ansgorge 1973]. David Edgar holds to his belief that it is possible to offer a contrast to the theatre of social disintegration - a sense of history providing causality, continuity and inspiration - within the context of mainstream subsidised theatre (e.g. Maydays [Edgar 1984] presented at the Barbican in 1984). Griffiths has been criticised for compromising his left-wing ideals too far in his decisions to write for the conservative media on the basis that any revolutionary message is assimilated into the reactionary medium. In the same way as what was radical avant-garde theatre like Waiting for Godot [Beckett 1978], or Look Back in Anger [Osborne 1981], becomes a recognised 'classic', it is possible to see these 'revolutionary' writers becoming perceived as a recognised part of the institution of British theatre.

As the effects of these seeds of revolution failed to bear radical fruit, the challenge from the alternative movement weakened after the mid-seventies. Funding also failed to materialise here [Pick 1983 p178], and especially for companies outside of the core group which emerged as the Establishment of the Alternative Theatre [Linklater 1980 p95). Meanwhile the decision to spend nearly £200,000,000 on the building of the National theatre (opened in 1976) and the Barbican complex (opened
in 1982) indicated the almost irrevocable determination of a policy based on centres of excellence. Although based on its own kind of idealism, this was still no move towards finding again a theatre that could simultaneously address large numbers of people, or reclaim the vivacity of popular entertainment and genuine community drama.

Outside London, the 1940's saw the rise of regional repertory theatres. Later, Jennie Lee's [1965] White Paper, *A Policy for the Arts*, proposed the formation of Regional Arts Associations, but it is significant that subsequent actual action along these lines is recorded as being taken by local individuals, not by government or state institutions:

> half of these associations owe their origin to the initiative of private individuals who found their intrepid way into town halls and county halls, and into the Arts Council, and obtained their objectives by zealous persistence ... the whole initiative was local ... Certainly the vigorous new development of regionalism in support of the arts was not due to any ebullition of crusading zeal from the Arts Council. [Abercrombie 1980 p68]

Where the Arts Council did intervene, in what has been termed its "greatest contribution to drama in its first thirty years ...the reinforcing, development and eventual transformation of the repertory movement" [Linklater 1980 p80], the concern was once again with 'the best' - the improvement in standards as described by Linklater [ibid p81] - rather than its accessibility for 'the most'. The great surge of regional theatre-building, although benefitting partly from Housing the Arts grants, relied most heavily on local funding. Since 1958, some forty-five completely new, or substantially rebuilt, repertory theatres have been opened, "largely with Local Authority money and through local subscription" [Linklater 1980 p86, and see also Table 5, p87].

These local regional initiatives for the arts, and theatre in particular, indicate the importance of the idea of art and culture as an aspect of civic pride. Whilst not actively or financially taking the initiative in the regions, the policies of the Arts Council were designed to create centres of excellence, particularly in London, in which to cultivate standards that should 'Raise or Spread' [Willatt 1980 p22] to all other manifestations of artistic activity. The regional movement shows that the image of cultural centres as emblems of
prestige, at least, had become a stirring notion. The particular cultural function that this implies may be expected to be reflected in audiences for these kinds of regional theatre. Nevertheless, the very modernity of the new theatre buildings and the expansion of their functions which this facilitated, changed the aspect of audiences to some extent. Whereas audiences for traditional weekly repertory had been mainly middle-aged or elderly and female [Linklater 1980 p83], new regional repertory theatres, with a different form and standard of programme and the attractions of other activities (exhibitions, poetry readings, restaurants, bars, bookstalls, lunchtime recitals) attracted younger audiences [ibid. p83, p88]. Sufficient expansion of this idea of a theatre, as a centre of recreation and refreshment in the fullest sense, has the potential (as does alternative theatre experienced outside designated theatrical space), to undermine the association with formality, glamour and aristocracy which prevailed before the war.

Promoting a brief of 'the best for the most', the Arts Council, whilst patently restricted in their ideas of what might constitute 'the most' [see Pick 1983 p175], committed itself, then, to an idea of 'the best' rooted in the capital and "effective power houses of opera, music and drama" [Pick 1980 p12]. In important ways this still maintained the image of good theatre as being located in a particular geographical, cultural and social niche which in effect retained the exclusivity of Edwardian times. There is an argument for saying that audience expectations of the form and function of theatre are "still heavily influenced by the traditions of the drawing-room comedy" (Gooch 1984 p14). Even in the realm of subsidised alternative theatre, the same kind of concern to guarantee the standard of Arts Council funded work manifested itself. Whilst such standards could still be identified as being closely associated with elitist cultural aspirations, they left themselves open the the charge of political censorship (e.g.Gooch 1984 p46). Latterly, local authorities have been seen as more progressive in their support of alternative theatre, and Gooch maintains that this is a hopeful aspect of a burgeoning belief in theatre as a cultural activity of value to local community:

there is now a whole generation of audiences for whom their most memorable cultural experience has been the surprise of turning up at a scruffy local hall with no proper seating and no proper stage, and having their preconception of theatre as
This kind of experience is clearly in opposition to policy which emphasises theatre as an emblem of prestige, be it national or social. But it seems doubtful whether the common image of theatre is one in which traditional arts, crafts and pastimes, and a genuine communication between artists and the general population prevail. Certainly there are signs that some involved in alternative theatre feel that theirs is an embattled position. Relaunching *Theatre Quarterly* magazine as *New Theatre Quarterly* in February 1985, Simon Trussler expresses the dilution of idealism which he has experienced under new pressures. Appearing after the second round of Arts Council cuts associated with the 'Glory of the Garden' policy (an image which he says is "so self-revealingly symptomatic of the elitist assumptions of current Arts Council thinking" [*Trussler 1985 p4*]), he asserts, "such a change of climate makes the function of NTQ different from that of its predecessor" [*ibid*]. Something of a siege mentality is revealed in his comments that when he began his career he believed that "just by making theatre, we could help to change the world for the better", whereas now he can only believe that "theatre is one of the relatively few decent professions to be working in that is, at least, not changing the world for the worse" [*Trussler 1985 p5*]. This leads us to the speculation that audiences on the receiving end of such work may tend to associate it more with innocent distraction than with changing the world.

This outline of some of the developments in the social and cultural institution of the theatre is an important background to understanding the focus of the thesis. It serves to highlight the emergence of the kind of theatre and theatre-going with which the thesis concerns itself and to introduce the nature of the particular subsidised regional repertory theatre, its programmes and audiences, from which most of the research material is drawn.

**Notes:**
1. This is not to claim that audiences before the industrial revolution had some kind of simplistic homogeneity. For example, two types of audience, with distinctly recognisable social and occupational groupings, have been identified for Restoration theatre [*Botica 1986*].

2. "It would be true to say that by 1960 it was apparent that the influence of the Bancrofts in the West End was still greater than any influence of the kitchen sink dramatists" [*Pick 1983 p163*].
Key Concepts and Terminology

I Culture and Ideology

Many of the terms which have to be used to describe and discuss aspects of 'popular culture' and their relations with individuals and society are problematic. There is an inherent lack of definition in the vocabulary, which is open to significant variance in meaning according to how and by whom it is used. Bennett has identified the fundamental confusions which we have to live with, and laments the absence of, any generally agreed vocabulary through which to conceptualise the internal economy of the cultural and the ideological spheres and the relationships between them [Bennett 1980 p17]. This places an obligation on any researcher in the field to define the terms as they are used in his or her particular study. These definitions are necessary in order (as far as is possible) to make biases apparent and to allow arguments to be clearly understood. They are included here to that end, and not intended to tackle or resolve all the issues in a complex and contentious field.

Class

Although the class system of British society is an institution increasingly difficult to define, the thesis assumes that 'class' can still be a useful concept in delineating differentials in economic, political, and cultural power. Indeed, it remains a critical term in the discussion of the concepts of culture and ideology which follow.

What is to be understood by class often comes down to a sense of belonging to some social group which is most easily characterised as a class'. Such a sense of belonging might be expected to vary with circumstances, and it is possible to see how class defines itself ad hoc exemplified in day to day social relations (see also e.g. p113). Class identity is not to be seen as a fixed relation, but one which may gravitate around a number of different influences - work, environment, cultural activities, social pressures (see also p77).

A fundamental assumption about class relations colours the thesis' view of culture, and theatre which is a part of it, as a means of consolidating these relations. This is best described as an assumption of hegemony - a position in which a social class not only plays a decisive part in the economic relations of a society, but also exerts
moral and intellectual leadership over other classes. Subordinate and allied classes consent to the rule of the dominant classes. It is vital to a hegemonious society that such consent is constantly formed and reproduced. The basis of this kind of social authority is rendered invisible through the mechanisms of the production of consent [see Swingewood 1977 p30]. It is assumed here that one of theatre’s most important functions may be as one of these mechanisms, but with the important qualifications suggested by what is understood by ideology.

Culture
Sociology has defined culture as a progression from an organic whole way of life which nurtures the best things in man and society (culture as goodness, wholesomeness) [e.g. Williams 1968 p37,42], to something which is compartmentalised and even packaged as a consumer product (culture as status, power) [e.g. Berger 1972]. The term continues to defy stabilisation of its duality. The following, then, is only a guide to its use in the current work.

The word takes on one set of meanings when it is twinned with 'popular' - a word which itself requires a fuller definition that will influence the harnessing of these terms. Where 'culture' is used either with the actual term, or in the context of 'popular', its inference is to be allied with that of 'popular'. i.e., it refers to activities which in important ways belong to and originate from the actual lives and experiences of the people.

From my work with theatre and audiences, I have come to accept that the use of culture as a noun or adjective in its own right (e.g. designating a place - London as a 'centre of culture', or an individual as a 'cultured person') has a quite different meaning. It is used to infer an association with a more refined and revered outlook and lifestyle. In this restrictive sense it refers most obviously to a few distinct areas of institutionalised art: theatre, painting, sculpture, classical music, opera and ballet. Connotations of exclusivity and elitism are almost unavoidable.

For some, this idea of elitism is crucial to their concept of culture and literature. F. R. Leavis advocated a role for the academic establishment as an elite which could be the guardian of literature in order to defend
it from the lowering of standards to the lowest common denominator which he saw as the inevitable result of mass culture [Leavis 1969]. The basic assumption of his position is that literature has an inherent value and meaning, which it is the reader's place to discover. His implication is that readers should be educated to discover the truths which are already there in the text, rather than the texts being written to be accessible to the population at large.

Nietzsche exhibits a far more aggressive expression of the opposition between culture and socialism. In *The Twilight of the Gods* and *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche develops his argument explicitly against the labour movement, the 'socialist rabble'. For him the threat to high culture stems directly from the insatiable demands and ideology of a mediocre 'mass'. The critique of collectivism is continued by Eliot [1948] who perceives the trend towards a collectivist, mass society as the direct result of the egalitarian policies adopted by democratic government. Eliot defends the myth of a static, organic culture against the 'barbaric' tendencies of the welfare state and mass media.

For Nietzsche and Eliot, the threat to modern society and culture comes from below; the common man, the mass, who threaten to submerge traditional culture with their barbarism. Leavis, however, represents the literary democratic elitist tradition of mass society, the threat to culture stemming from above, imposed through the profit-seeking capitalist mass media. His criticism is directed against mass publishing and the mass media as agencies which have undermined the organic relation between culturally creative elites and a broad readership. What is distinctive about his analysis is the apparently contradictory idea of culture as simultaneously popular and discriminating. He insists on the organic link between cultural (literary) vitality, and the common culture. He criticises modern mass society for the decline of a 'living tradition' [Leavis 1930]. This bears comparison with criticism stemming from a completely different, marxist, theoretical framework.

C. Wright Mills, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse share with Leavis a view of the critic's role in resisting the inhuman processes of modern industrial society. Note, for example, Leavis' assertion that a critic needs a public to aim his judgements at, and that the uneducated public of the day, "don't really form a public at all" [Leavis 1969 p54]. This bears direct comparison with C. Wright Mills' [1959] evocation of the
collapse of an informed and critically independent public into a largely apathetic mass./

This view of the public is substantially at odds with the aim of exploring the importance of the audience's critical role. This is because the emphasis remains with 'the text' itself. The implication is that the application of the principles of literary criticism in formal analysis of plays holds the key to their meaning. Whilst contributing to the debate about elites and the democratisation of culture which informs the use of distinctions such as 'elite' in this thesis, in other respects, this point of view does not further our aims. Although the climate of critical opinion moved on from such an entrenched position, such assumptions are not entirely a thing of the past. A defensiveness among critics and others who make their living from the theatrical arts, remains as witness to fears of degeneracy under the influence of the mob, or masses./

As an attitude, Leavis' English School approach (although it may not be recognised as such) may also still be seen to exert considerable influence on responses to popular literature or drama. Interview material will confirm this, in particular when respondents reveal anxieties about whether they have read the right meaning in the play. It is easy to understand why this idea of literature should feature in the popular perception of the arts. A predominant view in society (disseminated from an elite) of culture as high status, leads to some mystification of the arts for those outside of the elite. It is obviously preferable for the layman to accept that it is the nature of literature to have some inherent, hidden, value, rather than to conclude that he himself is at fault in not being able to understand it. An interesting question for the thesis is that of how a respondent's perception of the play as an artefact with this kind of hidden meaning might determine his/her response to it.

Popular Culture

The problem with regard to 'Popular Culture', of the, "inherent 'slipperiness' of the relational properties inscribed within the term" [Bennett 1980 p18], applies also to the definition of popular theatre in this work. If the term 'popular' is used to distinguish theatre from mass media, or mass communication, for instance, it means something
quite different from the same term used as opposed to say, folk, or community theatre. This is symptomatic of the disintegration of high culture (in this case, 'high-brow' theatre) as an absolute against which other kinds can be defined:

To the extent that the concept of high culture - the anchor point which provided the crucial point of reference in relation to which the differentia specifica of other areas of culture could be constructed - has all but collapsed as a sustainable category, all of those terms (elite culture, mass culture, popular culture and so on) which derive their differential signifying power in relation to this axial concept need to be handled gingerly [Bennett 1980 p18].

There are numerous attempts to define the term which could be referred to for clarification. In the most common-sense sort of way it has been used to mean "well liked by many people" [Williams 1976 p198]. In his analysis of popular drama and the mummers' play, Green [1980] makes a convincing argument that only 'community' makes any sense as a referent for 'popular'. By others, 'popular' is treated simply as a residual category consisting of those cultural forms which are 'left over' once the sphere of high culture has been defined [e.g. Burke 1978]. But almost all attempts to form a definition are inscribed with the duality of a concept which has been described as "damagingly inflected by its double origin; in conservative cultural analysis and in social democratic politics" [Grealy 1977 p5]. These origins dictate two undeniable implications for the term. Hall [1978 p3] has identified these as, firstly:

Cultural activities, practices which are authentically of the people, which in a sense do have their roots and their basis within the lives and experiences and capacity of people to, as it were, impose form and meaning on their lives and which undoubtedly have some authentic or indigenous roots there.

Secondly, popular is designated as fairly equivalent to mass culture: as widely distributed, and as having won the acceptance of vast numbers of people regardless of its source. This second sense often implies the opposite of the first i.e. that it does not spring authentically from the people, is something imposed (e.g. by the media industry), but nevertheless, through that imposition having won active consent.
More recently, Caughie has suggested a certain amount of stabilisation of terms which it has proved helpful to assume in its use in this work: 'Mass culture' within cultural studies, resonates not only with an etymology which associates the masses with fusible matter waiting inertly to be fashioned, but also with the pessimistic tradition of Adorno and the Frankfurt School which poses that inertia against the aggressive advances of the 'consciousness industries'. 'Popular culture' in contrast, seems to have behind it a memory which finds its focus in Britain in certain histories of popular resistance to the advance of capital in the nineteenth century, and which has often taken the form in cultural politics and cultural study of a Utopian desire to restore culture to the people and the people to their culture [Caughie 1986 p158].

It is noteworthy that he discriminates between the use of the term as it is employed in different traditions of criticism. American contributors, less inclined to fight shy of the negative connotations, prefer mass. Whilst in Britain, "popular culture is the object of cultural studies formed in reaction to Leavis and the 'high culture' tradition [ibid]". Here the assertion of popular culture, as an object of academic study, is a political intervention as much as anything, contesting the elitism of 'Eng.Lit.'. There is a ring of truth about his suggestion that in this context there is a "tradition of shame which is associated in the British left with academic study", which accounts for a tendency for British academics to "seek a very immediate engagement with a politics which cannot be found in the academy" [ibid.].

Hall and Whanel make the British critical distinction between what they consider to be genuinely popular art, and mass art or culture which is not of the same order. They insist that "the typical 'art' of the mass media today is not a continuity from, but a corruption of, popular art" [Hall and Whanel 1965 p68]. They subsequently expand upon the identifying characteristics of these different types, using examples from cinema and jazz music which are nevertheless informative also for theatre.

The personae of Chaplin and Hancock represent popular art forms which they suggest are identifiably different from, and better than, mass art. Characteristic of their performances is the way their comic invention
works through the medium of personal style:
Chaplin indelibly imprints his work with the whole pressure of his personality, which is fully translated into his art [ibid].

By contrast, mass art "develops a set of technical tricks for projecting image". Popular artists like Chaplin and Hancock have the capacity to lose themselves in their material, but in mass art:
the 'teller' is never lost in the 'tale'. The man behind the work is 'sold' to the audience - the element of manipulation is correspondingly high - instead of, as in Chaplin's case, the man within the work [ibid.]

Although quality of stylisation and convention remains important in popular art, in mass art this becomes a kind of stereotyping, a processing of experience. Stereotypes are used,
to simplify the experience, to mobilise stock feelings and to 'get them going'... without offering anything creative or worthwhile within the conventions [ibid.p69]

Setting aside for the moment the category of the 'high' artist, these characteristics raise interesting questions for the categorisation of contemporary plays as either 'popular' or 'mass' art. Theatre is not generally assumed to come into the category of mass communications - it is often presumed to retain a status somehow 'above' mass media. Such assumption could be open to challenge, however, if the criteria above are observed. The interviews conducted in this research can provide the grounds for such questioning. They are a source of evidence that some of the characteristics which Hall and Whanel identify as characteristic of mass art, can be descriptive of some theatre (e.g. Russell), as well as, for instance, soap opera. Hall and Whanel, however, imply that some 'objective' assessment of levels of 'stylisation', 'stereotyping' and 'manipulation' is sufficient to determine the popular or mass nature of art. This thesis assumes that making exclusive use of this kind of assessment can give only partial answers to such questions. In an important sense, audience response determines what is popular or mass art, and indeed how useful this distinction can be. This becomes clearer in the course of addressing the 'negotiated' nature of ideology.

Mass Culture
Whilst the possibility of recognising characteristics of mass culture in
some theatre has been suggested, it is important to realise the
limitations associated with the idea of mass culture. For marxists, mass
culture is a form of ideology. Marxist dialectic assumes a material base
to society which is determined by the means of production. The base
determines social consciousness, and thereby the institutions of the 'superstructure'. In this scheme, certain definite forms of social
consciousness (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic and so on), are
designated ideology, the function of which is to
  legitimate the power of the ruling class in society; in the
  last analysis, the dominant ideas of a society are the ideas
  of its ruling class [Eagleton 1976 p5 (Eagleton admits this
  is an over-simplified account – for a full analysis, see
  Poulantzas 1973)].

The marxist belief that literature, as part of the superstructure, will
be defined by the mechanism of historical change, which is class
conflict, gives rise to passive notions of reflection. Lukacs [1950]
sees the chaos and alienation of advanced capitalism uncritically
reflected in the modernist form, which offers no indication of the
sources of the problems or possible solutions. Not all marxists,
however, see literature as purely reflecting the undermining of the
lower classes. Lukacs has been criticised for
deliberately detracting from the obvious power of some
modernist writers in the interests of his own critical scheme
[Hall 1979 p5].

Among contemporary marxist critics who do not necessarily accept the
implication of an exclusively expressive role for literature, Terry
Eagleton asserts that literature "may be part of the superstructure, but
it is not merely the passive reflection of the economic base" [1976 p7].
Before we consider the ways in which marxist criticism has developed in
this direction, it is important to recognise the powerfully negative
connotations of mass culture associated with the seminal Frankfurt
School.

The Frankfurt School believed that ideology, especially as disseminated
by the mass media, corrupts and deradicalises the proletariat. Mass
society is defined sociologically as lacking strong, independent social
groups and institutions. It is a society dominated from above [e.g.
Mills 1959 and Kornhauser 1960]. The collapse of an informed and
critically independent public, into an apathetic mass, is seen as a
direct result of a drift towards a collectivist, totalitarian state.
This view is found at its most pessimistic in Adorno and Horkheimer's
critique of 'the culture industry' [1977] - the purveyor of 'barbaric
meaninglessness', conformity, boredom, and the 'flight from reality'. In
this context, changes in the social structure socialise the individual
into the virtues of obedience and conformity; mass culture functions to
reconcile the individual to the status quo. In contrast, genuine art or
'high culture', is considered to be able to resist the alienation and
values of the dominant economic and political order [Adorno and
Horkheimer 1973]. It retains the autonomy that secures the transcendent,
critical function of art, which mass art has lost. Swingewood is right
to point out the close relationship to the reactionary Nietzsche here
[Swingewood 1977 p16]. The elitist conception of culture, and a
pessimism about the working class as dupes of the system, echoes
Nietzsche's contempt for the 'mediocre' masses. Believing that the
working class is integrated into contemporary capitalism, these marxist
intellectuals see the only genuine radical opposition as confined to a
privileged elite and a subversive art.

These ideas do not conform to the position of conventional marxism (post
Marx and Engels) which implies that the material base is the true
reality. Such a position affords no value or possible political power to
non material forces, especially the individual consciousness or sub
consciousness. The Frankfurt School sees this as a devaluation of
inwardness, emotions and imagination. The subjectivity of the individual
is dissolved into class consciousness. Against this, Marcuse argues for
an "Inner History" which individuals have which is not grounded only in
their class, and not comprehensible in those terms. The methodology for
the interviews and data analysis in this research recognises the
importance of this inner history. It is an aspect of personality which
has to be referred to because it informs any class groupings of
responses, as will be shown. This inner history consists of their
encounters, passions, joys and sorrows. Marcuse claims that it has a
crucial effect on the possibility of 'radical praxis' (actual social,
political change). The inner history is stressed as the key to art's
categorical imperative to change:

Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing
the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could
change the world [Marcuse 1979].

To effect this kind of change, it is assumed that art must remain autonomous in relation to, or 'above', the normal rules of reality. This is obviously not an idea exclusive to this school of criticism — the very raison d'être of all art is in some sense, transcendence. But it explains why Adorno and Horkheimer maintain that only 'great' or 'high' art can penetrate ideology — popular art is seen to be working according to the rules of actual reality, not creating, and working according to its own autonomous reality. An interesting extension of this argument is Marcuse's suggestion that not just popular art, but also 'political' art can subvert its own ends. If it tries to do something within the structures of actual reality (e.g. agit-prop), it will paradoxically fail to succeed by its very nature:

The political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change. [ibid. p.xii]

This idea that art has to change the consciousness of men and women, and only thus lead to political change, questions certain fundamentals of marxist belief. It suggests an ingress of the superstructure into the base. To traditional marxism, the 'autonomy' of art could easily be seen as producing merely 'false consciousness'. Engels introduced this idea in asserting that the processes of ideology are pure illusion [Marx and Engels 1950 p.497]. Althusser pursues the idea of false consciousness, characterising ideology as a one-way, mechanical process in which the working class are deflected from developing a revolutionary class consciousness [Althusser 1971]. In contrast, Marcuse asserts that great art can function as a counter consciousness; the negation of the realistic-conformist mind. Art is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination and reason from functional existence. To do this requires a degree of autonomy which can withdraw art from the mystifying power of the given (i.e. material society, economic forces, means of production). He argues for art as this necessarily estranging form, but acknowledges the co-existence of the enduring contradiction:
The aesthetic form, by virtue of which a work stands against established reality, is, at the same time, a form of affirmation through the reconciling catharsis [Marcuse 1979 p58]. Nevertheless, in spite of affirmative ideological features, Marcuse insists that (great) art remains a dissenting force. One of the assumptions which this thesis aims to question is whether popular art need always be excluded from the possibility of such a function. This is a question which is seldom directly addressed, but is often an implicit assumption. Unusually, Goldmann is quite explicit about the particular difficulties of interpreting popular art: popular works cannot be interpreted according to such theories of aesthetics because they have no inner coherence, no world vision. ...the mass of texts which have only an average or an inferior value are...difficult to analyse by the sociological historian or the aesthetcian [Goldmann 1970 p313].

The implications of such distinctions are interesting for the plays studied in this thesis. Marcuse says great art does not show the world as the possible object of domination. Conversely, then, works which do show the world as dominated can be assumed to be consigned to the marxists' category of popular art and consequent dismissive criticism. Russell's plays, for example, may well be open to the charge that they show the world as dominated (e.g. 'domination' personified by the Narrator in Blood Brothers). Interviews with the members of audiences for such plays aim to discover whether they may nevertheless also retain some of the functions claimed for 'great' art, such as liberating the imagination and freeing the sensibility and reason from functional existence.

In his separation between the higher autonomous truth of art, and social reality, Marcuse gives the impression of an unqualified distinction between two aspects of the evaluation of a work: first, the 'social content' of a play which refers to actual reality, and secondly, whether the autonomous reality of the play is "good, beautiful and true". But it is difficult to see how such an appraisal can be made, except through a socially affected perception. Ideas of what is good, or true are socially conditioned; what evidence is there for the kind of abstract ideal for these qualities which he is implying? Indeed, it could be said
that it is not only the historical/social conditions of the production
of the work, but those of the audience, which 're-create' any of its
goodness, beauty or truth. He makes the criticism of marxist aesthetics,
that it has yet to ask: "What are the qualities of art which transcend
the specific social content and form and give art its universality?".
But this leaves the assumption that 'universality' exists unchallenged.
Although the resolution of this question itself is not one of the aims
of the thesis, it is a question which can be expected to underly many of
the issues which are raised in the discussion of interview material.

Bourgeois Culture

Another assumption in the marxist tradition which some of this research
material may question, is that art must become atrophied in a bourgeois
society. If art exists on the premise of bearing witness to the limits
of freedom and fulfilment, then groups with a vested interest might be
expected to constrain art from revealing these limitations. Art is
therefore more vigorous, it is argued, in the hands of the validating
consciousness of the proletariat, when its alternative reality is
asserted in opposition to existing, limited reality. There are flaws in
this assumption that the proletariat is the only class in capitalist
society which has no interest in the preservation of the status quo. It
presupposes that they unlearn the language and concepts of capitalism
and reclaim their subjectivity; that they can assert the individual
consciousness which people like Leavis feared for in modern society. But
much marxist criticism has no truck with the kind of 'inwardness' he
would have advocated as a way of resisting the collective view.

There is also the argument that the proletariat is not in any case a
viable opposition to existing society, but integrated into it. Goldmann
[1970] takes this view, pointing out that where advanced capitalism is
able to give them more than simply alienated labour, the proletariat are
given a stake in the perpetuation of the status quo. This is an
important point. In Thatcher's Britain, is there any evidence of a
'proletarian' validating consciousness to appeal to? Is the factory
operative with his holiday in Teneriffe, video and microwave, going to
be interested in art which shows the limitations of the social structure
which provides these material comforts? Are such groups to be abandoned,
then, as too dominated by the prevailing system to be able to respond
'properly' to art?
Adorno and Marcuse make the retreat into elitism. Marcuse also maintains the notion that 'higher' art may have a radical content and become again almost subversive. Although it is reasonable to suggest this as a possibility, a problem of plausibility is to be faced. Adorno contends that the autonomy of art can assert itself in advanced capitalism, in an extreme form – as uncompromising estrangement. Marcuse recognises that this can be interpreted as elitist, a symptom of decadence, but he maintains that such works still have a value:

They are nevertheless authentic forms of contradictions, indicting the totality of a society which draws everything, even estranging works, into its purview. This does not invalidate their truth or deny their promise. [Marcuse 1979 p31]

These assertions might appear to be suggesting a curious alliance between the Left, and the elite, as against a deradicalised 'mass' where distinctions between 'proletarian' or 'bourgeoisie' become blurred. Eagleton recognises this apparent contradiction in the fact that the major writers of the twentieth century – Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence – were all political conservatives. He offers an explanation which makes the common enemy clear:

in the absence of genuinely revolutionary art, only a radical conservatism, hostile like Marxism to the withered values of liberal bourgeois society, could produce the most significant literature [Eagleton 1976 p8].

The most important qualities of art thus become that it should be esoteric and estranging. One of the possibilities to be addressed by this research, is whether these qualities have been asserted to the extent that they have come to be appreciated for their own sake.

Marcuse clings to the idea that, even when weakened by integration, it is always and ever a characteristic of art that it shows limits. He claims it can still do this for those with a stake in existing society, but the limits it shows will be superficial rather than radical (which might beg the question – does more of a stake, denote more superficiality, in which case, what happens to the subversion of elitist art?). There is an implicit suggestion here that the profile of the audience – 'those with a stake in society' – and the extent of their 'stake', is crucial in determining the function of the work of art. This is in contrast to the explicit assertions that it is a quality of the
art - its autonomy, esotericism - which is decisive. The two are by no means mutually exclusive, but this research assumes there is more to be learnt from explicitly recognising the importance of audience, than from looking at theatre as 'text', or artefact in isolation.

Ideology
Whilst recognising the importance, then, of a view of the arts as part of a 'Culture Industry' and of the possibility of 'false consciousness', in approaching popular theatre it seems especially important to question the orthodox marxist view that this is merely transmission of dominant ideology, somehow inert and impossible to mobilise. Goodlad [1971] has propounded the thesis that popular theatre does function most importantly as 'reassurance'. Others argue that the conclusion that popular literature can only reinforce the norm, implies attention has been limited to "the spaces and possibilities for reading produced within culturally dominant reading formations" [Bennett and Woolacott 1987 p268]. This research likewise conjectures that actual relations between 'reader' and 'text' - theatre and audience - may be much more ambivalent than this. Such ambivalence is more suitably characterised as a kind of complex of shifting relations. Eagleton offers a more complete picture of this sort:

An ideology is never a simple reflection of a ruling class's ideas; on the contrary, it is always a complex phenomenon, which may incorporate conflicting, even contradictory, views of the world [Eagleton 1976 p8].

Ideology, then, does not necessarily have to be seen as a totally impenetrable veil, under which the mass of the people toil blindly on, moronically unaware of the shortcomings of their own lives. Indeed, there is an unsatisfying ambiguity in the kind of criticism which does see ideology that way. Some marxist criticism is pervaded by an almost holy respect of 'great' art (e.g. "Art has always kept alive the human yearning which cannot find gratification in existing society" [Lowenthal 1966 p14]. And yet some marxists, who do believe in art as representative of the ultimate goal of all revolutions - the freedom and happiness of the individual, experience such an abandonment of faith in the integrity of the population at large, that they can seem to be trapped in the paradox of promoting elitism as the means to dispense with elitism.
Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht developed more progressive standpoints based on the possibilities of a new collective proletarian art, created by the collective nature of the capitalist mode of production. Brecht was aware of the limitations of the theatre under capitalist society: he realised that it allows only innovation which does not change the basic ideological function of the theatre, not that which might change society [Willet 1964, Chapter 13 passim]. However, he had faith in the possibility of enfranchising his audiences, through revealing to them the machinery of his art. In his 'epic' theatre, he practised techniques of alienation. Characters were to be seen as figures being acted out by actors, not taking on a life of their own. They were written and played unsentimentally, to appeal to reason, rather than feelings. The audience were to remain aware that they were watching a piece of drama presented for their benefit. Indeed, show cards, anticipating the action of the scene, were used to promote this awareness. In this way, a 'moral tableau' was presented, as a discussion in which the spectator was forced to cast his vote.

This was an attempt to develop a new dynamic for the relationship between stage and audience. The audience were neither to be carried away by illusion and emotion, nor to be the passively entertained masses of the culture industry. The model role suggested for the audience in this theatre, of judgemental autonomy, is laudable. The tradition of this kind of optimism about cultural possibilities, within which this thesis can, to some extent, be placed, is continued in modern criticism by 'progresive evolutionist' theories of mass society [Swingewood 1977 p20]. Although Brecht's epic theatre may be considered a step in the right theoretical direction, in practice, as evidence in this research will witness, the difficulty of engaging the audience in moral choices without the 'pull' of emotional involvement is extremely problematic.

The problem of ideological relations can perhaps be confronted more openly by commentators less anxious to keep within the bounds of recognisably marxist criticism. Perkins' attempt to get away from a mechanistic, pre-determined, and unproblematic notion of ideology is one with which I sympathise (together with his frustration with the almost exclusively theoretical basis of much marxist criticism):

While I believe that a Marxist approach provides the most convincing and full account of ideology, I nevertheless find
myself confused by current attempts to theorise ideology. Not the least of my problems arises from the unwillingness of theorists to give some empirical content to their theories. Consequently the usefulness of these theories in the analysis of actual ideological processes or in understanding a phenomenon like stereotypes is as yet hard to assess....

...The problem is surely that while we must recognise (and theorise) the extent to which ideology does determine thought (and activity), we must allow that this determination is not, and cannot be, total. It may be that we must posit the capacity for 'creative', non-ideologically-determined thought as a human capacity, rather than merely as an ideological effect which is therefore by implication false [Perkins 1979 p135-6].

It does not seem unreasonable to posit such a capacity here when it is considered that its existence is hardly questioned in other fields. Moments of scientific genius, for example, are not subject to interpretation as aspects of ideology. Perkins goes on to cite the existence of protest groups in society (e.g. gays) as evidence that the model of ideological imposition is not uniform. He contributes some common-sense suggestions to an often dogmatic field:

The only explanation which I find convincing is one which presupposes a capacity of individuals, as members of a group, to evaluate an 'ideology' as misrepresenting 'reality', as being illegitimate. That this process will be influenced by the ruling ideology is admitted. But to be influenced by something is not to be totally determined and 'caused' by it. [ibid. p136]

This mediated view of ideology promises the most interesting avenues of investigation for this research. It raises the question of whether sufficient evidence can be found to support a claim that this capacity for creative thought is a possibility for popular, as well as great or high brow art. It suggests that the audience are not necessarily merely the dupes of ideology; a dominated, decreated mass. In fact it offers a progressive, if not exactly radical role for drama. Such a role is conceivable when, against a background of deep-seated ideological constructs, there is evidence of the superimposition of ideas which are not so unequivocally part of those ideological assumptions. One example
might be that while many 'middle class norms' of the first order are almost the modus operandi of Joe Egg, there is a questioning of the arbitrary snobbish values which are some part of this (e.g. the way in which the characterisation of Pam is perceived).

This sense of ideology as a complex of shifting relations, rather than as a predetermined structure of society, assumes a conspicuous reasonableness in the context of primary research. Hall's approach presents the most plausible explanation for some of the apparent contradictions or inconsistencies which will be met:

A vast sum of cultural practices and institutions in our society is the result of negotiation: i.e. they embody neither the prevalence of a dominant set of cultural values and meanings, nor a fully oppositional content, but a kind of compromise [Hall 1978 p20].

Such a view of ideology, as negotiated, transformative, seems to offer a less partial approach than many to the complex of relations between theatricality and audience. In particular, it offers an alternative to the kind of cultural ultra-leftism which devolves into:

constantly 'smoking out' each new oppositional element for the lingering traces of the dominance which are inside it and dispelling it, dropping it into the basket because it's not pure enough [ibid. p25]

Referring to the outstanding popularity of Coronation Street as an example, he goes on to suggest the kind of vocabulary which is appropriate to the contradictory nature of the relations of popular culture:

Quite why a form which, although clearly dominant in its institutional organisation and production, nevertheless does in some way connect with experiences and with how people see themselves is not explicable in this [conspiratorial] view. Without getting that contradictory feature of each particular cultural practice, you don't understand its dynamic. So terms like residual, emergent, negotiation, securing, recuperating and so on are absolutely essential terms because they remind us that we are dealing with practices of transformation [ibid.p21].

An emphasis on this kind of terminology may well prove invaluable in a study which aims to investigate the dynamic between audiences and plays.
which can be described as dominant in their institutional organisation and production. As an example, we may have to concede that the distinction between the two approaches to the term popular suggested earlier, may be "more or less inoperable" [Bennett 1980 p23]. After all, it seems only reasonable to suppose that the products of the 'culture industry', although imposed from above, must somehow "resonate with aspects of the 'lived cultures' of subordinate social classes" [ibid. p24] in order to produce effects within such cultures. Thus a theory of sub-culture as emerging directly from the wellsprings of the people has developed out of the meaning of popular, but this also needs to be subject to important qualification. Hebdige points out the lack of homogeneity in such sub-culture:

Typical members of a working-class youth culture in part contest and in part agree with the dominant definitions of who and what they are, and there is a substantial amount of shared ideological ground...between them and the dominant culture. [Hebdige 1979 p86]

Popular culture, then, cannot be defined simply as 'imposed from above' or 'emerging from below'. For the sake of discoursive convenience, however, some guide to its use must be given.

Since this study aims to see the audience as critic, it necessarily must work with the assumption that some relationship which could be placed within the tradition of an authentically popular culture is taking place. This is not to say that the possibility of relations between audience and theatre characterised by the idea of mass art is ignored. On the contrary. It may be that most evidence suggests that theatre of the type studied here is likely to function in many important ways as mass culture, in the way that Adorno and others suggest. The thesis aims, however, to question his assumption that only bona fide 'high' art resists those forces which cast the audience into a role of passive consumerism. Indeed I would tend to agree with Caughie that some marxist analysis of culture puts into question the 'popularity' of popular culture (at least in the sense of possession), and find myself even more in accordance with his assertion that:

It also gives a somewhat attenuated sense of there being a (class) struggle as anything other than a desire in the imaginary of the left intelligentsia. [Caughie 1986 p161]
Although some evidence might be found of this kind of attenuation (e.g. responses to Bloody Poetry), the emphasis will be on identifying what is characteristic about theatre/audience relations which appear to be functioning as a form of a dynamic popular culture in the most hopeful sense.
Key Concepts and Terminology

II The Nature of Response

In order that subsequent reporting and analysis of interview material can be easily followed and assessed, concepts which have been found useful to the understanding of responses to theatre in this study, and terms used in their description, are outlined here.

Entertainment

'Entertainment' is a word frequently used by respondents to describe their motivation in attending theatre. It has, naturally, strong associations with the term 'popular', especially in the sense of being a value given to theatre in opposition to high brow cultural value. Where it is used in this thesis, 'entertainment' is defined by what the respondents imply they mean by it. To elaborate too much on their indications would be to anticipate to a certain extent, the findings of the second part of the thesis. However, entertainment is a concept which needs to be understood before conclusions about the research are reached and so it is appropriate to give some provisional directions at this juncture.

Respondents do sense an opposition between entertainment and high brow theatre. They are not so conscious of this, however, that it becomes necessarily the predominant criterion of entertainment for them. They suggest that one of the main elements of entertainment might be distraction. This could be seen as part of a trend in Western society to equate relaxation with passivity (in contrast to the Eastern philosophies which promote concentration as a means to relaxation, see Fromm 1985 p91). Being absorbed in something alien to daily life, having one's mind taken off everyday concerns, gives a sense of respite, and perhaps play, which is described as entertaining. There is also an important ceiling to entertainment. However absorbing it is, it must also continue to fulfil the criteria of 'taking your mind off things', of release. Once a piece of theatre is recognised as demanding application of the mind, as putting the emotions through their paces, it is no longer considered properly entertaining. This prerequisite for entertainment to be 'light' reveals how theatre can be seen as a means to 'switching off'. The entertainment it provides is often what the consumer wants to buy with his money in his time off work, when he has earned the right to have something done for him, to passively sit back.
and be entertained. To some extent, then, entertainment as respondents indicate it should be understood, might be seen as retaining some of the negative connotations associated with 'mass' culture. It is important at this stage, however, that this reading of entertainment is not asserted to the exclusion of other possibilities which the research aims to reveal.

**Psychological Characteristics**

It is helpful also to consider here other aspects of what respondents might find entertaining, or gratifying, about the theatrical experience as illuminated by social psychological approaches. These are intended to outline some of the lines of investigation and analysis which have been found useful in the course of the study.

**Catharsis** - an important concept in any discussion of the function of the dramatic arts is the ancient one of *catharsis*. A major rationale for performing and attending theatre in ancient Greece was the belief that intense emotional experience led to a kind of purification of the soul. Psychoanalysts, following Breuer and Freud, incorporated similar principles in their approach to the treatment of neurosis. Psychodrama is a development which combines these two traditions. What exactly is released by powerful emotional experience and whether it is beneficial is controversial in psychological theory. However, it is important to note that, in general, the mere experience of the emotion is not held to be sufficient for it to be released. Some kind of consummation seems to be necessary before the tension is reduced. Wilson [1985] argues that the importance of this factor has been underestimated. He insists that catharsis occurs because an emotion is consummated rather than just aroused. It is therefore important to consider whether a film or dramatic performance provides within itself a resolution of the passions it evokes, but, "much of the research that purports to examine the catharsis hypothesis fails to take account of what may be the most important variable - the resolution" [Wilson 1985 p7].

*Groups* vs *crowds* - the contention that a crowd draws out primitive attitudes which already exist, a group creates new, and ordinarily more realistic ones [Allport 1958] seems a plausible one. Certain types of theatricality in Russell's plays can be seen to be appealing to the *'crowd'*; whereas *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* seems rather to create a
'group' feeling, almost like a shared counselling session. Likewise, it has been found that groups of people are less resistant to persuasion than individuals:

a person's attitudes are not always... built-in attributes of his personality, but rather a function of his role within a particular group [Brown 1963 p294].

It is not within the scope of this research to draw conclusions in a nature vs nurture debate. However it may be possible to identify significant differences in types of response which are obviously influenced by very personal experience, and those relying on group prejudice.

Rationalisation - an unconscious reaction to adversity. Pretence that whatever happens 'is for the best', that 'things might be worse', is commonly encountered. Thus lower-middle or working-class people who actually envy the upper class and its wealth may tell themselves that wealth does not bring happiness and that, in any case, they are more respectable, moral, and altogether better citizens than the group they envy [Brown 1963 p69]. This precisely describes, for instance, the response of MINLAW to Blood Brothers. A related and similar notion is denial, in which unacceptable information is either distorted to make it fit the existing structure of the mind and current trends, or is totally ignored, e.g. "I don't think [euthanasia] came into it at all" JENNINGS on Joe Egg. It seems likely that Projection functions in a similar way to avoid facing up to unpleasant realisations - impulses people do not wish to recognise in themselves are attributed to others [Brown 1963 p70], e.g. JENNINGS' condemnation of the character, Pam in Joe Egg.

Identification - the individual identifies the self with the person concerned and believes himself to feel likewise. Examples of respondents 'entering the head' of the protagonist are common. Clearly this process relies on audience response as much, if not more than on theatrical presentation:

If [identification] does not happen, somebody has failed in the chain of dramatic communication from writer, through interpreter to audience. Ignorance or ill-preparation on the part of the audience may be responsible for the failure of the performance as much as those who set out to communicate [Wilson 1985 p56].
Anxiety and affiliation - a well-established psychological process in which the audience experience the urge to affiliate in the face of threat, and relief that they do not have to undergo the trauma they witness (e.g. that they are not the parents of a severely disabled child like Joe). The popularity of horror, disaster and death in films and plays is explained as enjoyment of feeling closer to companions and even the rest of the audience, and a means of rehearsing reactions for exceptional contingencies. The suggestion that the comparable attractions of 'normal', if mundane, life, enjoy an enhancement which can have "a deeply disabling effect politically [Sharratt 1980 p280]", is discussed in more detail in analysis of interview material. Views like Roddick's, of disaster movies as "the embodiment of a corporatist world view" [Roddick 1980 p261], are not, however, considered to be so plausible in the context of live theatre.

Pattern processing - indicates a neurological need to impose perceptual order on incoming sensory stimuli and to seek recognisable form. Information Processing theory [Berlyne 1965] suggests that there is an optimum level of familiarity or uncertainty for any art work/audience interaction. If the art work is too predictable, it becomes boring, but if it is too complex to be able to detect meaningful patterns in, it may also lead to boredom, or even anxiety (like the anxiety of being immersed in a totally alien culture in which there is nothing familiar to cling to). Responses to the plot of Blood Brothers suggest that the latter could be a greater danger than the former.

Cognitive dissonance - laboratory experiments dealing with cognitive dissonance effects [Brehm and Cohen 1962] indicate that people are less appreciative of a performance for which they have not paid. The more the tickets cost, the more determined people will be to get their money's worth. This might contribute to the explanation of the LANES' disaffection with Bloody Poetry, since their ticket for this had been 'free' as part of a 'three for the price of two' plays scheme. It may also be connected with preconceptions about the entertainment value of 'a good night out', such as KNIGHT's, which dominate her responses to Joe Egg.

Selective Interpretation - is a concept which offers a direct comparison with instances in the interviews. Kendall and Wolfe of Columbia
University's Bureau of Applied Science Research showed anti-racial prejudice cartoons to 160 men. They demonstrated that two-thirds had misunderstood the message, and that a large number had even reversed its meaning - i.e. that the cartoons were designed to create racial prejudice. This is a useful comparison for Bloody Poetry's attempts to show that radical socialist ideas need to be in touch with real life and the people. The fact that some of the respondents in the VAUGHAN COLLEGE class saw it as taking a stand against the philistinism of the masses is a possible example of such interpretation.

Propaganda - it seems likely that at least some of the explanations of audience reactions in this field will have a relevance to theatre audiences. Seldom an outright attempt to 'brainwash' audiences, (although theatre has been used for this purpose), theatre is sometimes produced in a way which will let the audience get 'carried away'; it might have a 'message' to get across, a particular point of view of which to persuade the audience. The three stages of the propaganda process are recognisable features of some theatrical productions; drawing and arousing interest, emotional stimulation, and showing how the tension thus created can be relieved (i.e. accepting the propagandist's advice). Social-psychological studies of propaganda have provided some useful insights into the way people can be expected to deal with antipathetic tendencies. They show that people are very resistant to messages that fail to fit their own picture of the world and that they deliberately (if unconsciously) seek out views which agree with their own.

One observation which might be expected to apply also to the theatre, is that propaganda is able to accelerate or retard trends in public opinion, but unable to reverse them. If the message runs counter to existing trends, it may be impossible to stimulate emotion. Or if emotion is stimulated, the message may be only partly accepted, e.g. respondent accepts he should not be racially prejudiced, but cannot bring himself to be a 'nigger-lover'. Thus tension remains, and the ultimate effect may be more hostility to blacks, or to the propagandist. This suggests that if a piece of theatre attempts to put across a point of view which is too emphatically opposed to that of a respondent, the effect might be not only to make the respondent 'switch off' to the message ('denial'), but even to reinforce their hostility to it. Vernon
Beste, writing about the propaganda for the Spanish Civil War, points out how intensity of emotion can have unfortunate associations with mindlessness, and yet, how it can also enrich the depth of an experience.

Mass declamations are not suited for explanation or argument but only for the reinforcement of them through the senses....Left diehards turn up their noses at making appeals to the emotions as a means of stirring the people to action...they would be correct to point out the fascist nature of such methods... There is no reason, however, why we should depend only on intellectually acquired conviction, for such conviction remains shallow unless it is quickened by feeling [Beste 1943 p3].

The same question of the value of making an appeal to the emotions is a central one for the theatre - does it stir people to action, add depth to conviction, or encourage an abandonment of the better reason?

The usefulness of these concepts to the present study implies an underlying sympathy in the thesis with the importance of "the psychological traits of observer or listener himself" [Brown 1963 p317]. Clearly, however, it is not intended to imply that exclusively psychological traits determine the effects of a production. Social psychology suggests, for example, that the basic political (left or right wing) affiliations which inform responses can be explained as psychological phenomena formulated by early experiences (e.g. of parental discipline [Brown 1963 p60]). This psychological basis for a radical or reactionary bias is assumed to mean that a person who holds some right wing views is likely to hold other corresponding biases. Whilst not necessarily agreeing that 'point of view' is entirely determined by early experiences and psychological factors in this way, this implication of a cohesive, rather than eclectic pattern of attitudes is obviously significant. Like the other concepts we have considered, it helps to make our conception of 'response' a more coherent one.

Social Functions
It is also clearly crucial to a study like this one to consider how theatre as a particular aspect of a person's social life and social role, relates to their social existence in general. A useful distinction
which can be used initially for the purposes of clarity such discussion is between the expressive and instrumental social functions of theatre. Goodlad refers to the distinction between these two elements in his work on popular drama and defines it as:

an expressive element concerned with the way people reveal their understanding of their environment, their beliefs about it, and their affective reaction to it; and an instrumental element through which people seek to exercise control over their environment [Goodlad 1971 p3].

In practice, these two elements are usually almost inseparable. There is for example, an implication of both an expressive and instrumental function in one of the basic assumptions that many sociological approaches make. This is that theatre functions as a form of social control, informing audiences about appropriate behaviour (a function often explained by theatre’s origins in religious or social ceremony and myth in primitive societies). Although modern theatre may have come to fulfil other functions, associated perhaps with aesthetic, emotional or intellectual satisfactions which are more personal and internalised, the possibility of theatre's contribution to social cohesion remaining an important, or even predominant, function should not be overlooked.

Theatre's origins in myth are similarly informative about the relationship between systems of belief and behavioural possibilities. Myths have had an important function in acknowledging the existence of those realities which, for the sake of stability in social organisation, are excluded from the 'socially real world':

Mythical speculations ... justify the shortcomings of reality, since the extreme positions are only imagined in order to show that they are untenable [Levi-Strauss 1967 p30].

It is, for example, easy to make the connection between the function of myth, and the way 'experimental' theatre might allow its audiences to experience those things which cannot be contemplated as part of social reality, for fear of anarchy. Drama which appears to be challenging established convention might also be explained in terms of its role in informing about appropriate social roles. 'Avant-garde' drama, for instance, may reinforce certain groups' perceptions of their social roles as cultured elites or intellectuals. The idea of social context can clearly play an important role in such a function, and is particularly relevant in the case of the theatre to which this study has
largely confined itself. Mainstream provincial theatre performed in major city playhouses operates in a context which is relatively well-defined, even institutionalised.

Not all theatre functions within such explicitly articulated social institutions. In some cases there is some difficulty (as is common in many of the social sciences) in differentiating between what is context, and what is 'the play' in the context - e.g. Welfare State's requiem for Bradford Kirkgate Market [described in Kershaw 1983]. Indeed it could be said that a good artist makes his own relevant context. But it is worth more specifically suggesting that the commercial nature of an enterprise can be essential in defining its context. The 7:84 company performing Garden of England during the miners' strike, for example, were clearly less separate from their audience, who indeed became participants in many ways, than companies in commercial theatre which casts the audience in the separated role of consumer.

The distinctive differentiation to be made between ritual and drama is characterised by such a change in the relationship, a separation occurring, between audience and performers. Schechner identifies the most important effector of this change in relationship as the context of the activity:

..context, not fundamental structure, distinguishes ritual, entertainment, and ordinary life from each other. The differences among them rise from the agreement (conscious or unexpressed) between performers and spectators.

[Schechner 1976 p217]

If we accept that the separateness of the audience is decisive, then the importance of audience involvement becomes clear. One of a series of oppositions posited by Schechner [1976 p207] associates the functions of efficacy and ritual with trance-like states. If we accept this, then we can conclude that when respondents say they 'get carried away' by a play, or 'lose themselves in it', functions of ritual and efficacy may be taking place. This might appear a commonplace - that the deeper the involvement of the audience, the deeper the effect of the play. But what kind of theatre is likely to achieve this? Opposing the trance-like states in Schechner's model is the identification of a more 'conscious' mode with entertainment, which is described as 'passing the time'. This is an unexpected conclusion if one considers, perhaps, Brecht, as
representing theatre designed to retain its audiences' consciousness ('entertainment' which 'passes the time' does not spring to mind as an appropriate description of *Mother Courage*, for instance). In this light, much expressly political or consciousness-raising theatre could be seen as severely limited. Perhaps more constructively, such an opposition questions assumptions which may be made about the trivial entertainment value of the kind of popular drama in which people get 'carried away' (e.g. soaps, melodrama).

**Theatricality**

In addressing this question of the separateness of audience and stage, and the level of involvement of the respondents, use of the term 'theatricality' has proved helpful. This is a term coined by Burns for the quality which distinguishes dramatic presentations from 'real life' [Burns 1972]. It describes the way in which people have come to see 'theatre' as seeming like real life, but only pretending, the suspension of disbelief, the crucial duality of the experience. Its use in this thesis also denotes the importance of such duality. It is meant to refer to the way in which the play influences the level of illusion accepted, or the distance maintained, by the audience. This is represented by those qualities of a production which involve the audience in some vital way in the dynamic of the drama. This will include particular techniques such as farcical sketches, audience address, melodramatic acting - essentially elements designed to elicit an almost involuntary response at an emotional level; shock, horror, laughter, pity, when the association between theatricality and involvement becomes clear.

**Realism**

When using the terms 'real', 'realistic', or 'realism', it is accepted that all 'reality' is subjective. Such subjectivity has promoted countless contributions to the philosophical and metaphysical implications of the word, especially as it is adopted in literary or dramatic criticism [e.g. Lukacs 1950, Gombrich 1963, Kermode 1967, Culler 1975]. What is being referred to by the use of the terms in this work is a sense of everyday life as respondents experience it. There is a natural connection here with ideas of what is popular (as opposed to mass) in culture. It becomes clear that what respondents determine as 'realistic' depends on whether they can relate to it in terms of their own lives, whether they can recognise situations they have come across
before. It is often used to denote qualities which make a play 'worthwhile', in an almost practical sort of way, i.e. there is a sense of it touching their own lives, that it could have a bearing on things that might happen to them (e.g. WALMSLEY: "What would I do had I got a handicapped child... they didn't treat her as anything special, which I thought, well that's what you'd have to do").

In some cases, especially in discussion of how respondents' preconceptions affect their responses, it is helpful to be able to differentiate more specifically between different levels of 'reality'. It is useful for these purposes if one sense of reality can be understood as being validated by general consensus. It may help to exemplify what is meant here. Perception of colours is a subjective and individual thing, but the word, 'green', is universally understood to refer to a particular part of the colour spectrum. It denotes some model idea of a hypothetical hard and fast pure colour. This is the equivalent of the a model 'hard' reality we sometimes need to make use of. It enables us to make clear the ways in which individuals' realities differ from this, and how they affect the perception of theatre. Their individual realities are the equivalent of all the variations of yellow and blue tones that different people see as 'green'.

This distinction is most useful in identifying cases of respondents' own view of the world overriding the 'hard' reality they are apparently presented with. This occurs in discussion of Russell's work, where it will be suggested that the play contrives to beguile respondents into 'letting go' their grip on 'hard' reality, in order to confirm their own more comfortable view of reality. It is useful, for example, in understanding responses such as those to Mickey's situation in Blood Brothers. The 'hard' reality of his dead-end job is acknowledged in the play with references to "the soddin' place" that Mickey hates so much. Some respondents, however, override this information with their own perception of the reality of the situation - that "he would have been perfectly happy" (GEORGE) working there if things had not gone wrong.
Notes:
1. An example from a recent report of problems over a lease stating that flats should be used only as 'dwellings for the working classes', illustrates this. The council claimed the clause was 'antiquated' since the term working class 'has no clear meaning in today's society'. Tenants, on the other hand, 'are in no doubt about their social class or who should live on the estate'. The allegiance to a sense of class based on neighbourhood is clear in quotations from the tenants: "Of course there is such a thing as the working class. This place was built for them" (Derek Rhodes, 43, tenant of 14 years), "I don't think they want anybody like us round here, working-class people. They're trying to turn it into a yuppie area" (Ivy Cooper, 62, lifelong tenant) [Davison 1989 p10].

2. E.g. Functions of "social control" and "transmission of norms" have been identified in Icelandic sagas [Rockwell 1974].

3. The audience joined with the company in singing songs of solidarity with the miners, rose to their feet, clapped in unison, passed money for the strike fund to the stage and signed up for a street demonstration the following day.
Theatre and social change

Behind my criticisms of theatrical productions is an assumption of a model role for the theatre. The role is that of enlightening and introducing new possibilities for its audiences. These would be initially emotional and imaginative possibilities - the liberation of ways of feeling and thinking from habitual notions. This implies a role for theatre ultimately as inspiration for change, on personal and social levels. This is a very broad statement of outlook, but some of its implications are and have been explored elsewhere. This section focusses particularly on this model role of social change to outline the background of possibilities and limitations within which responses can be assessed.

The idea of theatre as a conservative force has already been partially addressed. The concept of expressive, as opposed to instrumental, function which we introduced earlier becomes useful here. For those among critics of mass media drama who argue for the importance of expressive aspects which reflect norms and values of culture (e.g. Elkin 1954 and Ennis 1962) the possible role of theatre in promoting change is obviously limited. Other commentators (also applying the idea to the mass media of films and television rather than specifically the type of theatre in this study), assume an instrumental function - Fearing [1947], Albert [1957], Riesman [1961] and Forsey [1963], but such mass communications (and some sociological, e.g. Goodlad 1971) commentators focus on the way drama may work instrumentally to regulate behaviour. The implication is that instrumental function is conservative - it assures the continued standards of behaviour of the status quo (see also Burns 1972 and Rockwell 1974).

A marxist view suggests that ideology functions to perpetuate certain types of class relations and therefore performs a basically conservative function. Marxist thinking also implies that the predominant ideology will be, to a greater or lesser degree, an important part of the cultural profile of the audience (cultural profile is more specifically defined as a part of Methodology, p76). If the cultural profile is subsequently shown to be an important factor in determining responses to theatre, then the implication is that predominant ideology is a powerful regulator of theatrical experience.
Sociology and social psychology also make contributions to a view of drama as a form of social control. They illustrate ways in which theatre can exert pressure for social conformity on audiences. It has been suggested, for example, that acceptable models are presented in drama, showing people how they should act according to them, and the dire consequences if they do not (classically, the morality play) [e.g. Burns 1972]. The psychology of dispelling discontent by representing the mundane as an attractive alternative to the tragedy and horror in drama is another example [Braby 1980].

Such emphases on theatre as a force for social conformity appear to contradict the convictions held by some commentators and practitioners in the world of the theatre: that theatre is a force for social change (e.g. "The theatre will inevitably be an instrument of social innovation and in that sense it is an institution subversive of the status quo". [Esslin 1978 p104]). Indeed, to a certain extent, the 'regulating' affect can be seen as inherent. Even a company such as Welfare State are aware that their events, which are aimed at 'making people feel in some way better', might (like carnivals in South America) be open to the charge that they are a way of giving people a day of freedom so that they can be repressed for the rest of the year. They say there will always be this argument, and that it is asking; is this a time for art, at all? Although their aim is to release their audiences from conventional constraints, they are forced to acknowledge the almost inherently conservative nature of the building blocks which are the basis of drama:

The function of the shared beliefs and myths on which they build their work has generally been to reinforce the dominant politics and culture. Public ritual is usually thought of as essentially a conservative, power-reinforcing activity [Kershaw 1983 p12].

What one may take issue with here, is that although 'public ritual' might 'usually be thought of as essentially conservative', theatre need not necessarily be thought of first and foremost as public ritual. Although some ritual aspects of theatre may fulfil this role (e.g. sharing of applause and laughter), other aspects can be seen quite differently (e.g. the emotions aroused by the performance). A case can be made that the conservative nature of ritual aspects may be overridden
in the minds of many by an idea of theatre as anything but 'essentially conservative', as my data will help to show.

In contrast to interpretations of theatre's reactionary instrumental function, other critics have proposed a radical instrumental function for theatre. Williams suggests that drama may be both expressive and instrumental, but the force of his argument focuses on the importance of seeing drama:

> Not only as a social art, but as a major and practical index of change and creator of consciousness [Williams 1965 p273].

I would suggest that this idea of theatre for change - incorporating an idea of progressive liberalism, even radicalism - has become an essential part of the perceived nature of much theatre. It is also my assumption that this extends to the kind of theatre studied here, even though aspects of it earn it the label 'popular'. It is difficult to detect some clearly defined 'movement' historically, towards this view of theatre. However, it seems that the idea of this 'liberal' role is important to the way contemporary producers and audiences perceive theatre in a way that it was not, for example, to late nineteenth century audiences.

There is an underlying ambivalence in my attitude to this role. Optimistically, I would like to believe in such a 'liberalising' model role for theatre. At a fundamental level, I retain a faith in the theatre's capacity to be effective, to be a positive force. An important aim for the research is to discover whether audience relations to theatre might be positive, liberating and creative in ways which do not necessarily need to be understood in terms of marxist polemic, or indeed specifically in terms of class politics at all (even though some form of 'hegemony' is taken to be the crucial context in which such relationships must be formed). To do this it is useful to make use of such concepts as 'relaxed pleasure', as "a way of thinking about the pleasure of television, and popular culture more generally, which escapes the economic problematic of production and consumption" [Caughie 1986 p166]. The idea of relaxed pleasure is to be thought through 'politically', as opposed to simply seeing it as a descriptive account of an audience's impassivity. Using this approach, with examples from Brecht's epic theatre, Caughie illustrates the importance of gestural precision which, in the theatre, continually
condenses meaning in a moment of perfectly realised
performance. ... The relaxed detachment is made political by a
highly concentrated and skilled performance which does not
simply show the world but which, in its condensation, makes it
strange. [ibid. p167]

This idea of theatre succeeding in 'making strange' is one which
underlies much of the thrust of the interview plan used in this research
(fig 2). Different types of theatricality are to be investigated to see
if some are more likely to 'simply show the world', and some more likely
to 'make strange'. Finally, Caughie calls for a recognition that in a
society where psychic and social alienation and dissociation are
becoming more and more profound:

Confirmation and recognition are important and necessary
pleasures, and that to undervalue them is to extend the life
of an inappropriate and totalistic modernism which can only
find value in the dissolution of fixed identities [ibid. p169]

This thesis does wish to discover and investigate, rather than dismiss,
such pleasures. However, a difficulty presents itself here for the
analysis of the interview material. The evaluative notion that theatre
which in some ways 'makes strange' is a more authentic form of popular
culture, could easily lead to a preoccupation with seeking out instances
of theatre which provides the 'dissolution of fixed identities'. Whilst
recognising that this is a bias to beware, the collection and analysis
of the interview material has endeavoured not to dismiss the importance
of confirmation and recognition as possible instances of positive
popular cultural experiences.

These points of view allow possibilities for positive instrumental
functions of theatre which are worth investigating. Schechner
classifies these functions as 'efficacy' [Schechner 1976 p207] and
believes them to be determined by the ritual aspects of theatre. I
sympathise with the hope he cherishes in his work, to enhance these
ritual aspects, without diminishing its theatricality. He contends that
"efficacious theatres are on the upswing and will dominate the
theatrical world within the next 20 years" [ibid. p210]. To whatever
extent we may agree with this statement, it is easy to find those at
work in the theatre who are anxious to affirm that 'efficacy' of some
sort is their intention and achievement (e.g. see p4).
More pessimistically, in spite of such affirmations, some scepticism remains about how close the audience's experience comes to matching this model. Evidence for or against this is difficult to collect, but this should not preclude genuine attempts to seek a better understanding of how theatre does, could or should work for audiences. Without this kind of evidence, some scepticism about the claims of some productions, their producers and critics is healthy enough. It is not merely small-minded to bear the possibilities of presumption in mind. In this spirit, Hall forms a significant critique of the idea of 'efficacy', or as he terms it here, art as 'praxis'. He claims that there is a basic weakness in the presumption that the imagination can dream up something without a basis in experience:

This belief underlies many well-known aesthetic cliches such as that of the independence of the 'creative mind', the ability of art to 'transcend' experience, and probably the currently popular but resoundingly vague idea of art as a 'praxis' [Hall 1979 p.37].

Whilst his point about the independence of the creative mind has already been addressed (rather more hopefully, by Perkins, above), the current popularity, but insubstantiality, of the idea of art as praxis rings true. Any contributions which can be made to what we know of the audience as critic, as opposed to the professionals as 'self-critics', can only help to focus more clearly on what Hall finds so resoundingly vague. In the process perhaps a contribution can also be made towards more constructive debate, which a lack of evidence of this kind can restrict to an opposition of defensiveness and scepticism.
CHAPTER THREE : METHODOLOGY

In the course of pursuing its own aims, research at this level often seems to call for a greater wealth of study in associated areas than could ever be contained within the scope of a thesis of this kind. A primary concern, therefore, is to acknowledge what cannot be fully addressed as part of its undertaking. It is not possible for the researcher to become an expert in all the fields (e.g. social psychology, linguistics, data analysis, etc.) which relate to the specific research subject. However, in this case, methodological problems in particular were inextricably related to the aims of the research. These are therefore outlined as fully as they can be without overshadowing the original aims of the research.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data
A qualitative methodology was considered to have clear advantages over a quantitative one for the purposes of this study. It aims to discover as much as possible about audience response and involvement. For reasons which are outlined below, it was assumed that the information needed to do this would not be easily quantifiable (e.g. attitudes and emotions). The limitations of a quantitative study then, did not appear to be appropriate to our purposes.

Most audience surveys to date have been restricted in scope to quantifiable questions of how many, how often, and the collection of demographic details of audiences. The kind of information gathered and the subsequent design of surveys is usually determined by financial concerns since such surveys seem often to be commissioned by marketing managers. This was the case with a survey carried out by SWET at the Globe theatre in 1983 at which I was invited to assist and observe, as is exemplified by the questionnaire used on that occasion [fig. 1, see also SWET survey 1981 and Leicester Haymarket survey 1982].

Some less marketing-orientated surveys have concentrated on finding out about what types of audience attend which types of play according to social class [e.g. Manuell 1966 and Wilkie 1970]. Although this type of survey can produce helpful statistics, it often confirms expected demographic characteristics of theatre audiences. Mann, for example concluded that audiences are largely of a high occupational and
educational status and overwhelmingly 'middle class':

No audience has as much as 10% of what could be called ordinary working class occupations [Mann 1969 p66]. Such surveys give no information about why the audience make-up is as it is. The quantitative researchers themselves sometimes seem rather wistful about the lack of 'meat' on the 'bones' of their figures:

Probing and searching questions about why people do things cannot be dealt with by these techniques and the need for interview surveys becomes all the clearer as we accumulate further data from audience surveys [ibid. p71].

Mann had been driven to a high degree of inventiveness in pursuit of more satisfactory information, which nevertheless eluded him [Mann 1966 and 1967]. He attempted to use a mechanism installed in theatre seats which respondents could use to register their levels of gratification with the production. This did circumvent the problem of collecting recollected, as opposed to spontaneous response [McCall 1969 p107], but was not wholly successful. There are difficulties in interpreting information which respondents can only give in rigid and simplified forms determined by the researcher. Such difficulties will be discussed as they came to light in the use of reaction indices in one of my pilot studies. Both Mann [1969] and Manuell [1966] have attempted to supplement basically quantitative surveys with some qualitative data, implying that they recognise a need for more in-depth information. In these cases, however, the information is 'tacked on' to the major survey, and lacking in the methodological rigour and scholarliness which accompanies the quantitative data. It is rather featured as interesting, but somewhat unreliable information which cannot be validated.

Even the marketing men seem to recognise the need for qualitative data in conjunction with quantitative surveys. NOP Market Research Ltd. make quite extensive use of quotes from 'in-depth' group interviews in a survey commissioned by SWET [NOP 1981]. This did provide more information on what people actually thought of the theatre, but in an almost purely descriptive format. Without any analytical structure, the presentation of random, sometimes unattributed quotations, was difficult to evaluate. A more recent work on marriage [Mansfield and Collard 1988] received similar criticism of its 'quasi-methodological' survey:

Sixty-five couples is too few for a census and too many for a
series of profiles. Instead, the authors tend to use short, often unattributed, quotations simply to illustrate the general points they are making in the main text. [Brown 1988]

In view of the preponderance of quantitative surveys on theatre audiences it proved difficult to locate examples of applied qualitative data theory in this, or indeed many other fields. Although guidelines could be found in the theory of sampling, interviewing, etc., it would have been helpful to find examples of how this translated into actual contacts, questions, etc. in specific instances. This problem of a lack of examples of applied qualitative data theory to refer to (particularly acute in the case of a methodology for analysis as we shall see), suggested some resort to a degree of 'trial and error'. Out of this necessity, a number of preliminary studies were conducted.

Preliminary Studies
3 'Pilot' surveys played an important part in decisions about the best kind of interview plan to use, and which specific topics should be emphasised in it.

Marat/Sade
The first preliminary study used 4 video-taped scenes from a university drama department production of Marat/Sade [Weiss 1969]. Using reaction indices with a 7 point scale [after Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum 1967] a questionnaire was devised, which attempted to identify those aspects of the production which had proved most compelling. Two groups were surveyed using this questionnaire. Firstly a group of 8 university cleaning staff, and secondly a group of 7 university secretaries. This was an initial attempt to discover evidence for the idea that there might be distinctive differences in responses according to particular social groups. It was not assumed that social class could be simply defined by occupation. As will become clear, this kind of categorisation is rejected in favour of the concept of a broader 'cultural profile' as an aid to grouping responses. However, in this case the occupational split was a convenient starting point for an experimental survey.

The use of the 7 point scale was not found to be a satisfactory method of discovering what was most important to these respondents. The questionnaire method explored only those aspects which the researcher
expected to be important, rather than allowing the respondents themselves to indicate what was important from their point of view. In this case results were limited to information about elements of theatre which might make it unattractive to audiences, but not about aspects of theatricality which promote positive response.

One of the possible gains from this pilot study, however, was that the results suggested an important distinction between factors determining audience attendance and those determining appreciation. Respondents were asked to rate extracts according to how 'entertaining', 'boring', etc. they found them on a 7 point scale and to rate the effectiveness of aspects of their theatricality - 'dialogue', 'action', 'lighting', etc. Finally they were asked to indicate their interest in seeing the extracts again and in seeing the play as a whole. There was little correlation between the rating of the extracts and respondents' interest in seeing more. For example, in spite of the fact that an extract scored three '7s' (at the top of the scale) for being 'entertaining', none of the respondents indicated an interest in seeing it again. Likewise, although 'dialogue' and 'action' scored highly in most extracts for the secretaries, they all expressed a marked lack of interest in seeing the play. This led to the conclusion that aspects of theatre other than those associated with the on-stage action, dialogue, etc., or the entertainment value of particular scenes, may determine attendance.

This finding was in accordance with other commentators' observations about important aspects of these kinds of cultural entertainments. Mulvey, for example, suggests what the alternative factors determining attendance might be - "the appeal of films was posited on 'going out'" (whereas television appeals to 'staying in') [Mulvey 1986 p79]. Although Mulvey does not appear to give the 'going out' appeal of theatre as much emphasis, it seems reasonable to expect that there might be a similar importance to the "draw of the city lights at night, the neon, the names of the stars, the glamour of the Palaces" [ibid].

**Educating Rita**

As a result of the shortcomings of the *Marat/Sade* survey, a more informal kind of questioning was essayed in an experimental study with a small group of respondents after a production of *Educating Rita* [Russell 1981], performed by a touring theatre company at Loughborough
University. Goodlad's explanations for the 'unpopularity' (i.e. low attendance figures) of 'high brow' theatre [Goodlad 1971 p169], suggested that choosing a very popular play (i.e. high attendance figures) would reveal more about those aspects which promote positive responses. This play was chosen as Willy Russell had attracted larger audiences than any other playwright in the year of this survey (1984). 5 people of different ages and occupations were invited to come to see the production with me. After the play, I led an informal discussion, giving minimal direction which I hoped would allow the respondents to dwell on those aspects which they found important, rather than on those which I thought they might find important.

This exercise did provide data of a higher quality. It was more successful in identifying the most important elements for the respondents, and in explaining the nature and strength of their responses to them. The group discussion, however, proved rather too informal and unstructured to clarify and focus adequately on important issues.

Top Girls
Encouraged by the Educating Rita interview, but seeking a more structured method, the idea of the interview plan was introduced to provide a suitable structure. A prototype of the final plan was used in a series of 6 interviews with respondents who had seen a production of Top Girls [Churchill 1982] at the Leicester Haymarket studio theatre. Although some of the data from this survey was interesting in itself, it is not included here as the exercise was primarily a preliminary. It provided useful experience in using the interview plan and techniques, which could be used to collect reliable data in the series of interviews planned thereafter to form the main body of the work. A number of ideas for the design and use of the plan were consequent upon this exercise, particularly in the ordering of items. It was found helpful to move between specific questioning ("What was it that you found irritating about Bri?") and more general issues ("Is this the kind of thing you often go to see?"). This relieved respondents' anxiety over more 'difficult' questions, whilst allowing them to be returned to rather than being terminated by the respondent ("I don't know really...that's all I could say").
From these pilot studies, certain issues began to emerge as recurrent themes and important central questions. It was from these indications that many of the items in the final interview plan were decided upon. These early attempts also suggested items which were likely to assist probing. Most importantly, the core questions of the interview plan, as it is shown below, were consolidated to reflect and advance the aims of the research.

Interviewing methods
Merton [1956] and Richardson [1965] were useful in suggesting sound basic principles for interviewing procedure which were incorporated into this study. Merton, for example suggests a set of provisional criteria for productive interview material. These comprise Nondirection, Specificity, Range, and Depth and personal context [Merton 1956 p545]. The last of these is particularly important to this study:

The interview should bring out the affective and value-laden implications of the subjects' responses, to determine whether the experience had central or peripheral significance. It should elicit the relevant personal context, the idiosyncratic associations, beliefs and ideas.[ibid]

Special attention to these elements is a prerequisite of the groupings of respondents which are to form a basis of the analytical structure.

Another important consideration was Merton's point that when subjects are led to describe their responses in as much detail as possible, there is less likelihood that they will "intentionally or unwittingly conceal the actual character of their responses" [ibid. p542]. However, experience of conducting hundreds of interviews of different duration and depth (the present author has worked as a professionally trained market research interviewer on a wide range of surveys), suggests that there is a fine line between drawing out detail, and persisting with some particular subject to the extent that the respondent says merely what s/he hopes is what the interviewer wants them to say, simply in order to move on.

Holmstrom's work on the Two Career Family [1972] provided a seemingly rare and very helpful example of the practical application of qualitative methodology. Holmstrom used free style interviews to collect her data. She likens the interview guide of general topics which she
used, to Richardson's 'Nonscheduled standardised' interviews. Her notes on the wording and sequence of questions were used in conducting the interviews in this study. Such procedure relied on the following assumptions:

1. If the meaning of questions is to be standardized, one must be free to adapt the wording.
2. No fixed sequence of questions will be satisfactory to all respondents; the most effective sequence will be determined by the respondent's readiness and willingness to take up topics. [Holmstrom 1972 p187]

Likewise, Garden endorses the use of alternative order and wording in order to convey the same questions and collect the same information. He advocates the construction of interview guides on the basis of the goals of the interview, in terms of topics to be explored, with the emphasis on 'criteria of relevant and adequate response' [Garden 1975 p414]. These criteria have been considered appropriate to the EE Inputs (after Banaka 1971, EE = Interviewee) which are the equivalent of his goals. The use of such criteria, however, raises the problem which Van Maanen quotes as a loss of 'reliability' (standardised, replicable method), in exchange for other kinds of 'validity':

there is an inherent conflict between validity and reliability...Certain kinds of reliability must be intentionally violated in order to gain a depth of understanding about the situation (i.e., the observer's behaviour must change from subject to subject, unique questions must be asked of different subjects....(validity) is what fieldwork is specially qualified to gain, and increased emphasis on reliability will only undermine that unique function [Van Maanen 1979 p595].

The 'validity' Seiber is in search of here is comparable to the quality which Guba [1979] stressed as a prerequisite of qualitative research, i.e. that it should be seen as 'auditable', 'confirmable' and 'creditable' rather than concentrating on avoiding as many variables as possible. In the course of this research, I did not assume that during interviewing I would always be able to maintain a neutral and mechanical frame of reference (see 'Interaction effects' p58). Some measures could be taken, however, to assure the 'credibility' of technique. 'Prompting', for instance, was avoided in favour of 'probing' ('probing' and 'prompting' are recognised terms used in the market research
industry to regulate standards of interviewing e.g. Scantel Research Ltd Interviewer manual p26).

From time to time, in addition to the concept of 'probing', recourse was made to other recognised interviewing strategies. The expression of an attitude by the interviewer, which could be real or assumed, was found to reduce respondents' inhibitions [Rose 1945]. The important effect of the interviewer's stated attitudes and the way s/he should use them to get more information have been outlined by Becker's work in which he also argues for a flexible interviewing style incorporating a 'semi-cynical' approach in order to bring out the respondent's cynicism/idealism [Becker 1956]. Examples of this occur throughout the transcripts of the interviews conducted in this research. Other useful tactics suggested by Becker to which occasional recourse was made included the strategy of beginning the interview with highly general questions (e.g. "Most people seem to enjoy Willy Russell's plays, don't they?") and then challenging the respondent to substantiate answers from their own experience (e.g. "What was it that you especially enjoyed about this play in particular?") [ibid.]. Interviews were almost always started along these lines in this research. Becker's further suggestion that the interviewer can 'play dumb' (pretending not to understand what is meant by these explanations in order to encourage the respondent to state what is implicitly in their answer) also proved useful.

Having looked at methods of questioning and issue of 'standardisation', it is worth noting that a further suggestion of Holmstrom's became a feature of interviews in this study. This was that completely nonstandardized information should be collected from any respondents as long as the material seemed relevant to the overall study, (e.g. connected or significantly influential issues that had not occurred to the interviewer).

On a practical note, Garden's basic guidelines for the use of a tape recorder were observed in the course of recording the interviews. These recommend that the interviewer should be familiar with the machine, the recorder is kept out of the interviewees' sight, the microphone inconspicuous, the recording is explained in a matter-of-fact way, and that the interviewer should show no awareness of the recorder's presence [Gorden 1975 p275].
Interview guide
The interview guide I used was a form of Richardson's Non-Scheduled Standardised interview, but it was most closely based on Banaka's interview plan [Banaka 1971 p46]. Banaka offered the most specific advice for planning in order to ensure that hidden interviewer assumptions were not incorporated, and that all the most important specific, as well as general points, would be covered in each interview.

The same basic interview plan was used for each play (fig.2), but, as noted above, different questions were sometimes needed to ensure the same Outputs and Inputs from different respondents. In addition, in the section (D.3.) designed to collect EE Inputs about Basis of response to the different plays, specific questions and their ordering needed to be varied according to the play to produce the same EE Inputs. Questions about frequency of attendance, preference for particular plays or types of plays, and general expectations of theatre were similar throughout. Other items were designed to focus on those elements which related to emphases in the plays. Examples of guide questions used to collect the planned EE Inputs for particular plays are shown in fig.3. It should be emphasised again that these questions were not necessarily asked in these words or this order. Often recourse to these guide questions was not needed as respondents introduced the Inputs of their own accord once they started talking about the play. For instance, the question: "What/who was to blame for the problems (in Blood Brothers, Mickey's demise and death)?", is a guide question to elicit EE Input 3.e): "Does EE identify a 'message'?". But this input can be achieved in different ways; here for example, the respondent more or less frames his own question and gives a very full answer without further probing:

Q: Would you class Mickey as the same, then (as Sammy)?
GEORGE: No I think Mickey was essentially a good lad...he got drawn into it by, desperation. Yes, he was a victim.
Q: What of - anything in the play, where he started to go wrong?
GEORGE: He'd still've been perfectly happy if he hadn't been made redundant. It was perhaps because he didn't want to be like Sammy that he blew it up when he lost his job. And that clash with Eddie...
INTERVIEW PLAN (After Banaka)

A. Role relationships of ER and EE*
1. ER's role
   Put into contact with EE through...
   Nature of initial contact with EE
2. EE's role
   Details EE: age, sex, marital status
   Explanations given to EE prior to interview.

B. Formulation of the problem
1. Description of the problem
   ER wants to find out EE's responses to the play,
   relate this to EE's general perception of theatre,
   discover how these relate to cultural profile.

2. Information available
   Anything known about EE prior to interview (frequency of theatre-going,
   membership of theatre groups, etc).
   Information about the play (writer, director, company).

C. Outputs
1. To identify EE's expectations of theatre in general
2. To identify EE's expectations of this play in particular
3. To describe EE's responses to this play
4. To differentiate between EE responses to the theatricality of play,
   and importance of social occasion
5. To assess relationship between expectations and response
6. To draw up a 'cultural profile' of the EE
7. To assess relationship between this profile and response.

D. EE Inputs
1. Expectations
   a) context: EE's favourite plays/writers/theatres
   b) emotional/intellectual
   c) social
   d) particular expectations of this play

2. Responses
   a) levels of interest/enjoyment
   b) what EE liked most about the play
   c) what EE disliked most about the play
   d) was EE satisfied with the ending

3. Basis of response
   a) identification with characters
   b) importance of humour
   c) importance of realism
   d) levels of involvement/objectivity
   e) does EE identify a 'message'

4. Importance of social occasion
   a) reasons for attendance
   b) related social activity

5. Cultural Profile
   Indications or declarations of attitude or beliefs,
   especially with regard to: Attitudes to Art and Culture, Left or Right
   wing political tendencies, attitudes to Sex roles.
   (Age, sex, marital status, occupation, education).

*EE = Interviewee, ER = Interviewer.
Examples of guide questions used to collect EE Inputs for
Bloody Poetry/Joe Egg/Blood Brothers

D. EE Inputs

1. Expectations
What do you hope to get from a visit to the theatre?
What did you expect of this play?
Did you know anything about the play before you went?
Have you heard of Brenton/Nichols/Russell — what do you know/think of
him/his work?
Did you know anything about Byron and Shelley/Have you had any contact with
the handicapped/Could you identify with the Johnstones way of life?

2. Responses
Would you say you enjoyed the play?
Were there any parts you found boring?
Were there any parts which particularly stood out for you?
Did you think it was a good ending, would you have preferred some other
ending?

3. Basis of response
What did you think of Shelley/Bri/Mickey ... etc. ?
Which characters did you sympathise with most?
Did you find any of the play funny or amusing?
Did you think it was an accurate/realistic portrayal of Byron and
Shelley/the family's situation?
What did you think of the shadow scene, the presentation of the ghost, the
passages of poetry/the comic sketches, the 'farcical' routine at the
end/the Narrator...?
What/who was to blame for the problems (emotional traumas of Harriet,
Claire, etc./Bri leaving his family/Mickey's demise and death).
How did you feel when you came out — happy/sad ...?

4. Importance of social occasion
Do you usually go to the theatre with a group of friends?
Do you combine a visit to the theatre with going for a drink or a meal
etc.?

5. Cultural profile
(If not already covered under 'Expectations'...)
How often do you go to the theatre?
Have you seen any particularly memorable productions?
How do you decide what to see?

(fig.3).
Sections A and B, then, reproduced Banaka's plan, but C, 'Outputs' and D, 'EE Inputs' were determined by the aims of the research. The 'EE Inputs' were broken down into categories reflecting the core questions of the interviews, and of the thesis itself - What did EEs expect to experience from the theatre (1. 'Expectations'), What did they actually experience (2. 'Responses'), Why did they experience this (3. Basis of response). Five EE Inputs were believed to be needed to answer these three basic questions. It was felt necessary to examine 4. 'Importance of social occasion', as a distinct element (rather than another aspect of 'Basis of response'), because it had recurred as such an important element for the 26 respondents I had already interviewed in the pilot studies. 5. 'Cultural profile' was a necessary innovation once it was decided that conventional (sociological, market research, etc.) classification of respondents was inappropriate (although this information is included; age, sex, occupation, etc. See Appendix A). Reasons for this decision are more fully explored in due course.

In fact, it did not prove necessary to question respondents directly about their 'cultural profile' (e.g. Q: "Where do you stand on women's lib/feminist issues?") - the things they said in the course of talking about the play and theatre in general provided this information (e.g. "She was manipulated by Shelley... trying to sort out what she was doing with him, and what herself - developing her art, and being a mother... a major problem" (WALDEN), "It's a girls' night out really" (FARMER), "She excluded him from their married life" (JENNINGS), etc.). The interview plan identifies some aspects of cultural profile as particularly important - attitudes to Art and Culture, Left or Right wing political tendencies, and attitudes to sex roles. The fact that these are almost analogous to the group of important issues also noted by MacCabe, confirms their centrality:

...throughout the seminar and the editing of this book three emphases recurred: Popular culture/politics... Popular culture/gender... Popular culture/high culture. [MacCabe 1986]

'Interaction Effects'

In qualitative research of this kind, the problem of the reliability of the informants always needs to be taken into account. As Schwartz and Jacobs have pointed out, such work is based on the assumption that the respondent remembers, knows, or can find out for the interviewer, what
the interviewer wants to know [Schwartz and Jacobs 1979 p112]. But the fact that the respondent is able to answer, does not mean that they know; there are many things people do not know about themselves, but if asked, they can come up with an answer which sounds plausible to them and to others. Further:

Many of the things we think, feel and do are done in a rather improvisational way. When others inquire about where, when and how we think and feel these things, in looking for the structure in what we do, we find a structured way of doing it, often a way preferable to the former way. While that may be good for lay persons pursuing their 'purposes at hand' it is bad for the social scientist, since it was the 'old' way of doing things that he wanted to learn about. [ibid. p115]

It was assumed that this kind of effect would be likely to manifest itself in the interviews. Above all, it would be necessary to take into account the possibilities of respondents' 'desire to please the interviewer' [McCall and Simmons 1969 p107], or of their feeling that the quality of their responses was being 'tested' by a 'professional' - the so-called "demand characteristics" [Cook et al. 1970]. However, it was considered possible that this in itself might provide some insights into attitudes to culture, art and theatre in general (this did turn out to be the case, eg. p202). Interviews were carried out in respondents' own homes and this might have helped reduce the researcher's "threat quotient" and "exoticism quotient" in the way Miles suggests [Miles 1984 p233] by putting respondents more at ease on their home territory and in familiar surroundings.

In any case, a further methodological point which is an important concern for any study using people's views as this does, is that constructs from social psychology have an unavoidable interfering effect. Whatever respondents say cannot be cited as the 'true' opinion as it will inevitably be distorted in the way things always are whenever two people talk. An important assumption behind the interviewing method was that which Myers outlines as characteristic of 'unconventional' interviewer role performance [Myers 1977 p247]. This is that social encounters intrinsically lack neutrality. Although this is an issue which all researchers need to be aware of, it is not within the scope of this thesis to deal with it here. It is more central to the field of spontaneous and naturally occurring inter-personal discourse than of
'interviewing' situations which are 'discourse' in only a restricted sense. However, it is hoped that the references to the interfering effect of Goffman's [1955] notion of 'face', for example (e.g. see p191), make a valid contribution, since simply noting the possibility of its effect is likely to lead to a more accurate interpretation of data.

Goffman's concept of 'facework', gives insights into the ways people present themselves which are useful in the analysis of the interviews carried out for this study. A concern not to appear to contradict the 'face' they have decided to present in the interview may for example explain respondents' reluctance to admit to too much dissatisfaction or lack of comprehension of the play. A desire to present a caring, liberal 'face' might make respondents claim to feel sorry for unfortunate characters (e.g. Joe in Joe Egg) when in fact the theatricality has not genuinely elicited these emotions. This is to acknowledge the problematic nature of the reliability of informants. But in some cases it is possible to distinguish between respondents who claim this 'sympathy', and those who feel it. There is often a distinction between the first as a 'cultural' reaction (e.g. JENNINGS p240) and the second as a 'personal' one (e.g. KNIGHT, see Appendix B). The evidence for this is to be found in their self-image, representations of their own worlds, tone of voice, use of pauses etc.

In practical terms, once this intrinsic lack of neutrality in social encounters is accepted, Myers suggests the interviewer is free to assume a dynamic frame of reference, to behave in a manner deemed appropriate to ensure maximum flow of communication and allow responses to evolve naturally. A measure of 'objectivity' can be introduced to off-set the loss of 'neutrality' if the interviewer is as explicit as possible about her subjective input. If one does accept that a lack of neutrality in social encounters is intrinsic, however, then the limitations on being explicit will be clear. A sensible perspective on the problem of objectivity vs rapport in unstructured interviewing would seem to be that the inter-personal relationship between the interviewer and respondent can only enhance the acquisition of valid data. Dexter agrees that the interviewer must perforce adopt some role, and suggests s/he should try to adopt "neutrality on the interviewees' side" [Dexter 1957], a policy followed in the course of conducting the interviews in this study (e.g. see p115).
For evidence of how the questions from the Interview Guide and interviewing strategies such as those outlined above were applied in practice, as well as some illustration of 'interaction effects' in action, the reader is referred to the sections of continuous transcript included in Appendix B. In addition, these are appended to give a more accurate impression of qualities of response (such as consistency, richness) which are not so easily transmitted by the excerpts included to make particular points in the body of the thesis.

Selecting and sampling
Selection of Plays
Holmstrom's selection of 'strategic cases' [Holmstrom 1972], i.e. those which would reveal most theoretically about the problem, provided a basis for the selection of plays to be studied in this work. Her 'strategic case' rationale owes its respectability to Kendall and Wolfe's suggestion that 'deviant cases' have a positive role in empirical research [Kendall and Wolfe 1949].

The plays chosen were 'strategic cases' in the sense that each one had characteristics which allowed the study to focus on what I believed were central issues in the audience's relationship to the stage. They each appeared to attempt to fulfill a kind of role, as theatre, which I was particularly interested in. That is to say that there is sufficient evidence, from what their authors are known to have said, from advertising material and reviews, to suggest that these plays aim to be more than mere entertainment.

The concept of 'entertainment' itself is a troublesome one, for which the respondents themselves must remain the most reliable source of clarification. The interviews will show that respondents make quite clear distinctions between theatre which is 'entertainment', and theatre which fulfills other functions. Recognition that a piece of theatre does something else, instead of, or as well as, entertain, is most often articulated in such terms that "it makes you think a little bit as well" (WALMSLEY), "all very intense and all that" (PAWLEY) etc. Although respondents are not precise about how they make these distinctions, it is clear that they do make them. It could be that 'textual shifters' surrounding such theatre (e.g. posters, advertising, exposure in
particular kinds of newspaper or magazine, etc.) [Bennett and Woolacott 1987 p249] help to locate them in such a category.

The sort of function which is being claimed for these plays is related to that of 'efficacy' as Schechner contrasts it with 'entertainment' [Schechner 1976 chpt.16 passim]. He asserts that the dominant 'efficacious mode' of the medieval centuries went underground, to re-emerge in the guise of social and political drama during the last third of the nineteenth century, and that efficacy lies at the ideological heart of theatre which has since emerged. He goes on to suggest that even some of the drama which today finds its way into mainstream establishment theatre, has something of this ideological heart. The thesis assumes that a 'social conscience' at the ideological heart of the plays in this study lends them, in Schechner's terms, 'efficacy'. It is with the audience response to this, as well as the entertainment value of the pieces, that this study concerns itself. It is from information about the audience view of such theatre, that we may discover whether there is any evidence for assumptions about what kind of theatre is 'good for' its audiences. Schechner himself exemplifies the kind of assumption which may be questioned when he says:

When efficacy and entertainment are both present in nearly equal degrees - theatre flourishes. At such times, theatre answers needs that are both ritualistic and pleasure-giving. [Schechner 1976 p209]

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, for instance, offered a particularly good opportunity to focus on the nature and level of respondents' involvement. This is because the play itself exhibits self-consciousness about its duality as both illusion and artifice. Throughout the play, the level of illusion shifts, such that (it was assumed) the audience has to reorientate itself for example, to Bri as the character who is the father of Joe, Bri 'playing the fool', and the actor playing Bri discussing the job of getting on with the play. Interviews hoped to be able to discover how effectively the theatricality of the play (and particularly the humour) did this.

The fact that Willy Russell's plays have drawn the largest audiences has seen him named 'most popular playwright' at least once. His plays are well-known for their Liverpool settings and working class backgrounds.
Through his writing and speaking, Willy Russell is perceived as a "man of the people" [JENISON]. I hoped that talking to some of the audiences at his plays would give some insight into what made them so popular; did they tap into some authentic 'working class' or popular culture, or was there something else in their theatricality which people responded to?

I conducted a series of interviews about a Nottingham Playhouse production of Our Day Out. During this work, however, the strength of feeling about Blood Brothers, which most of these respondents had already seen, came across so emphatically that I felt compelled to investigate the phenomenon. Accordingly, a production of Blood Brothers at Derby Playhouse was used for a further series of interviews. This change of plan in itself illustrates that although some criteria for selection of plays are obviously necessary, there is no point in setting up too many. The experience with Our Day Out shows that the researcher has to be prepared to change a pre-set selection of plays in the light of information about what respondents felt was worth seeing. Secondly, practical considerations often outweigh methodological ones. If the play is being performed at a reasonably convenient, or feasible, time and place, it can be used; otherwise it cannot.

Finally, I wanted to compare a 'popular' strategic case with a 'high brow' strategic case, but one which operated within the same context. I had a fortunate opportunity to do this when David Aukin took on a production of a new play by Howard Brenton at the Leicester Haymarket, Bloody Poetry. It was hoped that the contrast in responses to this and the Russell plays would help to highlight the importance of aspects of theatricality and ideological orientation for respondents.

Selection of Respondents
While I found the principle of strategic cases useful as a means of identifying promising plays to be studied, I did not follow Holmstrom's example in using it to select respondents. Their selection was again partly determined by practical restrictions. Contacts with members of audiences could only be made during the interval, before, or after the play. The time available for approaching people, therefore made formal quota or sampling methods almost impossible.
An effort was made to include roughly representative numbers from either sex, and of different age ranges. People in different types of 'groups' were approached, i.e. people on their own, couples, men together, women together, mixed groups of similar ages (e.g. students), mixed groups of varying ages (e.g. works outings). In the context of a packed and noisy bar or foyer with limited time available before curtain up, physical appearance was also considered a fair indication in an attempt to ensure a reasonable spread of 'types'. In other words, I was careful to avoid the kind of bias which might have occurred had all respondents hailed from the jeans and sweatshirt fraternity, or all been wearing pin-striped suits. This location of respondents seems to me no less conscientious than Holmstrom's contacts made "through a variety of informal means" [Holmstrom 1972 p85].

My selection of respondents was not intended to be statistically representative of the population at large. One of the difficulties of ensuring representativeness in a survey of this kind is that obviously only those people willing to co-operate are included. Manuell noted this when out of some 8000 questionnaires which she gave out, only 3328 were completed [Manuell 1966]. In my case, it is worth noting that not one of the people I approached at the theatres refused my invitation to be interviewed about the performance. This in itself may suggest some correlation between a tendency to enjoy being interviewed about one's views and theatre-going.

As far as possible within the constraints of the practical situation, Glaser and Strauss' strategy of 'theoretical sampling' was followed [Glaser and Strauss 1967]. This is not representative of the population at large, but based on learning something about certain theoretical categories. The theoretical categories were of those who view the theatre as entertainment, those who see it as 'culture', and those of a left or right wing bias to politics and gender. Theoretical sampling aims to "discover categories and their properties and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory" [ibid. p62]. This was considered more appropriate to the exploratory nature of the study than statistical sampling designed to obtain "accurate evidence on distributions of people among categories to be used in descriptions or verifications" [ibid].
The selection of respondents was not intended to form a tightly controlled quota sample, or to claim to be representative because of numbers\(^2\). Interviews on this scale, however, can still provide meaningful findings. As has already been implied, the study is more concerned with discovering patterning than testing hypothesis. The emphasis is on revealing those inter-relationships between the theatrical event and its audience which respondents themselves feel are meaningful. It is not the place of the thesis to hypothesise what these inter-relationships might be. With this perspective, Weiss's justification for 'holistic' research seems appropriate. His 'holistic' research comprises looking for a system of interrelated elements: "the aim is not to test a set of hypotheses, but to discover organisation, patterning, system" [Weiss 1968 p350]. He asserts that some useful generalisations can be made from small samples on the basis that the system discovered is a necessary consequence of the environmental pressures under which the cases function.

Halfpenny argues for the value of case studies, but his point also seems relevant to a study on the current scale. He notes that statistical quantitative studies generate only hypotheses suggesting that many units studied share some of the same properties [Halfpenny 1979 p810]. More in-depth qualitative studies permit generalisations about the structural relations between different properties of the one case, and between properties of the case and properties of its context. There is also the more pragmatic argument that a small sample avoids the dangers of 'hired hands' [Roth 1966 p195] which become necessary for large scale surveys. Schwartz and Jacobs have reported the problems of the orientation period, 'cheating' and 'skewing' of results [Schwartz and Jacobs 1979 p135-142, see also Garfinkel 1967].

Methods of Analysis
The problematic methodological issues surrounding qualitative data have been suitably characterised as an 'attractive nuisance' by Miles [Miles 1979 p590], who has pioneered approaches to the analysis of such data. It has proved typically difficult to locate any suitable models or even guidelines for the analysis of the data generated by the interviews with respondents. For instance, only through direct contact with Miles at the Center for Policy Research in New York was I able to locate the appropriate publication source of his work. Most texts confine
themselves to methods of data collection (e.g. Merton 1955, Richardson 1965, Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, McCall and Simmons 1969, Filstead 1970, Phillips 1973, Bogdan and Taylor 1976, Williamson et al 1977, Orenstein 1978, Burgess 1982, Holub 1983). Miles reports that a similar survey, of seven well-respected texts, conducted by one of his group [Sieber 1976], ..."found that most of the texts largely ignored the problem of analysis, typically devoting not more than 5 to 10 percent of their pages to it" [Miles 1979 p595].

Some researchers side-step the problem of analysis on the grounds that unequivocal determination of the validity of findings is not really possible [Becker 1958, Bruyn 1966, and Lofland 1971]. Phenomenologists may see no social reality 'out there' and no need to evolve a methodology to explicate its laws. Thus social processes do not exist independently of social actors' ways of construing and describing them [Schwartz and Jacobs 1979 p128]. This study, however, is concerned to limit the possibility of researcher bias, to seek some protection against self-delusion, unreliable or invalid conclusions, and face Miles' question: "How can we be sure that an 'earthy', 'undeniable', 'serendipitous' finding is not, in fact wrong?" [Miles 1979 p596].

Bulmer's is one of the few pieces dedicated to the problem of the actual process of analysis [Bulmer 1979]. He advocates a method of 'analytic induction', which abstracts from a given concrete case the features that are essential, and generalises them. It follows four steps:

1. Discover which characters in a given datum of a certain class are more, and which less, essential.
2. Abstract these characters and assume that the more essential are the more general than the less essential and must be found in a wider variety of classes.
3. Test this hypothesis by investigating classes in which both the former and latter are found.
4. Establish a classification, i.e. organise all these classes into a scientific system based on the functions the respective characters play in determining them [ibid. p661].

The use of analytic induction to produce explanatory propositions is shown in Lindesmith's study of opiate addiction [Lindesmith 1968]. He uses the procedure to formulate propositions which apply to all the cases studied without exception. Finding any negative evidence leads him
to change his hypothesis. He notes that paying particular attention to
deviant cases proved especially fruitful as a self-corrective
procedure. Steps 1-3 of Bulmer's strategy and Lindesmith's suggestions
appeared to constitute sensible checks on conclusions to be drawn from
interview material and were incorporated to some extent into data
analysis. These steps were in respects similar to Miles's 'rules of
thumb' (below), and were instituted in the rather less formal way that
he suggests. Bulmer and Lindesmith applied analytic induction to a
limited and very specific problem (e.g. opiate addiction) which the
strategy was designed to identify and analyse as exhaustively as
possible using the case study data. The present study, however, does not
address itself to an equivalent specific 'problem' and therefore the
strategy was not directly replicable or appropriate.

Other suggestions were few and far between. Miles' remark is one with
which I must sympathise:

We could not escape the suspicion that others did not know
much more than we about the arcane process of making valid
sense of large amounts of qualitative information [Miles 1979
p595]

However, Seiber provides a convenient summary of the limited advice
offered in the major texts as to what good analysis generally involves,
comprising;

- Intertwining of analysis and data collection
- Formulating classes of phenomena
- Identifying themes
- Provisional testing of hypotheses [Seiber 1976].

This advice, and the subsequent 'rules of thumb' which Miles proposes,
were a major aid to analysis of the interview material in this study:

Consider the validity of any particular generalisation. Is
there supporting evidence from elsewhere in the data? Does it
hold true for several different people, roles, groups, or
occasions? Is there any negative evidence?

Given a generalisation, make a prediction. What else would be
true if this generalisation were true? Then go look at the
'else' to see if it is there or not.

Test propositions: does Y always go with Z, and is it
reasonable to think that it causes Z? Are certain conditions
necessary for Y to cause Z? Sufficient? [Miles 1976].
There is an important problem of validity caused by the translation procedure widely used by qualitative and quantitative sociologists in analysis. Respondents' answers to commonsense questions are translated into answers to 'technical' questions. There is an assumption here, that the researcher can interpret ordinary talk in a way that makes it give information that subjects did not understand themselves to be giving, and that ordinary language is not designed to give. Whilst this is a necessary assumption, it is important to keep it in perspective. Frequent reference to Miles' Rules of Thumb, for example, are a useful check that the idea that 'I know better than you what you are telling me' is not distorting the information in the process of finding it out.

Data Reduction

Data reduction is an initial problem which is actually part of the analytic process. With interview material of this kind, the researcher needs to be aware of the possibility of vivid information, more exciting episodes 'jumping out' of the transcripts after more 'boring' passages, and becoming overweighted in the analysis [see also Miles 1984 p21]. In an attempt to check whether this was distorting the actual picture, I followed the example of Miles et al in a coding exercise. From initial write-ups, Miles and team initially generated 202 categories for key actors, planning and implementation processes of the organisation being studied (school), e.g. 'planner', 'resource allocation', 'reward system', etc. [Miles 1979 p593]. These codes for these were applied in the margins of the write-ups. Eventually, the 202 categories were honed down to 26 major 'themes' (e.g. 'site locations', 'finances'). Each theme in the write-up rated high, medium, low or uncertain. Coded excerpts from the write-ups were put on file cards to provide quick retrieval of all excerpts dealing with a particular theme.

In my case, about 850 entries were made under the different headings of 28 major themes (eg. entertainment, realism, emotion, identification, resolution, etc.), each entry identifying a section of transcript. The biggest problem was that many entries could be entered under a number of different headings. Such cross-referencing sometimes occurred to the extent that the 'theme' headings could become meaningless compared to the importance of the individual entry. Miles et al found this 'bureaucratization of fieldwork' unsatisfactory, and abandoned it. Neither did this exercise eventually form the principle basis for
analysis of my interview material. Misgivings arose about the 'hidden' analysis which goes on in such procedure in order to make decisions about 'coding' (below). Miles' experience of dealing with qualitative material was in common with my own in this respect:

Much analysis was going on in the mind of the fieldworker. Each one developed a fairly rich set of working hypotheses about what was going on in his or her site, along with a fairly retrievable store of specific anecdotes and incidents supporting the hypotheses. But without interaction with colleagues, the hypotheses went unchallenged and usually untested, and the anecdotes remembered were only those in support of the hypotheses. [ibid p594]

Without access to such cross-checking with colleagues, the theme/entry exercise was useful in checking whether the sections which 'jumped out' were isolated instances, consolidated, or contradicted by other entries.

The pieces on qualitative data analysis published in conjunction with the 1978 Project on Social Architecture at the Center for Policy Research in New York [Van Maanen 1983], including the theme coding exercise, were a prolegomena to a full-scale book [Miles and Huberman 1984]. In this, the methodology was refined into a system of using matrices. These were designed with different variables according to whether a descriptive or explanatory analysis was proposed. Using the entries from the theme exercise, I constructed 'descriptive' matrices with variables for the type of emotional response for a number of respondents. The entries were given a 'score', ranking the intensity of response as an equivalent to Miles' high/medium/low, rating and the intensity of response grouped by play (fig.4). The inferences which could be drawn from such a matrix were too general in nature to give any useful information about the cause and effect of response. This was largely due to the limitation imposed by using only two variables: type and intensity of response. A further matrix was constructed which attempted to show more clearly the causes and effects of responses to the ending of Bloody Poetry. Statements from interviews were represented (*) within a grid attempting to show the nature and the reason for the response (fig. 5). Similar techniques have been used by Banaka when 'codifying' statements in order to enumerate their occurrence [Banaka 1971], and Fletcher [Fletcher 1974 Appendix 1, 'Statements and Correlations']. The prominence given to the resulting 'correlation
(fig. 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sadness</th>
<th>Anger</th>
<th>Amusement</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe Egg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROADHURST</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KNIGHT</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>OT</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PAWLEY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WALMSLEY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood Brothers</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRAWFORD</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>GEORGE</td>
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<td>DEVINE</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>JENISON</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MINLAW</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Our Day Out</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MrHAYES</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>MrsHAYES</td>
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<tr>
<td>PENDLETON</td>
<td>1+1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WALKER</td>
<td>1+2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bloody Poetry</td>
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<tr>
<td>HINCHCLIFFE</td>
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<tr>
<td>LANE</td>
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<td>REEKIE</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(fig. 5)

Responses to ending of Bloody Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Made you think</th>
<th>diff end</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>unexpected</th>
<th>powerful</th>
<th>abrupt</th>
<th>ineffectual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ve</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>****</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>not remembered</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
matrix items' (tables of figures) in these studies raises doubts about the 'hidden' nature of decisions, which are themselves analytical, needing to be taken to produce the tables. In order to incorporate information about peoples' profession of the Protestant work ethic into a matrix in Fletcher's appendix, for example, the researcher has had to decide if the respondent is professing hard work as a general value. The question of how open to interpretation such professions might be is clearly paramount. In experimenting with generating my own matrices, I abandoned ones attempting to use 'spontaneous' or 'emotional' types of responses as variables since the subjectivity of deciding what is 'spontaneous', and the realisation that any response could be counted as 'emotional' seemed likely to render them meaningless.

In attempting to replicate such techniques, important reservations were formed about the validity and reliability of such methods. I found that breaking the transcripts up into discrete statements, consigning statements to particular categories, or variables were processes which were themselves open to researcher bias. The effect of presenting a series of correlation matrices, however, is to infer fixed relations between what are actually subjective elements. For example, once a response is consigned to a variable - eg. 'respondent finds ending sad (+ve/-ve/neutral response)', the significance of the relevant response may be detracted from or over simplified. This statement for instance would be entered under a (+ve) 'sad' variable:

The ending was sad. I didn't want him to take the film out of the camera at all. It spoilt it really. It didn't spoil it, but.... I suppose he couldn't really. [PENDLETON, Our Day Out]

But the most interesting and important element of this statement is the reservation expressed about the 'sadness', and the intimation of some concept of acceptable form for the play as an artefact. In cases like this, it should be possible to construct other matrices which focus on, perhaps, the reservations respondents had about the sadness. However, once this kind of sub-matrixing was attempted, so many different variables were needed to cope with the individuality of the data that a unique category was required for almost each statement (note the number of single entries fig.5). This obviously begins to defeat the object of the exercise. Even the creation of many variables for detailed and elaborate matrixing might miss important interrelations between statements (such as links between expectations of happy endings, and
intensity of emotion over sad endings, for example). Further, Banaka [1971 p34] acknowledges the importance of 'Nonverbal Relational Expressions' [see also McCall and Simmons 1969 p106], but the difficulty of incorporating such information (tone of voice, emphasis, facial expression, 'body language') into matrices is another shortcoming of the method.

Such schematic presentation of data was finally rejected in favour of 'write-ups' which themselves raise further methodological questions. Possible objections to this kind of technique are raised in Laing's [1986] overview of qualitative reporting of working-class life. The problem of insufficiently defined method in Young [1962] and Jackson and Marsden's work [1962] is noted, together with the invocation to be "terribly careful of your grip on personal sympathies" [Laing 1986 p46]. The thesis aims to meet this requirement by devoting the space to sections making the author's view as explicit as possible (in Chapter 2).

Write-ups are organised according to principles which are to be further outlined later in this chapter. In the first instance, it can be noted that sections describing responses are intended to function as relatively objective reporting - as objective as is possible within the necessary process of selection and presentation. Comments in sections where analysis of responses takes place, however, have a potentially problematic theoretical status. Remarks, for example, linking responses to cultural profile (e.g. "responses.. suggest.. a culturally induced idea of a 'proper' marriage strong enough to block out Sheila's positive qualities", p243), are not meant to assume the status of objective (e.g. scientific, legal) 'proof'. Such evaluative comments should be seen as the drawing out of one set of coherent inferences which do not preclude the possibility of other interpretations. The internal consistency and inter-dependence of such inferences are the register of their value, i.e. the inference (e.g. about marriage, above) does not jar against other factors which are inferred or known about this group. Although an alternative evaluation might be possible (e.g. they have such a cynical view of marriage that they are alienated from Sheila's tolerance of her husband), having quite the reverse implications of the first, it is much less compelling because it contradicts the other things we know about these respondents' attitudes. Sets of inferences, then are intended to
be understood in terms of their conglomeration to form a coherent overall scheme that depicts each group of responses.

In the matter of such evaluative comments two issues in particular require further clarification. In the process of making distinctions between different qualities of response, it has been necessary to use 'subjective' evaluative terms, as the only ones available for characterising such differences. It is assumed that they do have some usefulness as terms which command some consensus of meaning, even if it is subject to a great deal of relativity. Recognising that terms such as 'deeper', 'more superficial', 'more sensitive', etc. are relative in meaning, it is acknowledged that they operate within the thesis partly as registers of the author's assumptions of what 'depth', 'richness', etc. of response imply. In an important sense, the relative meaning of such terms inevitably relates to the user's individual responses. In some cases, indications are given that a most important aspect of a response is what it fails to take into account (p138, 165, 243). Such suggestions beg the question as to what evidence there is for something 'being there' in the play, if respondents have not registered it. It is conceded at once, that the only 'evidence' which can be offered is one which relies upon deference to the researcher's view, over and above the respondents'.

The practical problem of data reduction clearly remained for the write-ups. Given the vast amount of original research material collected (up to 200,000 words), the sheer reproduction of such volume would obviously leave little room for analysis and discussion in a thesis of this scale. The material is therefore quoted relatively sparingly. It was not always possible, for reasons of space, to give the full context of every quotation. Where this has been ommitted, the reader is asked to accept the assurance that extracts have not been chosen selectively or distorted in favour of the argument. The inclusion of uninterrupted and unabridged sections of transcript from interviews in Appendix B is partly intended as confirmation of this. In the body of the thesis, for concision, lexical fillers have been excised from transcript material and the main points being made by the respondent linked together with dots ... . From the following example I think it will be clear that this does not materially affect the meaning of the excerpt and where there are gaps the speaker is merely affirming the main points which are
given:
The discussion thing before it... was heavily based on the political side... I don't think that came over as strongly as I expected. And also, the women... Claire particularly, didn't seem... the strong character I expected (Mr REEKIE).
The full text, below, shows that those parts which have been omitted actually confirm Mr REEKIE's points even more strongly:
The only picture I had was what I gained from the discussion thing before it, and, er, it was less - although that was heavily based on the sort of political side of it, and the socialist side of Shelley, and yet I don't think that came over, perhaps as strongly as I expected it to from what everybody was saying about it before hand. And also, the sort of the - the women in it didn't seem as, perhaps as strong or Claire particularly didn't seem as strong as I would've expected, I mean she seemed like a bit of a, sort of follower, rather than the strong character I expected.

Encoding and Decoding
If the subject of study is 'the relationship between theatre and audience' then the existence of some 'given' which is the 'theatre' to which the audience relates has already been assumed. However, how are we to get at this 'given', in the face of the fact that it can never be reported in an unmediated fashion? This critical problem of the relationship between 'reader' and 'text' has been partly addressed by the theoretical traditions outlined earlier. In practice, studies from sociological and mass communications backgrounds suggested some of the most useful methods of analysis aimed at increasing our understanding of the ways in which 'popular' audiences relate to the media.

Encoding/Decoding models offered some of the most constructive concepts in this field. Hall argues for the importance of the encoding of the message in the overall communicative process, as well as the interpretation, or decoding, by the audience [Hall 1973]. Bennett and Woolacott use this approach to assert the importance of popular signifiers working in the same way as sophisticated ones do to affect 'decoding'. They can thus challenge the assumption that analysis of sophisticated reading must include more than the text (literary allusion...
etc), but that popular reading needs less than the text (reliance on plot etc.) [Bennett and Woolacott 1987].

Such approaches are useful attempts to locate the factors affecting diversity of interpretation in societal reasons, rather than communicative ones. But in attempting to explain the problem of 'misunderstandings' between television programmes and their audiences, Hall finds suggestions so far inadequate. His tentative view is that 'selective perception' is almost never as selective, random, or privatised, as the concept suggests. The patterns exhibit more structuring and clustering than is normally assumed [Hall 1973 p15].

The implication that misreadings at the connotative or contextual level do have a fundamentally societal basis is an important one. He suggests that to interpret what are in fact essential elements in the systematic distortions of a socio-communications system as if they were technical faults in transmission, is to misread a deep-structure process for a surface phenomenon. Morley shares this assumption in his work, which applies an encoding/decoding model to a study of the television programme, Nationwide [Morley 1980]. Arguing that the ideological discourses which, in a particular context, mediate the relations between text and reader, will influence the way a text is perceived and read, Morley gives varying reading practice a social base. He works on the principle that an individual's location within class, gender, ethnic and national relations will condition the mode of his access or exposure to the discourses which thus mediate his encounter with a text. The advantages of this approach are considerable in that it enables readings to be patterned into identifiable clusters, whose distinguishing characteristics are explained by the operation of both cultural (discursive) and structural (social positionality) factors. This implies that the 'cultural profile' of audiences may be equally, if not more, important than the manner of communication, or more idiosyncratic 'personal' factors.

Hall suggests 'ideal-type' positions from which decodings of mass communications by the audience can be made, based on an adaptation of Parkin's schema [Parkin 1972]:

**Dominant or hegemonic code** when the viewer takes the connoted meaning "full and straight" and decodes the message in terms
of the reference code in which it has been coded; 'perfectly transparent communication'.

**Negotiated code** mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: acknowledges legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations, while at a more restricted, situational level, makes its own ground rules; operates with 'exceptions' to the rule. Accords privileged position to the dominant definition of events, but reserves the right to make more negotiated application to 'local conditions'. e.g. response of worker to the notion of an Industrial Relations Bill limiting the right to strike, or to arguments for wages-freeze. At level of national interest, economic debate, he may adopt the hegemonic definition, agreeing that "we must all pay ourselves less in order to combat inflation", etc. This may have little or no relation to his willingness to go on strike for better pay and conditions, or oppose the Industrial Relations Bill at the level of his shop-floor organisation.

**Oppositional code** determines to decode the message in a globally contrary way. e.g. listening to a debate on the need to limit wages, viewer reads every mention of 'national interest' as 'class interest'.[Hall 1973 p18]

Hall’s work on these 'types' assumes that understanding responses in terms of cultural or ideological groupings is the most meaningful approach. His suggested classification of types, however, may not be entirely appropriate to the theatre audience. Because it is a mass communications model, it assumes that the type of communication under consideration is a predetermined constant. A 'theatrical event' cannot be defined, for example, in the way 'telephone call' can as a communicative act. The same piece of theatre can be perceived as an entirely different type of communication by different audience members. Their idea of what theatre is partly determines that either a 'dominant' or 'oppositional' code comes into play. There is an important duality to theatre (of actual event and theatrical illusion) of which there is no direct equivalent in mass media. This makes it unsatisfactory to understand responses wholly according to this culturally determined decoding process, although it undoubtedly plays a crucial part in the formation of responses.
Hall's 'ideal types', then, were adapted for use as a means of grouping respondents according to what seemed to be the most important decisive factor in their relationship to the production. Since they were being used to group respondents whose responses would thereafter be analysed as more or less 'negotiated' responses, his types were simplified into a scheme of accordant/disdiscordant/neutral. Even such groupings are, of course, open to the charge we have levied against 'hidden analysis'. However, the inclusion of some evaluative procedure of this sort is difficult to avoid in the interests of lucidity.

The respondent has to decide, possibly in a provisional way, but certainly at a fairly fundamental level, the degree of their accordance with the play, in order to predetermine how they are going to organise this experience, what ground rules to use. Personal bias from their individual life history may come into play and in a sense, all responses are then 'negotiated', the initial orientation having determined where to give precedence. 'Cultural' and 'personal' factors can never be completely exclusive, and the relations between the two are to be given further consideration. However, the suggestion behind the encoding/decoding model, and a working assumption for this study, is that the fundamental level of accordance between respondent and production will be best understood in cultural terms. The concept of the respondents' 'cultural profile' therefore, is used to group them as accordant/disdiscordant/neutral. Within such groupings, it was assumed that the experience of the play could be mediated by the "inner history" of the individuals, "their own history which is not identical with their social existence. It is the particular history of their encounters, their passions, joys and sorrows" [Marcuse 1979 p5].

Cultural Profiles
Audiences for theatre are conventionally classified according to the market research 'industry standard' of social classes; A, B, C1, C2, D, E. These classes are based on the occupation of the respondent's head of household: A = top level professional, B = senior management, junior professional, C1 = non-manual 'white collar' workers, C2 = skilled manual workers, D = unskilled manual workers, E = recipients of only state benefits. It is recognised that this somewhat problematic classification can produce anomalies such as a wife who is a headteacher (A), being classified according to her husband's occupation as a postman
(D). However, the shortcomings of this system are tolerated in the industry due to the requirement for continuity; it permits comparison from survey to survey over a period of years because it is assumed that "clearly occupational grouping is less likely to vary over the years so provides a more stable method of measurement" [Survey Research Associates 1983].

This classification has become an institution in commercially motivated large scale market research operations. It is used by the business world as a profitable way of targeting groups who have the financial resources to buy their products (e.g. witness the Sunday Times' proud boast to their potential advertisers: "we have more A,B,C1 readers than any other paper"). Such classification may well be appropriate to product purchase, and it has been widely used in surveys of theatre audiences where the emphasis has been on the marketing of a night out at the theatre (where a night out at the theatre is the equivalent of a consumer experience). However, it seems unwise to assume that occupation (income) will be the decisive element in the nature and quality of responses to theatre. Fletcher has pointed out [Fletcher 1974 p163] that a reliance on such class difference slides from sociology into demography when we consider the running equation:

\[
\text{class differences} \times \text{occupational positions} \times \text{adult male workers}.
\]

The methodology for this research has been formulated in the light of the assertion that, "It cannot be said strongly enough, occupation is not class" [ibid. p164]. Used properly, the concept of social class can be a useful one. Goldmann's notion of a 'world vision' is a more satisfactory way of identifying social groups:

the complex of hopes and feelings linking members of a social group, opposing them to other groups [Goldmann 1970 p17]

It is such 'hopes and feelings' that the study aims to consider, and the question of the "relation between one of the world visions and the characters and things created in a particular work" [ibid. p314] is one it hopes to address.

The terms 'working class', or more frequently, 'middle class' have been used occasionally as the best terms available to denote certain types of outlook. Such terms are undoubtedly less than satisfactory and rapidly becoming more so. However, the respondents themselves do seem to be aware of some kind of stratification, a feeling of belonging within a
hierarchy, and it is for this reason that these terms are sometimes pressed into service. Even then, it is assumed that 'class' may refer more importantly to attitudes than to traditional socio-economic factors.

The interviews in this study were designed to explore the expectations, satisfactions, emotional and intellectual involvement which formed responses. It was assumed that the elements of social and personal experience and background which were likely to form a part of the relations between respondent and stage would be wide ranging. More interesting insights seemed likely if the interrelations of such a range of elements were not excluded in favour of an emphasis on occupation.

The responses, then, are discussed in terms of their relation to what are best characterised as cultural influences. Occupation may be a part of these influences, and therefore it is included (specifically in Appendix A), but not necessarily because of its financial implications (e.g. p117 and 242). Occupation, however is only one of a number of cultural influences which might also include, education, leisure opportunities, neighbourhood, etc. Information forming the basis of conventional classification has also been included (Appendix B), but I think it can be seen that it is less useful in this study than the kind of grouping which has been used. These things are likely to help shape a respondent's broad 'philosophy', the basis of their relationship with the natural, religious, political and social world.

The interviews themselves have provided the information for the cultural profiles. The Accordant/Discordant/Neutral partitions based on them essentially group the responses, as opposed to some predetermined characteristics of the respondents. That is to say, that the groupings are retrospectively imposed as determined by the indications of the raw data collected. In talking about particular plays, or general attitudes to theatre, respondents have revealed important fundamental 'biases'. For example, the way FARMER talked about her visits to the theatre as a 'girls' night out' identifies an attitude to female roles which will affect her responses to the kind of female characters who appear on stage. This kind of proclivity characterises the cultural profile; attitudes to such things as class, race, religion, the family and marriage.
If we accept to some extent the pervasiveness of predominant ideology, this must obviously have a pronounced effect on such notions. For example, FARMER’s view of her own working class background seems to have been subject to a certain amount of stereotyping (see p137) and this must be expected to be a factor if she subsequently feels able to 'speak from experience' about the shortcomings of working class family life. The identification of such cultural factors helps to indicate the biases in a respondent’s outlook on life.

Sociologists have identified 'implicational profiles' in such factors - i.e. if respondent holds belief 'A', he is likely to also to hold 'B', etc. Social psychologists also recognise that individuals tend to have an 'across the board' bias; i.e. if they are patriotic, they are also likely to be religious, family orientated, and anti-feminist [e.g. Brown 1963 p60], suggesting that it is possible to group sets of attitudes into those broadly of the left or right:

Those who incline strongly towards radicalism or conservatism in any one of the fields tested are likely to exhibit a corresponding attitude in the other fields also. [ibid. p59]

In the light of this, it has to be said that whilst we may find evidence that the veil of ideology cast over the perception of respondents is not impenetrable, nevertheless it forms a crucial background to any cultural profile. This means that attitudes will often be grouped according to greater or lesser degrees of conservatism. But this question of the relative importance of ideological and cultural factors is beset by the terminological problem associated with 'ideology' and 'culture'. This has been a major stumbling block to some of the most well-known authorities in the field:

One of the most important theoretical difficulties impeding the development of the study of culture and ideology is the absence of any generally agreed vocabulary through which to conceptualise the internal economy of the cultural and ideological spheres and the relationships between them. The lack of any clear differentiation of meaning between the concepts of culture and ideology is symptomatic of this [Bennett 1980 p17].

It would be wildly optimistic to attempt to offer to resolve such a durable problem here. Rather, like Bennett, we must settle for "a latent
duality of meaning - a sense that they denote related but not identical aspects of a shared set of processes and relationships [ibid.]".

Some 'culturally' induced attitudes will be more deeply held than others. Some of them will also be rooted in what may formally be differentiated as personal experience. Such is the overlap between cultural and personal influences that it is never possible to say that either one or the other has been wholly formative of some particular bias. The kind of differentiation which is being used as an aid to understanding this material is perhaps best inferred by example.

It is possible, for instance to understand Mr HAYES's responses to Our Day Out in terms of his cultural profile as a middle-aged married family man, who has had only basic secondary schooling and works as a fireman. In the most simplistic sense, he might be said to have a 'working class' cultural profile which could inform his responses to the play. Clues such as his interest in football matches might support this. However, some of his responses might be best understood in terms of his very particular personal history and experience. Whilst his occupation as a fireman may be part of his cultural profile, it has also provided him with acute personal experiences of going into all types of housing conditions and meeting people from all backgrounds under stressful conditions. The fact of his being married, and a father, introduces certain cultural expectations about the roles of husband and wife, the institutions of marriage, and the family. But his personal history of the relationship between himself and his wife who is notably better educated than him, is a factor to be taken into consideration.

It is impossible to make hard and fast rules about what may be considered as part of a 'cultural' or a 'personal' profile. Does HAYES' interest in football and his habit of attending matches suggest particular types of cultural influence, or is his 30 years of standing on the terraces a part of his personal history? In some cases it is more obvious. FARMER, for example, reveals the cultural influences of being brought up in the back streets of a run down Liverpool estate in her responses to Blood Brothers. Quite different from this kind of attitude is the way her personal experience of divorce has permeated her view of the theatre. An argument could be made for the institution of divorce as a cultural influence as much as for marriage, perhaps. But it is
difficult to see the far-reaching bitterness in FARMER's attitudes towards the female role in relationships and in society in general, as anything other than a result of her personal experience of a particularly acrimonious divorce. However even a 'personal' factor like this must, in some sense, be culturally determinate. It is bounded by the culture in the sense that the experience of divorce happens to FARMER within a culture in which 'divorce' is recognised. She could not have these feelings in a culture where 'divorce' was neither known nor understood. Having said this, her divorce is probably best understood as a 'personal' factor, since there is no evidence that her feelings are a direct consequence of the fact that divorce exists in our culture. Rather the evidence suggests that they are a consequence of particular individualised experiences, which are not generalisable in any meaningful way to all divorced people.

It is important to recognise, then, that personal history can overlap with and reinforce cultural influences. It can also occasionally come into conflict with them. While JENNINGS struggles to maintain the apparent tolerance and sympathy towards the handicapped which her cultural profile suggests is the only appropriate response, confusion and contradiction are revealed in her comments. She indicates that she has had some personal experience of the trauma involved in caring for a handicapped person, and it is possible that this prevents her making the bland assertions about how the handicapped should be cared for which characterise the cultural values of the accordant group.

Since it is impossible to incorporate all the subtle variations of attitude which can be manifest by different individuals, groups have been identified on the basis of simple broad demarcations which are not meant to be prescriptive or predictive, but only a means to the end of discussion. Particular information about individual influences may be interesting and helpful (they may be used as additional evidence in support of chosen groupings), but it is the resultant underlying attitude which most importantly informs responses. For example, POWNER expresses critical opinions about the sort of people who let their children run riot in the streets, do not mind being out of work and irresponsibly get into debt. These kind of comments enable us group her responses with those of others revealing similar notions. The group might in this case be characterised as holding a belief in a kind of
basic meritocracy, in which all get their just desserts. The responses of this group can be contrasted with those of a group whose underlying conviction is that society has a responsibility to care for those who are in some way disadvantaged. Analysis along these lines aims to discover the nature and importance of the effect that cultural influences may have on the way these groups respond to a play. Proceeding from this, the methodology allows for some assessment of the theatricality employed by the author and presenters, from the respondents' point of view. This is necessary to the further aim of exploring the possibility that the importance of cultural influences might be such as to impose significant limitations on the potential effects of the theatricality. This, however, is a proposal to be addressed more fully elsewhere.

It is not the aim of this thesis to present a series of profiles as a social psychology study, as this might be expected to provide more information about respondents' individuality than about responses to theatre. Accordant/Discordant/Neutral groupings were preferred over psycho/political distinctions which might form part of a social-psychological approach. The preferred groupings try to identify the aspect of a respondent's cultural profile which has been most decisive in shaping their responses to a particular play, which is then used as a framework for analysis. This method reflects the shifting variables of both sides of the dynamic which is the relationship between stage and audience.

Although the types of information traditionally used to show the sociological position of respondents in surveys have been noted (age, sex, occupation, education etc.), the interviews show that these factors are not of primary importance. They may have a marginal bearing on responses; for instance, when looking at WALDEN's responses it is worth bearing in mind that he went to University. Because of such marginal bearing, this information is included in Appendix A. The factors which are of most importance however are not so easily catalogued.

Often the overbearing factor is of a more individualised nature, e.g. the respondent is involved in amateur dramatics, he goes to the theatre every week. Or something in a personal history might be the decisive factor (e.g. FARMER, divorce). These are the things which suggest the
respondent's attitude to theatre and they cannot be satisfactorily summarised. Hence they have been included in the text, where they need to be, to promote our understanding of responses. Such factors are inseparable from the respondent's identity, as their attitude to theatre is a part of their self-image. Because of this, the categories which have been used are not as clear cut as they may appear; they do overlap. This is to be expected since attempts to categorise people almost always meet the possibility of defeating their own objects. It has been my experience in the course of this work that the individual personal experiences of respondents which form their outlook on life, or their personality, mean that they resist grouping in any rigid formal way. The problem remains that attempting to assign respondents to particular types of sociological or cultural group can produce more 'exceptional' than 'typical' cases.

Where sufficient similarities can be seen to justify making a loose grouping, however, it is better to make the grouping than not to. In spite of the overlap, there is sufficient difference between them to make the groups useful. As suggested, Accordant/Discordant groupings make similar distinctions to Hall's Dominant and Oppositional codes. It is always difficult to differentiate between how much someone is responding to an actual play on stage, and how much to its social milieu, but a guide to the grouping of Neutral respondents was the assumption that the importance of the social event took precedence for them over levels of accordancy with the play. Ultimately, however, these groupings are purely managerial devices to which no theoretical import is attached.

Analysis was carried out play by play, with discussion of each play divided into four sections: Consensus, Responses, Profiles and Commentary. The concept of the cultural profile and accordant/discordant groupings has been introduced at some length as it forms a necessarily innovative basis to the problem of analysis of the interview material. The Commentary sections provide the opportunity to discuss points arising from the description and analysis of data, the more general significance of which might otherwise have been lost in the individual sections. The idea of the Consensus and the sections reporting Responses are now outlined.
Consensus

The encoding/decoding models were a valuable contribution to the method of identifying some of the most important 'starting positions' from which responses were to be understood. However, they rely on the idea of a 'preferred reading', against which the diversity of encodings and decodings can be measured. In practice I have developed a degree of scepticism about the usefulness of ideas such as the 'preferred reading'. The use of a 'preferred reading' against which to compare actual audience responses can create as many problems as it solves. It assumes a degree of determinacy from the author, and reliability in the critic's interpretation, which cannot always be taken for granted. Some of Beckett's plays, for example, illustrate the argument for there being no such thing as any 'preferred reading'.

Having said this, the study requires the imposition of some artificial demarcation in order to describe the theatrical presentation on paper at all. I have preferred to use the starting point of the audience themselves in defining the 'given theatre', rather than a more conventional 'critical analysis'. This was considered appropriate to the underlying assumption of the study that the 'meaning' of theatre is inextricable from its relationship with its audience. An impression of a 'consensus' view of the play as it came across from the respondents, is therefore offered. Even this is open to the possibility of distortion because of the unavoidable subjectivity of the researcher as s/he reports. It has therefore been kept as broadly based as possible, covering basically those levels of understanding of the play which are believed to be necessary in order to render the relations between stage and audience meaningful at all.

There are difficulties in defining aspects of performed drama through audience reports, and then attempting an evaluation of that audience's responses to those aspects. Apart from the possibility of circularity, there is the problem of differentiating between 1) those statements which are to be used to define the 'given event' (i.e. theatrical event), and 2) those which are to be used to analyse the 'depth' or 'meaning' of the experience for the audience. In some cases particular audience statements may come into both categories. It is often almost impossible to separate discussion of the play from that of its audience, as would be expected since the actual subject of the study is the
dynamic relationship between the two. But if no distinction is attempted, the possibility of repetitive and unfocussed argument becomes a problem. It is assumed here that some artificial demarcation is required, although it is not possible for it always to be rigidly adhered to. Such formality is nearly always a necessary compromise, but in this case it is emphatically not its intention to imply an autonomous critical evaluation since behind it is the standpoint that 'audience' is as essential to an understanding of theatre as 'text'. It is worth noting again, that these kinds of difficulties, which are inherent in the nature of this study, seem not to have been thoroughly addressed in any significant body of alternative works to which reference can be made for guidance.

Responses
Interview material was partitioned according to Miles' suggestion that discriminating between descriptive versus explanatory intent is of primary importance [Miles 1984 p211], although a clear dividing line between the two is again necessarily an artificial one. The interview material is dealt with in sections which aim firstly, to give the Consensus, secondly to "lay out data to see what’s there" ('Responses'), and thirdly to "extract some explanations as to why things happen as they do [ibid.]" ('Profiles' and 'Commentary'). It was hoped that at least this division would make the status of material clearer, i.e. whether it was a description or report of response, an interpretation, claim, or theory.

Categories used to organise the reporting of Responses ('Theatricality', 'Theme', etc.) were imposed post hoc. It is recognised that these are problematical notions in the study of text and that 'theatricality' and 'theme' always overlap and can only be notionally separated. It should be clear that they are not meant to suggest that there is something called 'Theatricality' etc., which the respondent was asked to identify. These terms are used simply to help in the grouping of responses to facilitate their reporting and discussion. Likewise, where subtitles ('Politics', 'Women's roles', etc.) have been used, these were not presented as subjects for interrogation ("I would like to know what you thought of the politics of the play....."). Such subtitles are primarily for administrative convenience. The material itself suggested these fairly obvious and natural splits. If additional research should support
the idea that there are facets of audience response that can be partitioned, the present work shows it might make sense to partition along such lines as 'theatricality', etc. Any claim one might be inclined to make for these categories as part of the methodology would go no further than this. It is emphasised again that the driving forces of the methodology were the central questions at the core of the interview plan and the aims of the research.

Summary

Ultimately, it was not possible to find, in any of the literature which was consulted, a satisfactory methodological model for analysis of the interview material. After looking at the overview of methodology for qualitative data analysis, I felt that most suggestions frustrated that concern which Miles originally voiced, not be stuck with numbers, and yet to "transcend story-telling" [Miles 1979 p600]. Despite the usefulness of his subsequent attempts to devise satisfactory methods of analysis, there seem to be no wholly convincing responses to his original conclusion that

- the actual process of analysis during case-writing was essentially intuitive, primitive and unmanageable in any rational sense [ibid.]

It has to be said that these characteristics of qualitative data analysis are difficult to avoid and will almost inevitably manifest themselves at times in the analysis of the kind of interview material generated in this study. The potential gains of such analysis, however, are believed to be sufficiently meaningful to merit the exercise.
Notes:

1. It is merely Osgood et al's idea of a 7 point scale which is being made use of here, not their 'factor - analysis' method, which is computationally elaborate without casting light on matters of detail.

2. As some assurance that those interviewed were not improbably unrepresentative, the details of their age, sex, occupation etc. can be are given in Appendix A, together with some comparable details of other theatre audiences and the population at large.

3. This kind of finding has also been supported by work in cognitive psychology, eg. the process of remembering - the parts of the story which are remembered are those which the rememberer's culture has encouraged him to remember [Bartlett 1932, Neisser 1982].

CHAPTER FOUR: BLOOD BROTHERS by WILLY RUSSELL

SYNOPSIS

A musical, Blood Brothers was presented by the resident company in the main auditorium of Derby Playhouse in May 1984. The play had met with considerable success when first performed at the Liverpool Playhouse in January 1983, with Barbara Dickson as Mrs Johnstone (locally, it had been enthusiastically received at Nottingham Playhouse in April 1984).

The narrator opens the play with the story of two brothers who are separated at birth and prefigures their deaths. Pregnant single mother, Mrs Johnstone, is shown struggling to provide for her seven children whilst being constantly in debt. Delivered of twins and unable to cope with another two mouths to feed, she gives one of her babies to the barren Mrs Lyons, a woman she cleans for in a better class district. Her sympathy for Mrs Lyons and concern for the child’s best chance in life is almost overcome by her longing to keep her baby, but Mrs Lyons makes Mrs Johnstone swear on the bible, terrifying her with the saying that "if either twin learns that he was one of a pair, they shall both immediately die" [Russell 1985 p13]. Subsequent scenes show Eddie’s childhood with the Lyons, and Mickey’s with the Johnstones, but when they are seven, the two boys accidentally meet and become friends. Discovering that they have the same birthday, they vow to be 'blood brothers', although both mothers endeavour to keep them apart.

Act Two begins with the boys now aged fourteen. Mickey’s elder brother, Sammy, is on the dole and has been in trouble with the police. He tries to involve Mickey in a knifepoint robbery on the school bus, but Mickey refuses. At school, Mickey finds the lessons a waste of time, and is embarrassed by constant and public declarations of love from his childhood friend, Linda. He feels the same about her, but is far too shy to respond. Mickey, Linda and Eddie spend happy days going around as a threesome. Meanwhile, Mrs Lyons has become paranoid about Eddie’s attachment to the Johnstones. She tries to buy off Mrs Johnstone, threatening her with a knife.

Eddie announces to his friends that he is off to University. It is clear that he will miss Linda badly. But he settles for prompting Mickey into action and as Eddie leaves, Mickey and Linda are in each others arms at
last. Linda soon falls pregnant and a shotgun wedding ensues. Almost immediately, Mickey is made redundant from the local factory. When Eddie comes home for Christmas, the contrast between his affluence and tales of a high life at University are too much for Mickey, who rejects him with some bitterness. Sammy offers Mickey the chance of easy money by acting as look-out during a robbery, which he cannot resist. The robbery goes badly wrong when Sammy loses his head and starts shooting. For his part, Mickey is sent to prison, where he sinks into clinical depression and becomes dependent on tranquillisers.

Eddie, meanwhile, unaware of Mickey and Linda’s hurried wedding, makes an untimely declaration of the feelings he has always had for her. She says that she has felt almost the same, but gives him the news that now she is Mickey’s wife.

When Mickey is released from prison, Linda is desperate to do something about his addiction and depression by finding him a job and a home of their own. She turns to Eddie, now Councillor, Lyons, for help and a "light romance" [Russell 1985 p65] between them becomes an escape for Linda from the problems and drudgery of her life with Mickey. The deranged Mrs Lyons finds out about this and tells Mickey about it. He goes berserk at the news, he grabs Sammy’s gun and runs off in search of Eddie, finally confronting him in the council chambers. He rails about the unfairness of the fact that Eddie has so much more out of life than he and that what he does have - his home and his job - are beholden to Councillor Lyons. Imagining that the only things which are really his own - his wife and child - may belong to Eddie too, he is about to shoot at him when Mrs Johnstone rushes in. She stops him by telling him that Eddie is really his own brother. Uncontrollable with rage at the realisation that "I could have been him!" [Russell 1985 p69], Mickey allows the gun to go off, killing Eddie before the police open fire killing Mickey as well.

The narrator provides the epilogue, with Mrs Johnstone, then the whole company concluding the play with an emotional rendition of the theme song, "Tell Me It’s Not True".
Among respondents who had seen Russell plays, there was a sense of the 'rules of engagement' for his type of theatre. There is an element of having to accept these ground rules in order to get anything out of the play. It must be emphasised that Russell is one of Britain's most popular contemporary playwrights (in terms of attendance figures). All respondents had some prior knowledge of Russell, some notion of what to expect and what their obligations as audience were likely to be.

The play as entertainment was fundamental to these ground rules. The emphasis on the entertainment value of this show is partly explained by an attitude predominant throughout all interviews; that entertainment is expected from theatre – as well as, and often rather than, education, intellectual stimulation, etc. But respondents had a predetermined idea of Russell's plays in particular as entertainment. There was much anticipation of having 'a good night out'. The experience was expected to be a diversion from the workaday world and a relaxation. Respondents as we shall see, gave the impression throughout that they felt their role as audience was to sit back, relax and let themselves get carried away by the play. The fact that Russell's plays were musicals obviously added to the impression of an evening of light-hearted enjoyment.

In view of the 'light-hearted', 'entertainment' qualities expected of Russell's plays, it seems, at first, inconsistent that respondents should also identify a strong emotional impact as an important element. However, it is crucial to an understanding of the relationship between Russell's plays and their audiences that this possibility of 'the best of both worlds' is recognised. The emotional aspects of his plays are partly seen as an aid to 'getting carried away' (i.e. from the tedium or troubles of reality). But there was also a consensus that the heightening of the emotions is inherently a good thing. Emotional impact was seen as giving the play a greater value than that of mere entertainment (see also discussion of 'accordant' respondents, Chapter 6). Respondents found it difficult to analyse what this greater value was, but it was what made Blood Brothers in particular so much more remarkable than others they had seen.

'Naturalistic' is a convenient description of the level of illusion registered by respondents. This level was expected firstly because of...
prior knowledge of this well-known playwright. Secondly, the conventions were characteristic of those most often used at this type of civic playhouse (i.e. proscenium arch or at least an imaginary fourth wall, where actors pretend that the audience do not exist, setting and situation signified by recognisable physical props rather than abstract symbols). It is worth noting, however, that even within such 'conventional' conventions, some respondents found the level of illusion at variance with their expectations, e.g. "I don't need to see four walls. Representing a room with a chair and a lamp is quite sufficient" (Mr. JENISON) and "you've got to get away from the television, where you see all the rooms, ...after a while I could imagine they were different rooms instead of a little brick wall" (POWNER).

The plausibility of the plot was not questioned by any of the respondents. This was because the power of circumstances ('fate') was universally acknowledged. Respondents therefore accepted the series of 'circumstances' as determining events. Other important elements were the presentation of recognisable 'realistic' characters, and the 'good story', with 'a beginning, a middle and an end'. The respondents shared assumptions with the play about what conventions would be observed, such as definite plot with satisfactory resolution, and representation of social 'norms' (e.g. strict schoolmasters and policemen, women characters for whom family and children are most important). These elements are all defining characteristics of narrative, rather than theatre, and they give prior notice of the priority given to good narrative as a distinguishing feature of Russell's work.

The play presented two extremes of social class. They were fairly obvious as stereotypes in the sense that respondents referred to 'the rich family', or 'the poor family', etc. The discriminations of the class system were established as hard and fast rules of the play, and the terms in which it was to be meaningful to respondents. Most respondents authenticated the importance of these class distinctions by identifying with either one 'side' or the other. They felt that the basis of understanding the play was in this taking of sides. In order to be on the 'right' (i.e. Russell's) side, a degree of liberalism would be necessary. This was most clearly identifiable as a sympathy for 'the people', or the 'working class'. Respondents acknowledged certain
assumptions about class distinctions which made acceptable the extremes of social class which Russell presented.

Finally, the most conspicuous element in overall response to the play, was the manifest enjoyment and enthusiasm with which people talked about it. Respondents conveyed such a powerful sense that they had seen a uniquely successful play that research plans were altered in order to investigate this phenomenon (see p63).
RESPONSES
Theatricality
Emotional Impact
Respondents stressed the importance of the emotional responses they had to Blood Brothers by frequently referring to them, and by identifying this as what made the play different and so much better than others they had seen. The remarkable emotional impact of Blood Brothers is unusual in being even more important to respondents than authenticity, or 'realism'. It was the way in which the play stimulated the emotions which elicited such an enthusiastic response (respondents interviewed about Our Day Out ratified these comments about the emotional qualities in Blood Brothers, which were important reasons for their attendance at a second Russell play). Respondents identified responses both of great joy, and of sadness. The nature of the emotion was less important than its intensity and the intensity was spoken about with unusual conviction:

  COOK: I didn't cry, though it was a bit emotional...the shock at the end stopped me getting upset, otherwise I might have done.
  GEORGE: Oh it was great, it was wonderful that was...just kids enjoying themselves...it was just tremendous fun, I was just - a big grin all over my face when that was on, it was lovely.
  CRAWFORD: I nearly did [cry]. ...I mean its absolutely tragic and pathetic when he says that ... I was incapable of talking about it for a good 15 minutes or so afterwards, it really did take me away, more than most plays.

Respondents reported that the music had been an important factor in making them feel emotional:

  Mrs JENISON: You just couldn't have got across all those emotions without the music, it would've been impossible with just the words.
  GEORGE: ..the emotional bit comes over in the music much more

The final scene with the song 'Say it isn’t true' was a good example of this, where some members of the audience as well as the leading lady, could be seen in tears. The music was crucial in orchestrating the upsurge of sentiment accompanying the finale. The danger of stimulating gratuitous emotion in this way presents itself if we consider Bentley’s opinion that, "music, I think, cannot even embody the intention of
making people find their way of life bankrupt [Bentley 1985 p53]". In
due course it will be suggested that it is not only the use of music
which might remove the possibility of disturbance accompanying such
emotion.

The fluctuation of emotional response was significant, since the
contrast of one emotion against another enhanced enjoyment. GEORGE
describes the ebb and flow of emotions washing over him quite
graphically:

Just could've laughed and cried at the same time, ...I felt
everything, it just pulled me all over the place... it was
just sort of bring them up, then we'll take them down a bit,
with sad songs...".

It is possible that these swings from sadness to joy added to the
intensity of emotion. These did not seem, however, to be feelings which
might be found to be draining, or an emotional strain. Some responses
suggested that the play was liked because it carried one along
effortlessly in its tides of emotion, thereby taking the 'work' out of
it and allowing the respondent to remain fairly passive:

POWER: I find them, relaxing, rather than a heavy play that
you've got to really listen and concentrate.

FARMER: It's nice to relax. You don't want to have to work
hard.

Realism
In terms of the frequency and emphasis of comment, the 'realism' of the
play was the next most important factor for respondents. 'Realism' is
being used here to describe what respondents identified as making the
play 'realistic', life-like, believable (for fuller definition see p41).

One fairly obvious reason why respondents applauded Russell's 'eye for
detail' is that it imparts interest and authenticity to improbable or
merely mundane plot and character. In common with Bentley [1965], we
could say that this is enjoyable for an audience because it invests the
trivial details of everyday life with a significance which, while we
would probably not go so far as to say, in this case, is 'cosmic', is
nevertheless, enhanced by its dramatisation. This in itself is
reassuring, because it assures the audience that the mundanities which
perforce consume such a proportion of time and energy, are in fact
meaningful, and not purposeless. The manifestations of the 'eye for detail' in words and images of the play are also attractive for their simplicity. The larger than life details are allowed to stand in for the whole. They have the pretension of showing 'reality', when in fact they show only blown up fragments, and not the complex relationships existing between these parts - an aspect which will give rise to further discussion.

The fact that the play concerned itself with what was recognisably close to home - a world the respondents themselves inhabit - was something they liked. Respondents saw presentations of people or situations in the play which they could verify themselves from their own experience. They spoke of recognising things in the dramatic portrayal as being just like things they had seen in reality e.g.

- MINLAW: I can remember it being just like that on the council estates....
- FARMER: I'm from Liverpool and I can see it all, its just like I know from my Nan's house. I can see it all terribly true.
- CRAWFORD: I played cowboys and indians and all that when I was a kid.. I mean I could relate to a lot of that
- COOK: The characters seem like real people.

Respondents were impressed and enthusiastic about the production's capacity to produce a verisimilitude of what life is really like. In particular, there was a sense in which Russell was accorded a genuineness - his 'eye for detail' was connected with an idea that he is 'in touch' with ordinary people:

- MINLAW: I think he's a man for the people really, isn't he. Its life. ...this man, he really knows.

The satisfactions of the perceived 'realism' appeared to be twofold. Firstly, it was because respondents were all very convinced of the 'realism' of the play, that they were happy to invest their emotion in it - clearly it had an important influence on the level of involvement which became possible for the respondents. Secondly, respondents enjoyed the display of professional skill in the imitative act:

- MINLAW: I liked it when the adults dressed up as babies - that big bloke in the romper suit, and he had it off to a T, with all the right knee-crooking movements and everything.
- GEORGE: You get some six-footer or whatever he is, out there,
dressed as a six year old and it's just fun.

COOK: I couldn't get over that bloke as the baby. He was the biggest bloke there, and he was just a baby, he was a perfect baby.

Bentley identifies mimetic performance as an important gratification of theatre arguing that there is satisfaction to be gained simply from observing 'the laws of nature defied by human prowess' in imitation [Bentley 1965 p154]. Respondents were least impressed when the credibility of the pretence broke down because an actor adopted a number of different roles on stage (e.g. POWNER: "I found it difficult to get into watching people changing parts..."). But the more difficult the imitation, the more impressive it is, which is why the most positive response was to the adults masquerading as children, and why the 'biggest bloke there' was the one they all remembered. FARMER's appreciation that "you get to see the actors afterwards when they come into the bar. I like to see that they're just normal people, I think", also implies a fascination with their mimetic skills. Bentley points out that Aristotle established this interest in sheer reproduction or mimesis as an inherent human quality:

The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood... he is the most imitative of living creatures...
Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is...that they find themselves saying..."Yes, that is he". [Bentley 1965 p9]

The number of affirmations which come through in the Russell interviews as respondents...'find themselves saying "Yes, that is he"' marks out Russell's theatre from the other plays studied.

Plot

A recognisably ordered plot was an important prerequisite in the enjoyment of any play for some respondents. POWNER expressed her frustration and dislike of inconclusive endings; it was imperative that the play end decisively and that she knew what had happened. Happy or unhappy endings were acceptable, providing there was a conclusion of some sort. Despite the fact that this play had irregularly revealed its ending at the beginning, which in itself was incomprehensible to POWNER ("I'd rather not have known. But then lots of plays are like that now aren't they, they put the end at the beginning and then do the story. I don't know what the point of it is"), at least it fulfilled the all important function of resolution:
POWNER: I thought it was a good ending, because you knew what’d happened, I can’t bear plays and films where...it could’ve gone on... they annoy me (giggles)...oh what a stupid ending (laughs) ...as long as it ends... I know they can’t all end happy.

The ending achieved a high degree of satisfaction among respondents. COOK and FARMER were both very happy with it (in sharp contrast to responses to the ending of Bloody Poetry):

COOK: The way it was done, it was still surprising at the end. You knew what was going to happen and it didn’t cheat you. I was glad it did finish as it began or I’d have felt really cheated.

FARMER: Yes, you were satisfied with it. What I can’t stand is when they leave it in the air and you have to make your own mind up... I come away, absolutely keyed up, thinking, I wonder. It loses its entertainment then because I don’t like to decide for myself.

Even so, there was still one respondent who was prepared to make the 'confession' (cf. WALMSLEY, Joe Egg p216) that he would have preferred a happy ending:

Mr JENISON: I have to admit that even though I’d seen the ending at the beginning, I did secretly hope they'd find some way out of it.

This crucial sense of an ending is again a narrative feature, rather than a theatrical one. Its implications as a convention which imposes artificial order and therefore can never show 'reality', have been thoroughly addressed by Kermode [1967]. Certainly the desire for resolution is explicitly related to 'entertainment' here. This is easy to identify as an opportunity for escapism, in 'play', from the the problematic disorder of reality ('work'). Other responses, however, will reveal that the concept of escapism can also be applied to apparently opposite effect (see p140-141).

The plot was enticing. FARMER and COOK both enjoyed the "rollicking good story". Mr JENISON's involvement with the story was such that he was "dying for the interval to be over to get back to it". This is a rare instance of the predominance of theatricality over social event - allusion to interesting events before/ after/ during the interval is much more common. The 'naturalistic' flow of the storyline (another
narrative feature) was important and respondents appreciated the deference of the musical element to the continuity of the plot:

FARMER: the songs sort of came into it naturally, and they carried on with the action while they were doing them.

CRAWFORD: it was incidental. It wasn’t like going to see West Side Story or something like that, where the songs are so, showy.

In fact the high points of the play for respondents were focussed on musical or rhetorical interludes like the 'Cross your fingers' song (FARMER, Mrs JENISON and GEORGE) and the 'ideal youth' scene (CRAWFORD). Significantly, these were not obviously connected to any climax of plot. They were rather set pieces, enjoyed for their own sake because they were "fun", "lively", or nostalgic. Although FARMER thought that they "came into it naturally", they did not in fact arise out of plot-related high points (e.g. the wedding, the robbery). The finale song, however (high point for Mr JENISON, MINLAW and DEVINE), was an obvious example of one dramatised musical interlude which did coincide with a plot climax.

Oddly, the fact that respondents "knew what was going to happen" seemed to make them more interested in the plot, rather than bored with the predictability as might be expected. Showing of the ending at the beginning of the play actually increased satisfacton for some:

MINLAW: The thing I liked about it was that it was predictable. There couldn’t have been another ending; it would always have been there.

GEORGE: it was very predictable, not in detail, but you know, roughly, the plot, you could see it coming.

CRAWFORD: I found it pretty predictable... but that didn’t spoil my enjoyment.

The device of showing the ending at the beginning also helped to heighten interest and concentration throughout the show. The JENISONs specifically mentioned the heightened sense of awareness created by the opening; it gave significance to things which they might otherwise have missed, made them notice more details throughout the play:

Mr JENISON: It made you notice all the little things all the way through the play, the giggles, the jealousy - and you might have missed it if there hadn’t been that kind of a beginning.
The fact that respondents were happy with the predictability of the plot is an interesting finding. Not least, because Eco suggests that this is characteristic of the 'plotted pleasures' of the 'average reader' [Eco 1961]. Claiming James Bond novels exhibit invariant plot structure, which narrates the Already Known, Eco contends that the 'average' reader derives pleasure, 'simply from following the minimal variations by which the victor realises his objective'. The Bond plots are structurally uniform and in fact, merely a variant of the archetypal structure of traditional fairy tale as outlined by Propp [Propp 1968 p.23 - basic plot elements of the fairytale consist in the functions performed by its central protagonists; hero, villain, etc., in developing action of story]. It seems, then, that this play shares characteristics which all feature strongly in narrative theory.

Given such predictability, interest in the plot can not be explained by suspense (e.g. as in a 'Whodunnit'). The importance of fluctuating emotional tone suggests that what the storyline did offer was the suspense of not knowing what kind of mood the audience would be subject to next. The movement through the plot of moods of jubilation, wistfulness, fun, fear, romanticism, and sorrow, made the play 'lively' and gave it 'pace'.

The Narrator
Theatrical reasons could be responsible for the emphasis on 'fate' in the plot. Dramatic effects are achieved using the Narrator to suggest weighty meaning for quite trivial events. Russell and the producers of the play create a very powerful role here. His pregnant utterances are given the benefit of spotlighting and music to support their importance. A black-leather-clad brooding figure, lurking always in the background, his forcefully delivered refrains are accompanied by dramatic lighting effects and pounding, assertive music [Russell 1985 p8, p67]. He is a virtual personification of Fate as a physical presence dominating the other characters on stage. These interludes were memorable for respondents and elicited positive responses. Russell succeeds in what was presumably his intention with the Narrator's role - respondents reported sustained enjoyment which showed their interest and alertness remained high throughout the show.
Responses to the Narrator were universally positive. When asked why they particularly liked the inclusion of this character, however, respondents gave inconsistent reasons. It was suggested that he made the story easier to follow:

POWNER: I think he added parts that you didn't see ... and he told the story... you don't have to think of the story for yourself if he tells you.

The predictability of the story has been noted and here, even in the next breath, POWNER says that really this kind of function was unnecessary:

...I knew what was going to happen, yes once the children got playing together, I think it was easy to guess then what was going to happen.

POWNER herself is not conscious of this contradiction. She retains her idea that he 'told the story'. The JENISONS, who may have been more 'tuned in' to such techniques because of their involvement in amateur dramatics, were more aware of the Narrator as theatrical device. They thought it was "clever to always have him on stage and part of the action". Since they were unable to expand upon this 'cleverness', this seems to be an example of admiration for the theatrical craft for its own sake (and can be compared to appreciation of the different character 'sketches' in Joe Egg - WALMSELY: "It was very, very clever"). GEORGE's description seems to suggest that the Narrator's role is to spell out not just the story, but the 'message' of the play - "what Willy Russell was getting at...some sort of theme coming out". However, if we look closely at what he is saying, it is clear that what was most effectively communicated to GEORGE here was mood, a sense of impending doom and an aura of retribution:

He was putting over some of what Willy Russell was getting at...it saved you working it out yourself... building up a sense of foreboding that something was going to happen, having to pay for what you've done sort of thing...there was some sort of theme coming out, that you don't get anything for nothing, and that what you do you pay for...the way he was saying, we'll find you out sort of thing.

There will be more to say about the treatment of the Narrator's role and 'fate', but for now it is worth noting that although respondents saw the Narrator as central, the simple functions they identify are not enough to explain the importance and popularity of this role.
Theme

It is noticeable that for this play, the section outlining respondents' views of theme is considerably shorter than that describing responses to theatricality. Reasons for this will become clearer as the relative strengths and weaknesses of the play are discussed. It is also worth bearing in mind that a major theme in Blood Brothers - class - is more decisively partisan (than themes concerning idealism, female roles, euthanasia etc. in Bloody Poetry and Joe Egg). Presentation of the class issue also tends to be very categorical - respondents 'take sides', for or against Russell's promotion of the working class. The nature of responses to this play, then determines that much of the material is more appropriately discussed under accordant/discordant/neutral sections than under theme.

Respondents registered the class difference between the two families as 'what the play was about'. As we have said, it would be difficult for respondents to understand the play in any terms other than those of the two 'sides'. As a 'theme', however, the presentation of this issue somewhat pre-empted itself. Even respondents who did not identify with one side or the other readily acknowledged the great divide which was presented:

FARMER: my Nan used to live in a place like that on the council estates in Liverpool, and then I had an Uncle who lived in a big house out of town, and he was like the other side of it

GEORGE: ...the two extremes were both to either side of me sort of thing..

The fact that all responses to the presentation of difference between the classes were affirmative, some emphatically so, suggests that the 'theme' was more of a truism than a debate:

MINLAW: Oh the difference in the classes was there as clear as day. You had to feel sorry for the poor soul with all her family compared to the toffee nosed one. This class difference is still very true. Sad but true.

The very transparency of the 'theme' may have detracted from respondents' concentration upon it. In addition, although the momentum of the plot carried respondents along despite implausibilities, this too, may have been at the expense of their awareness of important themes. The recognition in itself of the 'class barrier' (FARMER), was
the closest most respondents came to identifying a theme or message:

FARMER: I did sympathise with the poor ones. Mrs Lyons was more stilted, and her husband... a typical upper class husband
GEORGE: I liked Mickey and his family much more than the Lyons. somebody from the posh end of Crosby would like the Lyons.
POWNER: ... we wanted ours to do well, not run the streets, and we wanted our children to get on in life, like go to university... that's how I would identify, anyway.

This kind of recognition seemed to satisfy respondents that they had understood 'what Russell was getting at'. There was a notable absence of uncertainty or nervousness that they might be some 'message' which they had not grasped (cf. PAWLEYs at Joe Egg, LANEs at Bloody Poetry, see p196 and Appendix B).

There were parts of the play which provided opportunities for social issues to be explored as themes e.g. the behaviour of the policeman [Russell 1985 p30], the redundancies [ibid. p57] and Mickey's treatment in jail [ibid. p63]. But these were not parts which were particularly memorable for respondents. That is, with the notable exception of Mrs JENISON (an accordant respondent) who remarked, unprompted, on the difference in the treatment of the two boys by the policeman, mimicking the policeman's attack on the Johnstones, and the Lyons' "so sorry, do call again officer" pleasantries. Apart from this, such 'social issues' did not attract comment. DEVINE, who was unemployed herself, seemed to have made a predetermined decision to dismiss any reference to her plight such as the scene with the Doleites [ibid. p58]: "Oh, God, you forget all that when you go out for the evening". It is important to recognise that this might represent, more than a failing on the respondent's part - possibly a failure on the part of the theatricality accompanying these issues. This raises questions which are to be addressed further later, such as why respondents, who "really felt" for Mrs Johnstone at the end (DEVINE: "it was her tragedy"), did not experience similar feelings over, for example, the doleites.

GEORGE, perhaps voiced what he thought "Willy Russell was getting at" most articulately:

Well it was a fairly obvious contrast between two classes

Q: Did the contrast itself make a point, then?
Well perhaps the point that it doesn't really matter who your parents are, its your surroundings, and the way you're brought up which governs what becomes of you, to a large extent. There's the working class poor people, they're down at the bottom of the scale, they've not as much opportunity, education.

Although he appears to recognise here the implications of social disadvantage, GEORGE does not accept them as decisive. When it comes down to it, he does not identify where the responsibility for such disadvantage lies - "I don't think the blame was put on [the families], I don't think the blame was put on Eddie for what happened, it's just that's the way it is". The only 'blame' about which he, and other respondents were very clear, was that attached to Sammy:

GEORGE: Well you get them, don't you, the Sammy's who er, (pause) ...the rotten apples who, er...(pause) who are more to blame than their circumstances for what they do.

POWNER: he was a right tearaway wasn't he, he was destined to get into trouble.

FARMER: Hm, well. Not everyone who becomes unemployed goes bad do they.

The developing delinquency of the character Sammy might have appeared to raise some important questions of 'nurture vs. nature'. However, he was universally renounced as the agent of some unspecified malevolent force. Here was some kind of inherent evil which was not born merely of the Liverpool slums (so there's no need to worry too much about those).

Notes:
1. As indicated in the methodology chapter (p57 and p86), it should be clear that respondents were not asked directly in the interview: "what was the message of the play?". What is meant by their identification of theme here is information from volunteered observations (e.g. MINLAW, p101), or probing arising naturally from question respondents had 'set up' themselves (e.g. GEORGE, p102-103).
ANALYSIS

Accordant

(JENISONs, MINLAW)

All respondents for Blood Brothers were positive enough about some aspects of the play to endorse it as an enjoyable experience. This could not be said of Joe Egg (e.g.PAWLEYs) or Bloody Poetry (e.g.LANEs). Likewise, they were all aware of Russell's sympathies being more with one class than the other. Could then all of these respondents be said to be 'accordant'? The assertion that it is a property of this play in particular to evoke such across the board 'accordance' will be dealt with later. For the purposes of this section, respondents are grouped as 'accordant' according to a moral bias which is a part of their cultural profile. Accordant respondents made a moral judgement, that the circumstances of which Mickey and his mother were the tragic victims, were unfair. Other respondents seemed to recognise that there was this assertion in the play, but did not necessarily accept it; they refuted it by asserting that rather than being unfair, the circumstances 'just were' like that.

Accordant respondents identified most strongly with the Johnstones (and registered a very negative view of the Lyons), especially "that poor soul" (MINLAW), the mother. Mrs Johnstone was seen as a character with very positive qualities, who tried her hardest and was understanding with her family. To these respondents, it was more important that she was an understanding mother, than one who pushed her children to 'succeed'. This contrasts sharply with POWNER's critical view of Mrs Johnstone (see p112, 135, Appendix B).

The distinction between the two families and their characteristics had a lively reality for these accordant respondents. They were interested in authenticating these differences themselves in a number of ways. MINLAW related it to her own remembered experience:

I can remember it being just like that on the council estates, with harrassed mothers trying to keep house and home together. There is a sympathy here for those "harrassed mothers" who have been a part of MINLAW's past, which will be notably absent in POWNER's view of the "mothers who come out on the street and shout" that she has seen in her past. MINLAW feels the harrassment the mothers are subject to; POWNER sees only the shouting, not understanding what is behind it.
These respondents enjoyed being able to contribute their own experience and ideas to authenticate the reality of the play in this way. Mr JENISON was interested in Mrs Johnstone's sympathetic reaction to the news that Linda was pregnant. He was open about the fact that this related directly to the situation of one of his relatives. Mrs JENISON and MINLAW elaborated on Mrs Johnstone's reaction in order to emphasise a favourable comparison with Mrs Lyons' hypothetical reaction:

MINLAW: The posh one wouldn't have responded like that, it would've been, Oh, What a terrible thing.

Mrs JENISON: But the posh one never came into contact with girls. Problems like that don't arise for that class.

It is interesting to note that neither of these assumptions has much basis in the play. Nevertheless, the play is functioning here as some kind of focus for undermining what these respondents see as middle (or upper) class values. Pregnancy before marriage is seen as going against middle class norms, and the fact that the older generation (Mrs Johnstone) should condone it, more so. Likewise, they had no criticism for Linda in her affair with Eddie, in spite of its implications of undermining the institution of marriage. Instead, they were sympathetic, saying that it was understandable for her to turn to Eddie because she was so desperate. This is in marked contrast to a pre-eminent concern for the institution of marriage among respondents to Joe Egg. The discovery of this variable in responses raises the interesting question of the reason for the variation. It is possible that there is a shifting set of values here according to which play they are being applied to. On the other hand, they could simply be the fixed values of the different people who will tend to go and see either one play or the other. A complete answer to such a question is only obtainable if the same group of respondents are taken to see the two plays, to see if their attitude remains the same. There are a number of practicalities to prohibit such a scheme. Methodological problems are introduced if respondents are not self-selecting (i.e. the fact that they have chosen to see a particular play is partly what we wish to investigate). Constraints of time also come into play, since it would be difficult to predict when a play with an appropriate comparison would become available. Although the question remains therefore, an intriguing and important one, the answers which this thesis can offer to it must remain partial and provisional.
These respondents feel then, that the play asserts values which they identify with, in opposition to middle class norms. These values seem more liberal than those of the 'norms' with which they are contrasted. However, it would be simplistic to see them as a part of the kind of coherent set of liberal or 'left wing' attitudes which might be suggested by a social-psychological profile. Correlations which Brown suggests, for example [Brown 1963 p60] are not borne out here – the respondents 'left' attitudes which 'stress sexual freedom' (condone Linda's affair), clearly do not go hand in hand with an attitude which 'tends to classless society' or is 'suspicious of family'.

To facilitate a vindication of the values they identify with, these respondents tended to embellish the bare bones of the stereotypic class barrier Russell had sketched. They seemed to be able to draw on a cultural background which supported an unusually imaginative input to do this. Mrs JENISON pointed out that we did not see Mrs Johnstone in as many changes of clothes as Mrs Lyons and she imagined that this would be “because she would have to make do and mend”. MINLAW envisaged Mrs Lyons' life of ease – “you can bet she never washed any dishes”, and suggested that the set would have been more realistic if it had reflected the kinds of details she had in her own mind, which emphasised the class differences. She thought the set should have been different for each side of the stage, instead of having washing strung all around:

She probably took in other people's washing as well as her own, so she would have had washing all over the place, but they should probably have had rambling roses or something for the other one.

In a comparable response, FARMER shows a similar affinity with cultural signifiers like the washing – “There was one thing about the set, with all the washing, I couldn't work out how that fitted in after they’d moved”. The nature of her overall response to the play, however, varies significantly from MINLAW’s – the overriding importance to FARMER of the social event has lead to her being grouped with 'neutral' respondents.

It is possible that as well as personal family history, etc, certain 'textual shifters' may be a part of the cultural background which informs these kinds of imaginative response. Bennnett and Woolacott [1987 p249] argue that images like 'the Bond Girl' can come to be
significant in an instrumental way, becoming a part of the cultural context through which further 'texts' are 'read'. In the same way, the 'big house on the hill' image of the Joe Lampton, *Room at the Top* [Braine 1989] period, to which the play makes reference [Russell 1985 p44 -46 and, explicitly, p47], seems to have become a part of some of these respondents' cultural backgrounds:

I had a picture in mind of the big house, I could just imagine it up on the hill overlooking the council estate

It is interesting that 'neutral' respondent, FARMER, reveals further similarities with the cultural influences of these accordant respondents - "I had an Uncle who lived in a big house out of town...". This makes the point that such groupings can never be categorical. In this case, they clearly overlap and indicate that their usefulness is restricted to administrative device. Also, although this 'big house' image is being proposed as a cultural, rather than a personal, influence, it is important to recognise the interrelationship of the two. There will be personal historical reasons why *Room at the Top* should become a part of JENISON's outlook, for instance, in a way it would not for, say, POWNER or GEORGE.

The JENISON's and MINLAW had an imaginative background they could exploit to give substance and life to the positive images the play presented and thus enjoyed an enhanced level of involvement. This allowed them to make a contribution to the creative process of the play, but it was partisan in nature. They wanted to engage creatively and imaginatively in order that they could emphasise class differences which furnished a sense of vindication. To do this, the virtues of the Johnstones tended to be exaggerated, whilst the significance of the Lyons was as a cipher for the failings of a whole class.

Although they were not clearly identified as being specifically responsible for the Johnstone's downfall, the very fact and nature of the Lyons' higher social position was seen as something to be contemptuous of -"that toffee nose would never have done a day's work in her life" (MINLAW). This is an example of how Russell draws on, rather than challenges, prejudice. MINLAW's response reveals such prejudice because it is simply the identifying characteristics of the Lyons which evoke her aversion. It is not, for example, some particular action on Mrs Lyons part (e.g. exposing Linda and Eddie's affair) which
draws MINLAW's criticism. It is enough that Mrs Lyons is seen in certain
stereotypic ways as being different from the respondent. She is not
actually shown 'never to have done a day's work in her life', but she is
shown to have certain stereotyped characteristics which MINLAW
associates with 'never doing a day's work...'. The most obvious of these
is that she employs a char [ibid. p3], but they also include for
example, her language (liberal use of 'darling' as a form of address),
and her delicate health in contrast to the robust Mrs Johnstone (she
suffers from 'nerves' [ibid. p27]). Cues like these draw on existing
prejudices so that the Lyons are dismissed by these respondents as
toffee-nosed snobs, undifferentiated as individuals, in the same way as
people with black skin are often seen as all the same.

In addition to their allegiance with the Johnstones against the 'toffee-
nosed' Lyons, the JENISONs and MINLAW asserted the play itself in
opposition to other 'toffee nosed' plays. An important aspect of this
assertion was the assumption that entertainment is a good thing in
itself. The clearest indication of what was 'good' about the musicals
and comedies which they preferred, and the play in question, was their
emphasis on the heightened emotion facilitated by this kind of popular
entertainment. This was part of a cluster of attitudes opposing the
'high brow' and "hoity-toity". This element confirms their 'accordant'
view. Certainly the indications are (particularly from plays like
Educating Rita) that a questioning of the value of the 'high brow' is in
accordance with Russell's own viewpoint. These assumptions are manifest
in MINLAW's contempt for, "anything heavy like Chekhov" which she
suggests might even be somehow subversive: "There's enough troubles in
the world without bringing more into it". Perhaps she is right to imply
that "heavy" drama of this sort might undermine people like her. In
spite of her emphasis on 'entertainment', it would be wrong to see this
necessarily as simply an expression of a desire for superficiality and
escapism. MINLAW's comment about Chekhov-style theatre 'bringing
trouble' should not be dismissed as a simple unwillingness to think
about a more 'difficult' play. It was rejected as something alien to her
life, values and understanding. In contrast, Russell asserts values
which she can relate to:

He's a man for the people really, isn't he. Some things you
can't hardly make sense of, but this was life, wasn't it. This
man, he really knows.
In the context of the possible debilitating effects of commercial ('mass') art on 'popular' culture (and the resulting resort to 'elitist' art, see p26), this response gains significant perspective. Within the aims of this research to discover whether audience relations to this kind of theatre can be understood as positive manifestations of popular culture, MINLAW’s dismissal of “anything heavy like Chekhov” can be seen as a very healthy rejection. This is especially so when it is taken in conjunction with the vitality of her engagement with this play.

Discordant
(POWNER {and WAY})

POWNER was the only respondent for Blood Brothers who did not express unrestrained enthusiasm for the play. One respondent hardly constitutes a 'group' or 'category', but reasons why it is difficult for respondents to be discordant in relation to this play should become apparent. It was noticeable that she (and WAY, who saw Our Day Out) did not enthuse as much as other respondents about the emotional experience of the play. There are two aspects of cultural profile which are significant in this; attitude to theatre in general, and relation to the theme of this play in particular.

It could be argued that POWNER’s attitude to theatre in general may suggest that she is a 'neutral', rather than a 'discordant' respondent. The passive nature of her response is similar in some ways to neutral respondents’, FARMER, COOK, GEORGE and CRAWFORD. However, the passivity of POWNER’s responses is so pronounced as to suggest that she would be 'discordant' in an important sense for almost any kind of theatre. She does not share fundamental assumptions which the play makes about audience relations with the stage and reveals a cultural profile which conflicts with the 'popular working class' bias identified by other respondents. These are the bases of her classification as 'discordant'.

Firstly, POWNER indicates that she prefers musicals:

I find them, you know, relaxing, rather than a heavy play that you’ve got to really listen and concentrate.

This infers, not only that relaxation is the opposite of concentration (which is in any case something I would contest), but also that her expectations are of being presented with something passive to watch. She does not recognise a participatory role for herself as a member of the
audience, even in so far as having to 'concentrate'. In fact she sees the theatre as the presentation of a spectacle completed by professionals, rather than an opportunity to create an experience for herself. The evidence for this is in her difficulty with seeing actors portraying more than one character ("I found it difficult to sort of follow that it was the same man because he'd played different parts"), the unaccustomed demand on her imagination to "imagine they were different rooms, instead of a little brick wall", her thankfulness not to have to think of the story for herself (because of the Narrator), and her surprise at the possibility that anything recognisable as 'theatre' might be produced in a studio ("a very bare room... we can't imagine how they do anything in it"). These are more the kinds of attitude one might of expect for television-watching, perhaps. POWNER herself, who has "been three times now" to the theatre, seems to be only just awakening to the realisation that there is something different about being part of a live audience from watching television:

To go to the theatre, you've got to get away from the television, where you see all the rooms, and all the different outsides, they haven't got them there, and you've got to use your imagination (full text Appendix B).

Nevertheless, it is important to register that POWNER does recognise a difference between responding to theatre and responding to television, and that she realises it centres on an obligation on her part "to use your imagination", even though this did not yet seem to promote imaginative involvement, or identification with the dramatic characters. In fact she seems to retain a cynicism about the actor 'pretending' fictitious characterisation:

I couldn't work out when she had the tears whether they were real...she'd lost herself in the plot, or whether she'd stuck them on! I didn't lose myself that much you see that I thought she was really crying....

The imaginative obligation which she recognises, is confined to imagining "things" to compensate for the physical limitations of the theatre: "It does make me imagine more, things...different rooms, instead of a little brick wall". This represents the minimum creative input necessary to make sense of the play, in fact. However, in spite of the rather superficial nature of this response, the fact that it is provoked at all is something she identifies with theatre, but not with television. This is not to imply that her responses to television must
therefore necessarily be even more superficial - it could be that the effort to suspend her disbelief distracts POWNER from a level of involvement which she can more satisfactorily achieve with television.

Although POWNER seemed to be beginning to recognise a minimal participatory role, she still retained a marked detachment throughout the play compared to other respondents. She suggested that this was because of the adverse effect of television:

She'd got herself into it enough to - think that it was real.
But I don't, I wouldn't get that far. ...I think because you watch so many on television, you know that they're not real.

POWNER seems to have a habitual consciousness of the play as an artefact and a habitual expectation of passivity as audience. This explains her concern with the actual theatrical techniques, rather than an involvement in what they signify. Some of her most positive responses were to the exhibition of professional skills (e.g. "the lady who played the mother...I thought she was excellent"). It seemed to be easier for her to get her satisfaction from the play by appreciating the mimetic skills of the actors, rather than responding to the fictitious characters and becoming involved with them. This kind of appreciation came across in her curiosity about the actual technical business of acting parts:

We argued as to whether she played the lady who was supposed to have come and live in their house. Did she play that part too? But then when they lined up, she had on the turquoise dress, underneath her raincoat. If she did play that part, it showed me how somebody can be changed, by dress and hairstyle.

Presumably the playing of different parts by the same actors clashed with her enjoyment of this mimetic element, making it more difficult for her to see these parts as accurate imitations of real people. The actor switching parts relies on the imaginative collusion of his audience to make the new character work.

POWNER seemed to have limited expectations of theatre which restricted her capacity for involvement in the play. She was the only respondent to express reservations about the fact that the ending was shown at the beginning of the play. This implies that an important function of theatre for her is its presentation of an orderly story with a beginning, middle and end in that order (an important element of
narrative – e.g. Labov 1972). Beyond this, she does not "see the point" of deviating from traditional theatrical conventions because she is unaware of the possibility of other functions for the theatre. There was even an element of condescension in her reaction to other audience members in that she found it amusing that they should be moved to tears by an ending which had been given away in advance, and in any case, was not real:

The lady next to me obviously found it very sad, because she was crying at the end (laughs), which I thought was rather nice, that she'd got herself into it enough to – think that it was real.

Having outlined POWNER's 'passive' attitude to theatre, it is only right to point out that her lack of involvement with the characters may not be totally explained by this, her 'failing', but also by the form of presentation of the play itself. The characters which were presented in a sympathetic light, were not those with whom POWNER could easily identify. She was put at the disadvantage, therefore, of having to work doubly hard, as it were, to get imaginatively involved with characters who were set up for criticism in the play. It would be difficult to argue for anything in the presentation of Mrs Lyons which promotes a positive emotional response, but POWNER seemed to sympathise more with her than Mrs Johnstone, who she saw as an irresponsible character. POWNER has a preconceived notion of "mothers who come out on the street and shout", which Mrs Johnstone reflects. There is an implicit criticism of what she thinks "tends to be more of a friendly relationship than parent" in these circumstances which contrasts with her own view of the parental role: "we wanted our children to get on in life". She identifies, therefore, with Mrs Lyons' aspirations for Eddie and thus misses out on the emotional 'buzz' other respondents seemed to get from identifying with Mrs Johnstone. Even so, POWNER did seem to be aware that "we weren't meant to like the Lyons" (CRAWFORD), and was reluctant to stress any comparability between her outlook and theirs, presumably because she realised that this would leave her vulnerable to the implicit criticism they received. Instead, she related to them as stereotypes of something she identified as the 'upper class' (".. he was a typical upper class man"), of which, she implied, she was not a part.
POWNER had a rather ambiguous attitude to the class issue. When we began to discuss the class difference between the two families, she seemed to take the liberal attitude — "to me they're no different", i.e. that she did not look down on the Johnstone's of the world. However, it became possible to see this as less rooted in egalitarianism than in wishful thinking when she expressed the comforting thought that, "I mean that showed the classes as two distinct classes, which I don't think we've got quite so much of that now". This suggests perhaps that POWNER sees herself as in the middle between these two distinct classes: specifically as middle class. Other respondents, particularly FARMER and GEORGE, also thought they were "in the middle", but where still prepared to identify the Lyons, who they knew were targets, as "typical middle class". Perhaps they felt more confident in their view of themselves; although they were "in the middle", they were not self-consciously "typical middle class". POWNER, on the other hand, tries to make a claim for some sound middle ground which she can occupy, safe from the criticisms of the play by establishing the Lyons as "typical upper class". With this perspective, the analysis in the play of the "two distinct classes" can become a vindication of what she sees as her own reasonable middle position. Given that she is unable to see the Johnstones positively, this is really the only other viable viewpoint she could take. It must have been obvious that to actually applaud the Lyons would invite not much less than ridicule. So POWNER manages to find a way to conform with the tone of contempt for the Lyons which she reads in the play:

She was told, you stay there, I've got to go to work, and you stay there, that's your place ... if she'd've said she was going to work, he'd've been horrified (laughs) ... I think he was a typical upper class man, and in charge of the house, and you can have some money but don't bother me any more.

Her tone here seems to have been accurately anticipated by Bentley [1985 p54]:

What generally happens is that if I belong to a class or group that is being attacked, I assume I am an exception to the rule and I laugh with the author (who very likely belongs to the same class or group) against the class or group.

From the indication in her tone that she is an exception, one might expect that she is speaking as a liberated working woman with her own income, so that she can suggest that relationships like the Lyons'.
where the executive husband dominates a dependant wife are really rather pathetic. In fact, POWNER is the non-working wife of a company director, and this must go some way to explaining her partial sympathy for Mrs Lyons.

This anxiety to remain outside of the class-conflict of the play has an important relation to her 'passivity'. Prevented from identifying with the Lyons by the play’s implicit criticism of them, and with the Johnstones because, "I've not lived that sort of life", it was difficult for POWNER to become involved with the characters. They were seen only in terms of their imitative quality. She did not get 'carried away', or endow the illusion with life through her own investment in the play. The extent of her detachment was revealed in her statement that, in spite of the pathos felt by others, she "found it more of a comedy than sad, I would say it made me happy, rather than sad".

Even though POWNER's sneaking sympathy for Mrs Lyons, went against the consensus view of the play, she may still have been able to gain some reassurance that her own point of view was the right one. Unless she considers herself abnormal, POWNER is likely to consider "wanting your children to get on in life", as the normal parental role, and letting them "run the streets", a deviation from this (something which is confirmed by the detail of her interview provided in Appendix B). With this outlook, the plot of the play provides a series of dramatic presentations of the tragic consequences of such deviation (dead-end job, redundancy, crime, drug-dependancy, depression, frustration and death). This could easily serve to reinforce the value of the 'normal' parental role with which POWNER identifies, providing a sense of satisfaction with the play in spite of incompatibilities in outlook. The possibility that she may have been able to do this shows the complexity of social, psychological and cultural influences which can come into play in any individual’s response. It reveals just how difficult it is for any combination of text and theatricality to take these inter-relationships into account in such a way as to execute a desired 'effect'.

To pursue this question, I wanted to explore POWNER’s response to the Johnstone family, who represented this deviation from the norms of her own life. At issue was whether the theatricality had succeeded in
stimulating a reappraisal of her own values at all, or whether she had assimilated or rejected an incompatible value system, leaving her own values intact (and possibly even reinforced). In order to do this, I played 'devil's advocate'. Becker [1956] suggests that using a 'semi-cynical' interviewing style may bring out cynicism or idealism that you want to know about in the respondent, and Rose [1945] suggests that the expression of an assumed attitude on the part of the interviewer may evoke more radical answers by breaking inhibitions. These measures seemed justified in view of the 'defensive' nature of POWNER's position with regard to the play. In this context, such a technique was almost equivalent to 'neutrality on the interviewee's side' [Dexter 1957]:

Q: ... did it make you think, oh, they're useless, why can't they sort themselves out!
POWNER: MMMnn, yes. Yes, its difficult to think well why can't they, why do they spend money when they haven't got it, and know they can't pay them, why do they do that? Is it just their easy going way, and it doesn't matter, and that always does seem wrong ...But, people are that way, they don't mind being out of work, and don't mind paying for things on the never never (for full exchange see Appendix B).

Succumbing to the temptations of hire purchase seems to be a more heinous crime than armed robbery here (Russell 1985 p62, not mentioned by POWNER). Although the Johnstones do take advantage of credit beyond their means, important reconstructions of other aspects of their presentation are taking place here. Mickey's desperate longing for employment - 'I'd crawl back to that job for half the pay and double the hours', is translated into POWNER's stereotype of the collective working class - "they don't mind being out of work". Mickey has expressed his dissatisfaction with the only job he can get - 'I hate that soddin' place'. And Mrs Johnstone's sentiments in 'Easy Terms' and 'Bright New Day' are of frustration and sadness at the 'terms' of her existence which do not appear to be so 'easy', and of longing for a fresh start, something better out of life. All of this is quite incompatible with POWNER's reconstruction of their situation when she asserts that "they were quite happy...quite happy as they were". Further, the implication is that this kind of life is all "those sort of people" could, or should, hope for, since if not for a few unfortunate circumstances, they would really have no cause for complaint:
He would've come off his tablets eventually, and lived a normal life, or normal for those, sort of people.

The play, then, seemed not to have been instrumental in imparting to POWNER any new understanding of a different kind of life. Without the understanding, there was no compassion for these characters, whose importance for POWNER was in their successful imitation of her own idea of working class life. This idea did not admit the reality of any suffering for the likes of the Johnstones; such suffering may be nothing more than a rumour, of dubious veracity, put about by the press:

You read in the papers of people living in appalling conditions, but I've not seen them so I can't say that they do or they don't.

Behind an attempt at liberalism, POWNER's comments display an impression of the kind of people the Johnstones are as feckless, idle, irresponsible, and perhaps faintly repugnant (POWNER notes it was only in the second act that they were no longer "dirty"). Are these qualities, like the inherent evil in Sammy, also somehow self-generated? POWNER chooses not to see them as a social product. Perhaps this makes it possible for her conversely to see the rightness of her own position as self-generated, and therefore deserved rather than privileged. This in turn will allow her to feel that her own position, as a responsible person (unlike the irresponsible Mrs Johnstone) yet not a 'typical upper class' snob (like the Lyonses), is secure in a reasonable middle ground.

Given the somewhat extreme nature of POWNER's incompatibility with the consensus view of the play, the question of her reliability as an informant presents itself. Her rather insular views could be interpreted as evidence of a kind of mental instability or inadequacy which ought to discount her as part of the sample of respondents. The question of sampling and how 'representative' respondents can be has already been addressed. With regard to POWNER, in particular, however, her response cannot simply be dismissed because it does not fall within an expected range of responses - selectivity of this kind would contravene sound methodological principles. In any case, significant unreliability in reported responses tends to reveal itself in noticeable contradictions and inconsistencies (e.g. GEORGE, p128).
As POWNER was the only respondent who failed to sympathise with Mrs Johnstone, WAY was the only respondent to see Our Day Out [Russell 1984] without feeling some pity for the children, and particularly Carol. Perhaps these respondents identified the play's 'message' correctly, but recognising that they could not be in sympathy with it, maintained their distance, fending off emotional involvement as a defence. A certain discomfort at recognising that they were part of what Russell was 'against' and a lack of sympathy for what he was 'for' might explain their tendency to emphasise that this was 'only a play' (POWNER insists a number of times that she "wasn't so taken in by it"). This could be an attempt to convince themselves that in any case, the play has no significance beyond its transitory entertainment value. It is worth pointing out that although WAY saw Our Day Out, not as a "full depth play", but "only more of a cameo, really", this was not the case in her assessment of Blood Brothers, which she had previously also seen. She did exhibit an unusual resistance to the sentimentality which most other respondents felt about Carol's plight, and was discriminating in her perception of the difference between the "depth" of Our Day Out and Blood Brothers. This latter had evoked a much more emotional response, leaving her "shattered" rather than simply entertained. This is testimony to the capacity of Blood Brothers to draw audiences into an engagement with the experience which in its intensity put the play into a unique category as far as my respondents were concerned.

The possibility that respondents' occupations may in some senses be related to their accordant/discordant orientation towards the play is noted elsewhere (see p242). It would seem likely that WAY's occupation (the only respondent to be running her own business) is related to convictions about individuals' capacities to succeed in life. Any idea of the 'self-made (wo)man' is incompatible with the fatalism which underlies the presentation of the Progress Class [eg. Russell 1984 p39]. In complete contrast to accordant respondents, who sympathise with the unfortunate because it is 'not their fault', but a product of 'circumstances', POWNER and WAY see the plays from a more Nietzschian point of view. An assumption that it is within everyone's power to succeed, means that failure is the fault of the individual. Discordant respondents failed to identify social causes of problems because they believed in the power of individual effort and will. Accordant respondents also failed to identify social causes of problems,
because they believed in the power of 'fate' or 'circumstances'. This raises a suggestion for further discussion, that the opposing beliefs, in individualism, and determinism, are both more deeply rooted than a belief in collective responsibility.

Neutral
(COOK, FARMER, GEORGE, CRAWFORD)
The fact that FARMER and COOK had gone for a social evening out was a more important factor in determining their responses than the degree of their accordant/discordant profile. Because the chance for the two of them to "get together", and to be 'out and about' in a lively atmosphere was most important to these two, it was less important to them to choose 'sides' in the play. Theatre-going was a regular social activity for them. Their enjoyment relied more on this social aspect than on the nature of the particular production, since: "we go to everything, we're not selective. I always enjoy it whatever's on" (FARMER). They identified the contrast with work and the consequent relaxation the theatre offers as a very important element ("after a hard day at work its nice to relax. You don't want to have to work hard"). Theatre is cast very much in the role of a reward, or antidote to the unpleasant things in life.

For these respondents in particular it also seems to have a function almost as a refuge for them as women. There was some indication that theatre-going for FARMER had a special significance as a social lifeline; it offered her the opportunity to experience safe and positive social contact which she needed as a result of her difficult situation. She was undergoing divorce proceedings but still living with her husband pending the sale of the house. A night out with her friend at the theatre was obviously a welcome light relief from this situation. The benefit of the evening's social contact, given her personal situation, was FARMER's overriding concern. Compared to this, the actual content of the play and its implications were almost insignificant:

Well, for five minutes or so it was deflating, but you soon forget the tragedy, we started talking about our own problems.

Theatre as a focus for the therapy of a "female get-together" seemed to be preferable to other possible functional equivalents (e.g. sports clubs, cinema, pub):

FARMER: It's a girls' night out really isn't it. The playhouse
is a nice place to go.

COOK: Yes, it's somewhere we can go. It has a relaxing atmosphere - but its not like going into a pub, but you can have a drink.

There seems to be something reassuring about their perception of the theatre; it is "nice" because it is somewhere they can go, implying there are some places they cannot go because of unnamed fears. Apart from more obvious (and probably justifiable) fears for personal security, one of their fears may be for respectability. COOK seems to suggest that to drink is alright, but to do so in a pub might be suspect. The atmosphere is "relaxing" because tensions about personal safety or reputation, which might accompany regular trips to the pub, are not evoked at the theatre.

One reason for the greater respectability of the theatre in FARMER's mind is its connection with 'education': "I like to think I'm educating myself as well". This might be connected to a woman's difficulty in laying a claim to the right to go out and enjoy herself. FARMER may find it easier to justify the 'treat' of theatre-going by thinking that she is educating herself as well. Such justification, however, is more for the sake of other people's image of her, than her own self-image, since:

Yes, you sound educated when you say you go to the theatre.

It's a female get together really. I'd much sooner watch a play like that than do most other things. It's far more social....

The social contact is more important to her than emotional or intellectual stimulation. In fact, theatre is seen as 'relaxation' in opposition to the taxing aspects of ordinary life. With this perspective, the possibility of emotional or intellectual stimulation could be seen as taxing (cf. Bloody Poetry - respondents who find emotional or intellectual stimulation relaxing eg. HINCHCLIFFE p176, REEKIES p178).

COOK and FARMER claimed that the atmosphere of live theatre helped them to get more 'involved', but when I questioned the nature of this involvement, there was some confusion between involvement with what was going on on-stage, and with the social opportunities surrounding it. There was noticeably more emphasis on the physical relationships between respondents and the rest of the audience, the actors and action in the auditorium or bar, than on the metaphysical:
FARMER: You participate more. Especially when they use the auditorium. There's much more involvement than at the pictures...Its the live actors, the real people on stage.

COOK: Yes and they do have them coming through the audience at the playhouse, don't they.

Q: Does being part of an audience help with the involvement?

FARMER: It creates an atmosphere

COOK: Especially when you get spontaneous clapping...sometimes in the wrong places! ... there was one woman clapping and that actress had to wait until she stopped before she could carry on. I really felt for that woman, having to wait like that.

The point that the "real people" on stage make her feel more involved is an understandable reason in itself, but it is particularly the awareness of their professional effort which comes across. It is interesting to note that COOK only "really felt" for the actress in her capacity as a professional trying to do a job. There were no references to "really feeling" for the fictitious character she portrayed, or any other character in the play, from either of these respondents. I found it unusual that FARMER remarked:

Another thing I like about the playhouse is that you get to see the actors afterwards when they come into the bar. I like to see that they're just normal people, I think.

This is a further indication of an attitude to theatre as something put on by other people, to entertain audience by relaxing or distracting them from the daily grind. Theatre seems to be quite specifically designated as 'play' outside the realm of the day to day 'work', suggesting that it is not essentially connected to the problems, value systems, etc normally operative in daily life. FARMER specifically wants to be aware of the actors as "just normal people", as professionals doing a job. An appreciation of the mimetic element suggests itself again [Bentley 1965 p154]. However, the alternative reasoning that such an attitude allows audience to 'have their cake and eat it' cannot be ignored. It is possible for respondents with this attitude to confront emotions, intellectual ideas, drama, in contrast with the relative tedium of everyday life, without relinquishing the reassurance of such tedium. FARMER reveals a resistance to being disturbed by theatre overspilling into 'real time', when she indicates her preconceptions of how far theatre should go in its effect on audiences. She does not appreciate being subjected to shock tactics, at least with reference to
the use of bad language - "I don't like it when it's used deliberately to shock you". She did, however, accept it in the context of this play, because, "they didn't use it just for the sake of it, just to shock you". It is not the actual bad language to which she objects, then, but its use as a means of upsetting her equilibrium (cf. responses to expletives in *Bloody Poetry*, see p161). Even more unacceptable was the kind of function theatre might try to assume in demanding judgement from the audience to provide a resolution for the play:

What I can't stand is when they leave it in the air...I come away, absolutely keyed up...it loses its entertainment then.

This preference is further evidence of conditioning by a traditional view of narrative structure with its need for resolution. This is something which recurs throughout the interviews for all plays, as might be expected, since, anthropologically speaking, the ability to pick up narrative is almost innate. Labov [1972] has written authoritatively on the acquisition of narrative skills at a very early age as a basic interactive skill. As a construct, narrative (the concepts of a beginning, middle, end, etc.) is very widespread and easily understood. Socially and historically, narrative is more enduring than drama - it conforms to classic unities of time and place more than drama does. It is arguable that there is a detectable shift in modern society away from an understanding of ritual and symbolic behaviour (this can be seen to be more intuitively expressed in advertising, etc. rather than in cultural activities). There seems to be an implicit recognition in Russell's plays that a good plot will be more popular than enacting in a symbolic way. Narrative remains in constant use in daily contacts, whereas a gathering together for symbolic occasions is no longer such an important part of daily life. The fact that Russell ensures his plays have good narrative content is an important distinguishing feature which helps to explain the reassurance, and hence, enjoyment, they can give respondents.

Apart from this formal need for resolution, the ideological implications of FARMER's response are interesting. To leave the audience "absolutely keyed up" is exactly what some professional theatre producers might aim to do. However, for FARMER, this has a totally negative result. Her preconceived expectations of theatre as a treat, a relief or recompense for difficulties or drudgery in life, mean that any play which replicates the difficulty or effort she is trying to escape from, is not
satisfying or fulfilling. What she wants from the theatre is clearly delineated and in a sense constitutes a 'package': something provided by professionals which she can pay for, but which will fulfil only those functions which she wishes to specify. In other words, a product with no 'will' of its own, of which she is the consumer. The attitude of consumerism towards theatre was there in FARMER and COOK's assumption that solely their desires should determine its function, without any recognition of the possibility of its own autonomy. Their desire (and ability) was to leave the theatre with their attitudes and emotions inviolate:

COOK: Although it was sad, I came out feeling I'd had a jolly good time, and alright, it was sad, and, well, that's that.
FARMER: We started talking about our own problems. In that sense, I suppose we left the story behind us as we walked out.

It is important to realise that FARMER and COOK related these conclusions as a strongly positive quality of the play (FARMER immediately continued, "it was very good. I'd strongly recommend it to anyone"). Although from some points of view 'leaving the play behind as they walked out' might be evidence of the play's failure, from the point of view of these respondents it was an unqualified success. These responses give rather more insight into the kind of satisfactions in general which might be most important to some audiences, than about Blood Brothers as an individual production. This is because the emphasis is on the relationships that the event allows them to have with each other, (and possibly other people), rather than focussing on the relationship between themselves and the stage. These are still relevant as responses to a theatrical event, however, since the respondents see the experience as distinctive - it is not the same, for instance, as going to the pub. In spite of their apparent lack of discrimination in going to see 'everything', the nature of some of their responses (e.g. the cultural affinities enjoyed by FARMER, see p132) suggest that in fact, it might not even be the same as going to another play.

The social congregation at the theatre has a similar importance for GEORGE. There is not quite the same emphasis on theatre as 'somewhere he can go' as there is in its function as a 'refuge' for the women. It is the way in which atmosphere and involvement are enhanced by the social gathering which he appreciates:

I wouldn't go on my own...it wouldn't be the same if there
were just the two of us sat there watching it. A film would be
the same, but a play wouldn’t, you’ve got the audience
reacting which is part of the thrill. Several times there was
spontaneous applause.

A more careful look at GEORGE’s responses, however, shows that his
satisfactions may be less obvious than they appear. In fact, it is worth
noting that there are a number of contradictions and inconsistencies
which might lead one to doubt the overall reliability of this informant
(it is also worth noting here that he is a politician – chairman of his
local SDP – which might give one reason to suspect him of a tendency to
say what he feels is expedient). For example, notice how incongruous
'involved' seems in this description from GEORGE:

Something that I can, understand, that I don’t have to think
too hard about, sit back and relax, and watch it, get
involved, go out afterwards, have a drink.

There is some difficulty here in determining whether GEORGE is speaking
rather glibly, in a way which makes his responses less reliable than
those of other respondents. It could simply be that his idea of
'involved' is very different from the way it is used by other
respondents. A further reference to the musical score is similarly
problematic. GEORGE stated that he did not usually like musicals; "seven
people bursting into song at some incredibly silly moment". Yet he
accepted the music in this play, saying that it "seemed to be more
natural on stage" than in musical films on television, for example. This
is similar to FARMER’s reasoning ("You get these musicals, don’t you
where they just come on and sort of burst into song all over the
place....But then it wasn’t like that at all...the songs sort of came
into it naturally), which also seems to convey a rather stereotyped
image of musicals. It is difficult to identify what makes the inclusion
of songs in this play any more 'natural' than in other musicals (these
objections could be made, for example, of the pre-eminently popular
Phantom of the Opera), even though they are contrasted with the
supposedly more "showy" nature of others on at least three different
occasions.

The condition of accepting the music - that it should 'blend in' with
the play, rather than assume its own importance, is interesting. In this
case it succeeded for GEORGE, because it was "fairly background" and
"just seemed to help telling the story somehow". But after further
probing attempting to discover why the music was successful in this particular play, GEORGE suggested, "Perhaps it's a more emotional way of putting over something". There seems to be a discrepancy here between the music 'blending in' and "being more emotional". If it is "thrill" and "involvement" that GEORGE looks for at the theatre, why should he dislike musicals in general if music is a more emotional way of putting things across? One answer is that respondents (and perhaps, especially certain types of men, who may be more wary of being emotional) may be happy to feel that heightened emotions have been invested in something 'worthwhile', whereas they may feel weak or silly if they respond emotionally to the kind of sentimentality presumably associated with music. There is little confirmation, however, that GEORGE wants or gets a level of involvement which moves him emotionally, as opposed to giving him a "thrill". He tells us that he felt "pulled all over the place", but there are no other responses showing that he was 'moved' in the way, for instance, MINLAW was. GEORGE seems to enjoy the ride afloat the waves and tides of emotions in Blood Brothers, but not to let them ebb and flow within.

Although, as we have seen, GEORGE showed an interesting grasp of the 'theme', the social disadvantage he appeared to recognise failed to foster the emotional oscillations he enjoyed. When I asked him which parts of the play he found sad, only one came to mind, and it was nothing to do with the social themes ("When Eddie and his family moved, that was sad"). This was symptomatic of the curious detachment he retained, despite his enjoyment of the emotional "thrill". This lack of depth in his involvement is partly explained by a cultural profile which indicates its neutrality in a number of ways. Not least perhaps is his official 'centrist' position; "I think the two extremes were both to either side of me", to which CRAWFORD's jovial response - "Oh, come on Dave, you're just an SDP politician", is probably pertinent. Whether the theatricality of the play explains the failure to engage GEORGE at any deeper level is another question. It could be that for someone like him, who does not culturally identify either with the Johnstones or the Lyons, the presentation of the characters was not rich enough to draw any empathy. As far as GEORGE was concerned, Mr. Lyons was simply a cipher, conjuring his own stereotype of "someone from the posh end of Crosby". To a certain extent he feels sympathy for Mickey, but the tone of condescension - "he was a good lad, really", suggests that he remains
something of a stereotype of the underdog. At this level, GEORGE cannot identify with, or feel empathy for Mickey, or it is doubtful that he would be able to maintain: "He'd still've been perfectly happy if he hadn't been made redundant".

Having said this, GEORGE was exceptional in identifying a major factor in Mickey's demise which every other respondent failed to mention. Whilst most respondents laid the blame squarely at Sammy's door, GEORGE recognised that Mickey's redundancy was as least as important, and pointed out another decisive factor:

It was perhaps because he didn't want to be like Sammy that he blew it up when he lost his job. And that clash with Eddie, when Eddie said, why worry, be on the dole, go on the dole sort of thing, and he just didn't understand.

It is possible that the play stimulated GEORGE's awareness that he himself could not really understand what it is like to be in Mickey's circumstances (cf. CRAWFORD, who assumed that he could). The fact that he offers the clash with Eddie as specifically instrumental in Mickey's demise might indicate the quickness of guilt in recognising that this kind of insensitivity can push someone over the edge (the guilt of middle-class social conscience, satirically touted by the media as pre-requisite of SDP membership?). Or in more general terms, how damaging such a lack of understanding can be.

CRAWFORD can also be classed as a 'neutral' respondent because it is possible to see how his concern to claim a certain kind of image often colours his responses more than other factors. CRAWFORD himself appears to see this in terms of political affiliation, and therefore related to the class theme of the play. However, the extent of his 'accordant' tendencies has to be weighed up against the impulse to lay claim to a kind of liberalism (which can be compared to that which proved important to respondents at Joe Egg) as a social prop. Evidence for the greater importance of the latter is found in CRAWFORD's presumption of esoteric references and his enthusiastic enjoyment of the "cleverness" of the play. Indeed, he put considerable thought into seeking out such "cleverness" and was pleased with himself when he could spot particular instances, for example in the use of music. When first asked about the music, CRAWFORD's reaction had been lukewarm:
I didn't like the tune, didn't think there was much in the way of tunes to it...it was unspectacular but effective.

The interview moved on to other subjects, but after some time CRAWFORD spontaneously interjected with another comment about the music:

...The other thing about the music, just going back, was the way the same tune, different lyrics, was used all the way through. It was a sort of repeating thing wasn't it. It was quite clever.

The cleverness in the repetition of musical phrases must have appealed to CRAWFORD for its own sake, since he "didn't like the tune". For Eco, the 'sophisticated reader' is distinguished as a subject of culture and knowledge by his ability to detect such 'signifying frills', which the 'average reader' does not notice [Eco 1961]. He argues that in James Bond novels, these become a medium for the exchange of cultural values between the author and the 'sophisticated reader'. Supporting our suspicions of CRAWFORD's motives, Eco thinks that the values thus exchanged are counterfeit, second-hand, well-worn cultural clichés.

Another example of such well-worn cultural cliché in CRAWFORD's response is his enthusiasm here for spotting that the play was "like life":

I thought it reflected life in that it was up one minute, down the next. I think that's the point, that the play itself went up and down and up and down, and that's life. I thought.

This kind of comment was unusual among responses to Blood Brothers (it was more usual in those to Bloody Poetry). It has to be said that CRAWFORD sometimes reviews plays in his a professional capacity as a newspaper editor and this might be expected to lead him to assume a special importance for his critical abilities. This need not lead us to dismiss his response, however, as a special case. The concept of a 'special case' is not particularly useful since the numbers of audience members it would be possible to exclude on these grounds are almost limitless for example: those involved in performance themselves - eg. JENISONs in amateur dramatics, those engaged in study or professional training likely to directly relate to their evaluation of theatre pieces e.g. FARMER and COOK teachers, REEKIE and HINCHCLIFFE librarians, FARRAH student. In any case, this type of response is found in other respondents, although in the different context of Bloody Poetry (VAUGHAN, REEKIE, HINCHCLIFFE). CRAWFORD did, however, manifest the common tendency of the critic to go beyond the expression of personal views by making assumptions about audience response, without any actual
reference to the audience. He does admit to a kind of affectation in the idea that he can see what others cannot in the play:

I probably admit to being something of an inverted snob, and I felt that some of the audience... posher theatre-goers... didn't understand some of the working class bits... there are times when there's an obvious criticism of Mrs. Lyons and Mr. Lyons, that some of the audience couldn't see why he was being criticised because that's exactly the way they would behave.

CRAWFORD may have "felt that some of the audience...", but the audience I spoke to did not confirm this. In fact, none of my respondents failed to recognise the criticism of the Lyonses (even POWNER saw that they were being criticised, although she did not agree with the criticism), and all but one saw their behaviour as anything but "exactly the way they would behave". CRAWFORD is right to be a little self-conscious of his 'inverted snobbery'. It is not a case of a high-brow elite assuming that the lower orders are incapable of relating to sophisticated drama, but CRAWFORD's assumption is at least as ill-founded. He assumes that the elite, "posher" theatre-goers are incapable of relating to the proletarian nature or "working class bits" of this kind of drama. This is to vastly underestimate the power of the middle class institution this kind of drama is, which facilitates the reconstruction and assimilation of "working class bits" into the conservatism predominant in theatre and in society.

CRAWFORD's assumption reveals that he sees himself as pro-working-class. He is confident that "we weren't meant to like the Lyons" and when asked why concludes "I suppose it's the point Russell's trying to make". His concern for the clarity of the working-class case, however, does not take precedence over his concern with the form of the message. Although he still assumes that some people could be oblivious to the class implications, he would rather the play remain "subtle": "I don't think you needed to be told that... Perhaps some of the others in the audience did... it wasn't subtle". This indicates an interest in the esoteric which sits oddly with his attempts to ally himself with "the working-class bits". He protests his solidarity with the working class, inferring that some people may not accept that the Johnstones' predicaments are representative, but insisting that he recognises it is "so true to life". When I queried this, asking "do you think it is realistic? Do people like that really exist?", he was quite clear: "I'm
convinced they do, well I know they do". In fact, what 'realism' he did relate to in the play was not specifically working class, but the realistic portrayal of youth, from which CRAWFORD was little enough removed to still identify with quite closely. His explanation of what he saw as realistic in the play related to his own relatively recent past:

I played cowboys and Indians and all that when I was a kid
...hid my favourite toy gun, said that word in front of my mother and got clouted, I could relate to a lot of that.

CRAWFORD was generally very positive about the play and determined to see it as a serious comment on society. This meant that the emotional aspects of the play were seen as instrumental, evoking a very strong response:

I nearly did [cry]...the first night some of the audience laughed at that, ...some of them didn't understand what they were getting at. I mean its absolutely tragic and pathetic...I was incapable of talking about it for a good 15 minutes or so afterwards, it really did take me away.

This emotional response is important to CRAWFORD, because he connects it with pro-working-class social comment. It is to be argued that in fact this connection hardly existed in the play. It has already been conceded (see p72) that such argument ultimately opposes the researcher's view with the respondents, implicitly suggesting that the former takes precedence over the latter. However, CRAWFORD's own choice of favourite piece from the play seems to amply demonstrate the gratuitous nature of the emotions evoked. He picked out the innocent romanticism of the scene which is in dumb-show between Linda, Mickey and Eddie to the Narrator's accompanying legend [Russell 1985 p52]:

When they were going round the fairs together, when they were three young teenagers together, I thought it just captured ideal youth enjoying themselves. Yeh, that was great. Taking pictures of each other, that sort of stuff, terrific.

CRAWFORD would not admit that what he was responding to here was nostalgic sentimentality; emotion unrelated to any 'worthy' socio-political cause. And this despite the Narrator's sickly clichés,

It seems that Summer's never coming to an end,
Young, free and innocent, you haven't got a care...
And who dare tell the lambs in Spring,
What fate the later season's bring...[ibid]
There was a big build-up of emotional static at the end of the play, thanks to the music and an indisputably committed performance by the leading lady (which moved herself, and not a few members of the audience, to tears). In fact, as far as I could see, this emotion, too, was largely gratuitous. Such peaks of emotion related more importantly to a theatrical sense of pace, resolution, etc. than to moments highlighting social injustice. CRAWFORD mistook the crescendo of pathos at the end for a vindication of his stance: that he recognises serious theatre when he sees it, even if others do laugh. The satisfaction to be gained from the idea that he can grasp an understanding of the play which evades others seems likely to be an element in his enjoyment of the play. An important part of the appeal of Blood Brothers for CRAWFORD seems to be its contribution to his claim to a certain kind of liberal social position.
Commentary

GEORGE said that seeing Blood Brothers gave him "a good night out", because it was something he could "understand...not work too hard...get involved". The feeling that they had "understood" and been "involved" was enjoyed by all respondents. They understood the play as a critical contrast between two social classes. Regardless of whether they accepted it or not, respondents seemed to recognise that a case was being made for there being an unrecognised value in the working class characters. Accordants saw this as Russell championing the working class, confirming their own belief in this value. Discordants saw this as an unmerited attempt to assert the good side of the working classes, and tended to concentrate on the 'downside' (shiftless, getting into debt, etc.) to compensate, so that they could hang on to their preconceptions (i.e. that they are poor because of their own lack of effort, etc.). Being supportive of the idea of meritocracy, a discordant respondent is more likely to see the Johnstones as to blame for their own misfortunes. In contrast, accordants, who in principle share the view that society has some responsibility for the family's fate, on the whole feel sorry for them. Although the cultural influences determining these outlooks are critically important, such influences are not completely unassailable. Some responses might suggest that whether the production chooses to portray characters in a sympathetic light or not may be almost insignificant. In fact, we find that all respondents are sympathetic enough towards Mickey's character to absolve him from any blame.

Respondents were all aware of Russell's sympathies being more with one class than the other. They felt that their role in interpreting the message of the play was in acknowledging this bias, even if they did not share it. As respondents with completely different profiles were nevertheless similarly able to feel that they had understood the play and formed an appropriate response, Russell succeeded in making them all feel a part of the theatre which was taking place. They felt included in the activity in a way they were not, for example, at Bloody Poetry.

Blood Brothers functioned on the basis of moving the feelings of its audience (even if what may be termed the 'depth' of these feelings is sometimes in question, see p72 and e.g. GEORGE p123-124). It was therefore sensed, apparently by all those interviewed, to be working in conjunction with its audience and respondents showed some awareness of
the importance of their response, or at least, presence. The respondents who enjoyed the play most were those who were able to 'let themselves go' with the emotions and therefore feel more a part of the event. Accordant respondents were obviously able to do this most easily, whilst discordant respondents showed some apprehension or reluctance. They realised that they were 'against' Russell and therefore felt too defensive to 'let go'. Neutral respondents 'let themselves go' on a more superficial level, going along with the orchestrated upsurges and downswings of feeling in the play. They did not 'lose themselves' to their involvement; they always retained a sense of themselves as consumer, being entertained by the play. The fact that these respondents did not identify with the characters on stage, so much as see them as representative of 'types' with which they were familiar, could be seen as confirmation of a 'consumerist' attitude. It is conceivable that advertising which attempts to create 'brand loyalties' among consumers may encourage recognition of 'types' and a preference for easily identifiable ciphers in other media.

**Stereotype**

The clear-cut representation of the "two extremes" of class in the Lyonses and the Johnstones has been noted. It is almost inevitable that in presenting these opposites in the way Russell chooses, a certain amount of stereotyping will occur. Thus the tendency for the characters to come across as showing a 'typical' middle class family and a 'typical' working class family. 'Stereotype' is often used in the pejorative, implying flat, empty or trivial representation. And yet we have the testimony of the respondents to the 'realism' of the play, the 'realistic' characters that they can believe in. Strangely enough, the evidence of the interviews suggests that in some cases, stereotype can give rise to a greater sense of reality, reality as perceived by respondents, that is. Such 'reality', however, relies on respondents being able to see characters as representative of 'realistic' types, rather than an identification with the individual reality of a character. Responses indicate that the quality of theatrical presentation may be at least equally, if not more, responsible for this than respondent profile.

Responses based on an admiration of how 'typical' characters are, rather than on empathy for them, are more common in *Blood Brothers* than in
Bloody Poetry or Joe Egg. FARMER and COOK, for example, do not have the understanding of what Mrs Johnstone is doing when she indulges in her spending sprees, that, say, WALMSLEY and JENNINGS (of similar profile) have of what Bri is doing when he indulges in his rather tasteless jokes. Mrs Johnstone’s spendthrift manner is taken on wholesale as representative of "people like that":

FARMER: Mrs Johnstone was always spending as soon as they got a little bit of money. With the food, you know, all this, and we'll have meat and cakes and everything.

COOK: But that's just what they do, people like that.

It may seem a little odd that this should be accepted as such an accurate picture of working class people, since thrift is a traditional working class value. But this is the kind of distortion which Brown explains as a 'natural tendency' leading to the loss of the capacity to see the reality of the unique individual:

It is the natural tendency to 'type' people, and in time this picture may become a fixed impression almost impervious to real experience. Hence the stereotypes ...and the reactions of members of these groups come to be explained, not in terms of themselves as unique individuals, but in terms of the stereotype [Brown 1963 p26].

Interestingly enough, this tendency to accept the 'fixed impression', seems to be partisan in COOK. Although she jumps to assert about the Johnstones, "that's just what they do, people like that", she is far more circumspect about the Lyonses:

I sometimes wonder if, like, Mrs Lyons you know, you think, oh, your typical upper-class woman, but if really it's as people would like to believe they are, rather than them really being like that.

What appears to be 'typical' or 'realistic' as interpreted by respondents, then, can sometimes be inaccurate. FARMER sees the play as "very realistic", but when she describes this 'realism', we can see that it is reflecting her own rather simplistic view of society, where different classes can be identified by stereotyped symbols.

...the kids going, 'Mam, Mam!'. I'm from Liverpool...I can see it all terribly true, you know, the gaudy curtains, the plastic flowers on the windowsill, and the trashy ornaments.

Oh yes, it's just what it was like. It was very realistic FARMER believes that, because she recognises the images, of plastic
flowers, etc., as representative, she "can see it all". Such images wield enough symbolic power for her to equate the recognition that Liverpudlian families have plastic flowers on the windowsill, with an understanding of their lifestyle. There are some important shortcomings to this kind of assumption, however.

Obviously it is convenient to compartmentalise those with plastic flowers into a pigeon-hole of the mind without further ado. The symbolism which 'plastic flowers' has accrued facilitates the simplistic categorisation of people who possess them (avoiding the implications of identifying them as, for example, single parents, unemployed... as members of a confusingly variable substructure of familial, functional and social groups). The attraction of such simplification has been noted before, for example, with regard to characters in disaster movies:

The characterisation of the world in terms of archetypes may be seen as a tacit statement that the world is simple, easily organised and hierarchically structured [Roddick 1980 p261]. Secondly, there were no actual "gaudy curtains, plastic flowers and trashy ornaments" in the play. These images are ones which FARMER herself has formed as representative of a certain group of people, using them here to identify the Johnstones as of that group. The thing is, that Russell gives us reason to assume that the Johnstones do have the gaudy curtains, etc., despite their physical absence on stage. Such emblems are loaded with inherent value judgement, they stand to identify those who have gaudy curtains as a group apart from the group to which we belong, we who have a common evaluation of what is gaudy and therefore to be avoided in our curtains at all costs. Russell addresses his audience as people who are bound to see that the curtains are gaudy. Positive responses to such 'mateyness' follow patterns noted by social psychologists:

Most people want to feel that issues are simple rather than complex, want to have their prejudices confirmed, want to feel that they belong, with the implication that others do not [Brown 1963 p26].

These comments were made in respect of propaganda, which is more likely to be successful if the message is delivered with an eye to existing attitudes and the intellectual level of its audience, but we can see a similar success in Russell's strategy.
'Realism'
In their conviction that the play was "very realistic", respondents imply that the play is able to present a picture of something which we all agree is 'reality'. However, comparing individual's responses shows that each appears to be acclaiming the play's ability to present a convincing picture of the world as they individually see it. The 'realities' which are identified in the play vary from respondent to respondent. This suggests that the important element of authenticity may come not only from some inherent capacity of the production to show 'reality' on the stage, but largely from the audience who authenticate the illusions themselves. According to respondents, the characters are remarkable because of Russell's uncanny 'eye for detail' which seems to make them like real people. What their varying interpretations imply, however, is that in fact the characters function more like reflective two-dimensional cut-outs; mirroring images already preconceived by the respondent.

Looking more closely at examples of disparate responses to the same 'realistic' character, suggests some reasons why respondents make these different appraisals. Respondents saw Mrs Johnstone as a central figure in Blood Brothers and agreed that her character was very 'life-like'. Referring to their own experiences of seeing people like her to authenticate the character, the details of the way she spoke and acted presented a recognisable reality for both MINLAW, and POWNER:

MINLAW: I can remember it being just like that on the council estates, with harrassed mothers like that trying to keep house and home together.
POWNER: She seemed to me to be very much like some mothers I can remember, where they (chuckling) come out on the street and shout. I thought she was good. (Full context, Appendix B)

At first glance these seem to be very similar responses, but in the context of their other comments about the play, it becomes clear that each is in fact appreciating a presentation of a quite different reality. Each one believes that what they like about the character is the fact that there is some objective reality to her. The character has this kind of reality in being generally understood to be 'typical' of a working class mother; a reality based on the tacit assumption that there must be some model working class mother which she represents. The assumption is shared even by respondents with contrasting cultural
profiles. They agree, at a basic level, on what Mrs Johnstone represents, but their evaluations of what she represents can differ widely.

Both POWNER and MINLAW make the same assumption that Mrs Johnstone has a particular 'closeness' in her relationship with her family, through which she tends to treat her children more as equals than as charges under her authority. POWNER contrasts this with her own motivations: "we wanted ours to do well... (see Appendix B)", interpreting the relationship negatively; as an improperly friendly and irresponsible one. MINLAW sees the relationship positively; as an understanding and sympathetic relationship, and she and her family find in it a certain class solidarity (see p105). Of greater importance here than being true to some assumed 'typical working class mother', is the character's ability to confirm preconceived individual ideas of what a working class mother is like. Both respondents make different evaluations based on the same assumption about families of the type suggested by Russell's clues.

The fact that the stereotype can be assimilated by individual preconceptions means that it supports habitual ways of thinking about social roles. As the antithesis of the 'making strange' of our 'model' role for theatre (p47), this is a fundamental indictment of Russell, and it must be acknowledged, also a reason for his popularity. Mrs Johnstone is a case in point. Those things which were attractive about her were qualities which would ensure that she would never have the power to change her circumstances: her easy-going capability in the face of poverty, gratitude for small mercies, lack of personal ambition in favour of her family, relative resignation to her lot in life and determination to make the best of a bad job. These characteristics make her seem realistic to respondents, because they reflect the prototype that is already in their perception. Those who identify themselves as being in a more privileged and powerful position in society than Mrs Johnstone, can see their privilege and power confirmed and enhanced by her powerlessness. Those who identify themselves as being in a similar social position to Mrs Johnstone have their own powerlessness confirmed. They see Mrs Johnstone as poor and hard done by, but in sympathising and feeling an affinity with her attitude of making the best of it, they do
not see that her easy going way is never going to help her get control of her own life and change things.

This quality of response, evoked by stereotype and drawing most heavily on cultural mores, tends to entrench respondents' sense of their own cultural position. This can be contrasted with a quality of response drawing on the workings of the 'inner self'. But more evidence is needed as to whether empathy and emotion can break through culturally induced preconceptions, before the stimulation of empathy and emotion can be assumed to be a worthwhile goal in itself.

In so far as the characters are stereotypes, reflecting habitual preconceptions, they do not introduce new experiences to respondents. There is limited evidence that respondents come to understand deeper levels of emotional conflict or moral dilemma through empathy for characters (in the way in which some respondents come to understand and feel for the pressures on Bri and Sheila in Joe Egg, for example). Although the play involved all respondents to some extent, through their authenticating role, it was only accordant respondents who showed involvement at a level which touched their 'inner selves'. The JENISONs and MINLAW were able to respond to an entirely different kind of 'realism' in the play than that appreciated by POWNER, for example. When they talked about the play, there were far fewer references to the cleverness of the superficially realistic detail. The JENISONs and MINLAW responded to images of a reality they could believe in, by investing their own feelings, emotions and values in giving the play a unique reality for them. Mrs JENISON's claim that "there wasn't anything else there except what was happening on stage" was corroborated by a rare lack of comment on other members of the audience, peripheral social activities, etc. Even the tremendous importance which the interval often assumes is erased by Mr JENISON's involvement with the actual play: "I was dying for the interval to be over to get back to it". In as much as this level of response stemmed from their strong affinity for the play, it could only be expected to more deeply confirm their original outlook. Although they felt the tragedy and injustice, which was lost on other respondents who "left it behind us when we walked out" (FARMER), the overwhelming effect on the JENISONs and MINLAW was to feel resigned to what was "sad but true".
These findings are very revealing about the nature of Russell's theatre. They highlight the capacity of Russell's characters to be, in a sense, all things to all men, disclosing that a crucial key to the play's popularity must be its capacity to reassure respondents with quite different perceptions that they are correct. This could leave the play open to the charge of 'playing to the gallery', but it is as well to be aware of the positive aspects of this kind of theatricality. This is important if the somewhat discredited kind of passive orientation to popular texts adopted by some Marxists is to be avoided. Such orientation can lead to popular texts being regarded merely as transmissions of dominant ideology, somehow inert and impossible to mobilise in any way. Analysis here aims not to be restricted to revealing the play's repressive operations as if these were given and fixed independently of the way in which the reading of such texts may be differently organised in different reading formations [Bennett and Woolacott 1987 p267].

Whilst it is valid to reveal repression of working class aspirations in Blood Brothers (e.g. the determinism in the play), it is important to take into account the possible positive ways it may be 'read'; possibilities like the positive feelings respondents can enjoy about themselves which could help them to be more assertive in the face of societal pressures. At the least, Russell's theatricality does create a recognisable role for the audience in authenticating the play. Respondents recognised this as an important part of what they enjoyed about it. Part of what makes a play popular, then, is that the audience are allowed to feel they had a hand in making the final product. This confirms a speculation which was a starting point for the work - that successful popular theatre needs to tap the creativity of its audience. In this light, Russell's character presentation could even be seen as a Brechtian attempt to allow the audience to use their own judgement. But an important ambiguity has to remain in our assessment of Russell here. He offers some interesting possibilities for involvement because he asks the audience to fill in the outline characters. His outline, though, invites the audience to slot in ready-made pieces of habitual notions, sometimes shaped by cliché and prejudice.

**Fate and his henchman**

Like Russell's use of stereotype, the theatricality created around the Narrator certainly achieved one kind of success. All the respondents
enjoyed his part. His interjections had the same effect as the ending being shown at the beginning; making respondents notice 'little things' throughout the play which would not otherwise have been particularly interesting. To a certain extent these devices absolve Russell from the obligation to continually revive audience interest through the play. In effect, it is one of a number of ways of dealing with the problem of rather banal subject matter; economically giving interest to theatre which might not otherwise be too gripping. It could be, however, that this is at the expense of another kind of success - an emphasis on important themes. Russell raises interesting questions of egalitarianism, meritocracy and social responsibility, but it is not these that the tension and emotion stimulated by the play are attached. This is due largely to the role of the Narrator. He promotes an atmosphere of high drama around trivial occurrences (e.g. 'Shoes Upon The Table', Russell 1985 p5), or around the 'wrong' causes of the tragedy - 'It was one day in October when the sun began to fade....' [ibid. p56], directs attention to the fact of Linda's becoming pregnant as a primary cause, rather than Mickey's redundancy.

Contributing to the evidence that the Narrator imbues events with a specious weightiness, is the finding that 'relaxation' is an important function of theatre for a number of these respondents. The fact that they all enjoyed the play so thoroughly confirms that they did find it 'relaxing'. The tensions or portentousness of the play, therefore, were not seen as tensions about real issues, which would carry over into real life. We have found that this was exactly what respondents like FARMER were trying to avoid through the distraction of the entertainment. The Narrator suggested there was such portent to the play, without actually delivering it. Again, this must remain to some extent a matter of the researcher's evaluation contrasting with respondents: the difficulty of illustrating what was not delivered is part of a general issue which is only partly resolvable. The evidence which can be offered here that the Narrator does not 'deliver', can be found in the finding that respondents are unable to clearly identify the significance of his role. Contradictions arise when they attempt to do so: they say he 'explains' what is going on, so you don't have to think, but also that they already knew exactly what was going on. The implication is that they expect Russell to have 'coded' a 'message' into the play which requires 'decoding' with help from the Narrator. Russell is trading on such
expectations of 'message', social comment, etc., without actually fulfilling them. They can be seen as unfulfilled in the finding that respondents identify only 'truisms' in the theme. There is theatrical advantage to be had in contriving a device like this, where respondents do not realise they are being spoon-fed the 'answer' to the 'problems' the play presents. Thus audiences can retain a feeling of satisfaction that they have faced up to difficulties, without any genuine disruption. Employment of such theatricality can lead Russell to undermine his own ends. He runs the risk of the 'snag' (identified by Egon Friedell in Shaw's position) that, "his audience could suck off the sugar and put the pill back on the plate" [Bentley (citing Friedell) 1985 p54]. The findings of this research indicate that for Blood Brothers, such a risk is more than hypothetical.

The overall effect of the theatricality surrounding the Narrator, was to promote an atmosphere conducive to the acceptance of fatalism. This had the effect of suggesting an overwhelming determinism to events, strongly entrenching respondents idea that "it's just that's the way it is" (GEORGE). Tension was therefore dissipated and feelings of indignation overcome by resignation. For example, Blood Brothers heightened the JENISONs and MINLAW's sense of class loyalty and indignation at inequality, but this was diffused by misdirection. They vented their contempt or bitterness in mocking the "hoity toity" snobbery of the Lyonses who functioned like cardboard cut-outs arranged to take the poisoned darts or rotten tomatoes. The JENISONs, for example, expected Mrs Lyons to be more instrumental in the final tragedy than she was, because they saw her as a stereotyped evil 'baddy'. FARMER, in contrast, who felt less allied with either class, found it difficult to understand Mrs Lyons' malevolence: "it was funny how Mrs Lyons came into it, because she was doing harm to her own". The Lyonses functioned as stereotyped 'targets' with whom no-one was in real danger of identifying. Respondents were able to distance themselves from criticism of them by classifying them as belonging to any group other than their own (e.g. see p112).

Although the JENISONs and MINLAW identified with the Johnstones, they did not address themselves to the root social causes of the disadvantages under which they struggled. They did not recognise the significance of those elements of social inequality which Russell had
introduced, like Mickey’s redundancy and prison treatment, which proved to function efficiently as straw dolls in this case. The obvious correlation between money and power was never mentioned, although the inference is there when Mrs Lyons ‘buys off’ Mrs Johnstone. The significance of wealth is strangely understated in the play. Although the Johnstones suffer repossession of their goods due to their inability to pay the bills, etc., it is not seen to be lack of money which blights their lives, but a predestined doom which cannot be so easily identified.

Rather than any of these ‘social’ causes, the JENISONs and MINLAW felt that the major cause of the tragedy, from which all contributory factors sprang, was the jealousy between the brothers: an accident of birth. They accepted that the hand of fate determined events. Being shown the ending at the beginning reinforced the determinism, of course. MINLAW in particular was influenced by the idea that the brothers were doomed from the start by a predetermination she identified as “breeding” (‘..it would always have been there. It was in his breeding, that’s why he got on with Mickey, they could bring him up different, but it would still show, his roots, in the end’). The predictability of the plot offers no possibility of the characters’ social positions ever being other than on the two stereotyped sides of the divide we are shown. MINLAW kept reiterating how the situation was "sad, but true", and all respondents seemed resigned to the fact that fate decreed that each man had his place, and there was nothing which could affect this destiny.

We have a very significant finding here. The JENISONs and MINLAW enjoyed a class loyalty celebrating a kind of solidarity against the predominance of the 'toffee nosed' values of another social class. The crucial point, however, is that although the play asserted some aspects of their own value system against the the prevailing norms, having done this, it left only resignation to the "sad but true" situation. The play can succeed in making these respondents feel more confident about themselves, at the same time, reducing their potential to improve their situation. If we accept Sharratt’s reasoning [Sharratt 1980 p275], we can see the presentation of the Johnstones as increasing the JENISON’s and MINLAW’s contentment with their own lot. He argues that there is the gratification of a kind of escapism in unpleasantness on stage (or TV), and this may be at work here. In comparison to the Johnstones' hand to
mouth existence, made worse by 'tragic' circumstances, the JENISONs and MINLAW might escape back to their own reality with some relief. Indeed, they did say that they talked about it afterwards and did not feel deflated by the tragic end. The overwhelming feeling was that they had had "a really good evening out".

This confrontation with situations which make ordinary life seem secure and attractive has obvious parallels with 'video nasties', as well as catastrophe and horror movies. The determinism in Blood Brothers can offer the same kind of satisfactions as the predictability of such videos. "You know its gonna happen [the next gory murder], its just a question of when" is how someone described to me their fascination with video nasties. This implies a sense of holding oneself at a pitch of readiness to receive the inevitable shock or horror you expect. Showing the ending of Blood Brothers at the beginning of the play allows an audience to do just this. In fact, "...all the way through you were thinking about it" (MINLAW). This 'steeling yourself' means that what would normally be shocking or horrifying loses its capacity to offend. In the case of the video nasty this results in violent and bloody acts being witnessed in relative impassivity; the butchery can be watched and vicariously experienced whilst any disturbing sense of horror is buffered by "knowing what's coming". The effect of this in the video nasty is to render escalating levels of violence acceptable. Whilst the predictability of Blood Brothers does not have such damaging implications, it functions in a similar way to render acceptable that which might not otherwise be so. Respondents did convey a profound sense of resignation to the class division they identified in the play. They were prepared to accept the tragic consequences with impassivity. POWER experienced no tension or shock over the shooting at the end ("the only thing that happened was that the shot made me jump! (laughs), no, I knew, that's what he would do") and FARMER and COOK "soon forget the tragedy... although it was sad, I came out feeling I'd had a jolly good time, and alright, it was sad, and, well, that's that".

In spite of his important role as (mis)director, the Narrator was seen quite innocently by respondents - "he told the story" (POWER). This was a common misconception. In actual fact, apart from a brief introduction and summing up, the Narrator never does actually narrate the story: he sets the tone, the atmosphere for the playing out of the story, which is
quite simple enough for anyone to follow. He fulfils primitive expectations by appearing to provide a narrative line, but his function is not, as respondents imagine, to make the story easier to follow, it is in interpreting the story for them. They are correct in thinking that he reduces the effort required to make sense of an already obvious plot, but he does this by offering a ready-made cultural concept by means of which the play can be least traumatically assimilated: Fate.

Mulvey's definition of the fundamental qualities of melodrama offers the perfect description of the role of fate in *Blood Brothers*:

*Early British melodrama celebrated transitional, liminal themes that included memories of feudal oppression with reflection on the lot of the working man. The world of everyday normality would be turned upside down as the innocent oppressed suffered at the mercy of the dominant, with arbitrary turns of plot and fate reflecting the arbitrary, relentless nature of class justice* [Mulvey 1986 p84].

There is also a strikingly appropriate comparison between this characterisation of melodrama and Russell's play:

*Aesthetics of the popular melodrama depend on grand gesture, tableaux, broad moral themes, with narratives of coincidence, reverses and sudden happy ending organised around rigid opposition between good and evil. Characters represent forces rather than people, and fail to control or understand their circumstances so that fate, rather than heroic transcendence, offers a resolution to the drama* [ibid. p93].

Do the respondents respondents to this play, then, also see fate, as opposed to heroic transcendence, as resolving the drama? To an important extent, the tragedy is seen as the result of particular acts perpetrated by individuals: Eddie's insensitive flippancy about Mickey's redundancy, Sammy goading Mickey into the robbery, Mrs Lyons exposing Linda and Mickey's affair. Discordant respondents failed to identify social causes of problems because they believed in the power of individual effort and will: a bias with interesting implications.

Accordant respondents also failed to identify social causes of problems, because they believed in the power of 'fate', or circumstances. This suggests that the opposing beliefs, in individualism, and determinism, are both more deeply rooted than a belief in collective responsibility.
These emphases reflect deep-seated cultural needs to believe in our individual ability to act on others and on the world. The need to have heroes has always been addressed by drama and literature. But what of the 'heroes' in Blood Brothers? Most individual acts are not only negative, they are 'explained' by the Narrator as part of some conveniently anonymous superstition working itself out. The theatrical presentation of superstition, fate, and destiny which are the recurring themes of the Narrator's timely interjections contrives to make it seem almost plausible that the whole tragedy stems from the pair of shoes being put on the table [Russell 1985 p4]. The atmosphere created gives plausibility to a plot based on trivial superstitions such as these. It relies, for example, on "what they say - about twins secretly parted...that if either twin learns that he was one of a pair, they shall both immediately die", as a basic premise of the plot. Surprisingly, the (over)emphasis of such superstition seemed acceptable to respondents: surprising, since it is the kind of unlikely element that often comes in for criticism as 'unrealistic'. It also jars against the need to believe in individual acts. The discovery of this apparent willingness to embrace seemingly unreasonable premises in the name of fate is of major significance.

One explanation for this unexpected attraction to the 'unrealistic' nature of fate is that respondents wish to choose fate as the cause of events, rather than face the implications of the alternatives. Obvious alternatives would include the shortcomings of the inegalitarian organisation of society, but this was never suggested by any respondent as a direct cause of the family's problems. Whilst the belief in the potency of the individual clearly serves vital psychological purposes necessary to the basic perception of the self, the idea of community is perhaps less innate. As a force which can take the responsibility for events, 'fate' leaves us more blameless than 'society'. The concept of society cannot be separated from our sense of our own contribution to it, our own part in the guilt. Fate, however, is beyond our control. It can be deferred to even more easily than theocracy, since it is not necessary for us to have any sort of 'relationship' with fate. The concept of fate provides a way of making sense of events to which no contribution on our part is necessary.
We may conclude that the idea of fate is a culturally embedded belief which offers even more reliable reassurance than 'realism'. The fact that respondents are prepared to forgo the satisfactions of realism in favour of acknowledging fate, suggests that their allegiance to realism is conditional. In effect, they are prepared to support the presentation which offers the greatest reassurance and the least obligation. 'Realism' will only do this if it shows what respondents want to believe is 'reality'. Fate, in any event, can be relied upon to take the strain if a sense of reality which does not defer to audience bias should threaten to disturb.

In his summing up, the Narrator offers his audience two explanations for the events which have just taken place: 'superstition', or 'class':

And do we blame superstition for what came to pass?

Or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?

The choice of which to 'blame' has not been left open; the theatricality surrounding the 'supersition' has proved far more persuasive than that surrounding 'class'. All the respondents give emphasis to elements of the former, rather than the latter. Does it not seem odd that all these respondents were so willing to accept the predominance of fate? The legend about the brothers being doomed to die if either learns of their true relationship, for example, is accepted by all respondents more or less unquestioningly. If it is not, the play makes little sense. And yet this faintly absurd superstition has no verified origin and would more usually be derided or at least dismissed in our modern world. Only CRAWFORD and FARMER referred to the implausibility at all. CRAWFORD admitted that, "the story itself might be a little far-fetched, giving away the child", but excused this on the grounds that "so much else in the play, incidentally, is so true to life". FARMER exhibited some doubts about fate being "absolutely there... I suppose you always have it in the back of your mind, but not quite so much as that". Even then, she did not allow this to disturb her acceptance of the story. A possible explanation for this might be that while part of her recognised that attributing so much to 'fate' was not sound, or realistic, part of her also enjoyed being persuaded that in fact there are many things in life which it is impossible to affect or change because they are 'fated'. 
Although 'fate' has been used as a convenient description of what respondents ascribe events to, the repetition of the term in analysis implies a concreteness which did not characterise respondents notions. The apparent presence of some kind of malignant force gives 'melodrama' to the play and is an ancient element of tragedy. The character created in Sammy seems to assume elemental proportions, not intended perhaps by Russell, as a manifestation of this force - a 'tempter', like Mephistophiles or Iago. An underlying perception, however, of realms of good and evil, which supported those characters is less clear cut for latter day audiences. There is no sense of understanding the source or nature of the amorphous unidentified evil in Sammy. This inherent evil is accepted because it precludes the possibility of respondents accepting the responsibility of being a part of the society which has produced this malefactor.

Although such forces of evil feature in traditional tragedy, is there ever the possibility of real tragedy here? It could be said that in Blood Brothers it is seriously undermined by Russell's insistence on fate. The ability to appeal to this transcendant power defuses any attempt to disturb, because it absolves people from their responsibilities as individuals. Assurances previously found in religion, where it was possible to believe everything was in God's hands, have been undermined, but the new scales and complexities of organisation and technology in society form a kind of secular equivalent. They are beyond the understanding and control of most ordinary people, who come to accept that it is futile and unnecessary to attempt to take control of their own lives, or to accept individual social responsibility. This sense that one is powerless before 'the powers that be' is emphasised again in the scene with the doleites. Redundant workers are handed out 'explanations' with the inference that they need not bother even trying to understand the reasons for their misfortune which are quite above them..."due to the world situation, the shrinking pound, the global slump and the price of oil..." [Russell 1985 p57].

There is a sense of conspiracy between the respondents and Russell to confirm the importance of fate in determining one's position in life. Accordant, discordant and neutral respondents were all party to this conspiracy - not a single respondent rejected the basic assumption that
'circumstances' could determine the characters' lives to the extent shown. This strongly suggests that there must be some comfort to be found in all camps in the idea that some force is at work which we are powerless to resist. Those who have benefitted from a privileged destiny are absolved of guilt and responsibility for those who have not. The downtrodden can rest assured that it would be pointless to take up some mighty struggle for liberty and equality, since only destiny can determine the course of events, not human endeavour. In fact, attempts to alter the course of fate can be seen in the tragic conclusion of *Blood Brothers* to be not only futile, but dangerous.

The Narrator directed attention to fate, and away from alternative possible interpretations of events. These may have been subversive of audience confidence in the governing institutions of our society, pointing, for instance, to the double standards of the police in dealing with people from different backgrounds, or to the arbitrary economics of private enterprise causing redundancy to undermine the fabric of people's lives. The Narrator allows respondents to easily avoid these possibilities, suggesting that Mickey is doomed from the start, and hence, these unfortunate aspects of social organisation are incidental, and not a matter for serious concern as the real cause of his problems. It seems clear that *Blood Brothers* reaffirmed respondents stereotypes and reassured them that all is well in society, or at least, those unfocussed and unaccredited things which are not well, are beyond the power of the audience to affect (fate, evil). Assured of this, and after the throes of the finale, contentment with the evening is the overriding response. The potential in the quality of accordants' responses culminated in nothing more than the good night out also enjoyed by neutral and discordant respondents.

Notes:
1. *Blood Brothers* may not have a classically happy ending, but note respondents satisfaction with it. See also discussion of importance of *resolution*, as opposed to 'happy' endings, Fn. p237.
CHAPTER FIVE: BLOODY POETRY by HOWARD BRENTON

SYNOPSIS
A new play, Bloody Poetry was presented for the first time in the main auditorium of the Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, in October 1984 by Foco Novo, a visiting experimental theatre group with an emphasis on new work.

The play begins with the meeting of Byron and Shelley in Switzerland in 1816, and goes on to present a version of their lives with Mary Shelley and Claire Claremont until Shelley’s death six years later. Bysshe (as Shelley is known in the play), Mary and Claire spend the summer enjoying the company and hospitality of Lord Byron, "in an infinite combination of couples" [Brenton 1985 p26], which repels Polidori, Byron’s doctor and official biographer who accompanies him. Claire becomes pregnant to Byron.

One evening, the conversation turns to the parable of Plato’s cave, and the four decide to act it out. With Polidori bound up as prisoner, shadows are thrown onto the wall to represent the visions of the cave. The monstrous shapes bring ideas to Mary of “not a man, a thing, put together out of graves” [ibid. p40]. This is clearly the basis of Frankenstein’s monster. Suddenly Bysshe is seized by a fit apparently caused by a vision of another woman he has known in Mary’s place. Bysshe soliloquises about his haunting by spirits, ghosts and phantoms which prevent him from being truly free.

The last scene of Act One splits to show Mary and Claire on a beach, and Byron and Shelley in a sailing boat. The women talk about Byron’s incest with his sister, but Claire tries to be confident of his affections. Mary brings Claire’s day dreams that the “summer will never end” [ibid. p45], down to some realistic arrangements for her to share a house with them in England to have her child. Meanwhile, on the boat, as a storm gathers, Byron discusses with Shelley his preference for his sister and for boys. The storm worsens and Byron declares, “the boat is lost. Dive in sir!”. Bysshe first soliloquises about his intent to “act as if I were free” [ibid. p46], then confesses he cannot swim. Byron stays with him on the boat and Bysshe sails it throught the storm to return them safely to the two women on the beach.
Act Two shows Shelley's ex-wife, Harriet, reduced to prostitution, mental instability and finally suicide. Returning to England in the winter, Bysshe responds to the news of Harriet's drowning in the serpentine with bitterness and distress. Mary, however, chooses this moment to point out that with Harriet dead, they can get married. Bysshe declares that this is against their belief in free love, but Mary persuades him, insisting, "it is a practical matter. We must move through the world, armed as best we can be" [ibid. p52]. Claire gives birth to a daughter, Allegra. Bysshe is now being investigated by the secret police, and financially, the economies of free love are proving fragile. Claire asserts that they should go abroad, take Allegra to Byron and have a holiday. They are accompanied on their travels to the Appenines by the ghost of Harriet Westbrook.

Later that summer, Bysshe decides to go with Claire when she determines to see Byron in Venice. Mary finds ironic his intention to force Byron to be practical, and with some bitterness declines to accompany them because one of their children is not well enough to undertake the journey. In Venice, Bysshe and Claire indulge in sexual liaisons whilst the ghost of Harriet haunts him still. Byron has been enjoying the married women of Venice, suffering "vicious clap ... getting pissed and falling in damn canals" [ibid. p65]. He dismisses his obligations to Claire and his child airily, and Shelley offers little reproach. Byron takes Bysshe to see a deranged poet imprisoned in a madhouse to illustrate that it is not possible to be a "moral immoralist" [ibid. p68]. Byron himself has despaired of such ideals. Shelley still argues for utopia, but is chastened by his encounter with the mad poet. Harriet continues to haunt him.

Mary has come with the children to Venice. Shelley returns to their hotel in an untimely rage about the Peterloo massacre until Claire tells him that his daughter has died. Mary is vitriolic about him making her bring the sick child to Venice. She challenges him to justify the "pointless cruelty" of the "endless - hopeless - schemes, and dreams" [ibid. p74]. He counters that he has written The Mask of Anarchy, but Mary cannot accept that the price of a poem is the death of their child.

Three years later, Byron and Bysshe are sailing in the Gulf of Spezia while the women are walking on the beach. Claire's child by Byron has
died and Mary has miscarried another. Byron has become more interested in becoming actively involved in the revolutionary struggle, but on meeting, the two women are stony towards him. The men set sail to Livorno and Polidori preludes Shelley's death at sea with a description from his subsequently published literary reminiscences, before Shelley delivers his own poetic elegy. Back on the beach after the storm, Byron's command to "Burn him! Burn us all! A great big, bloody, beautiful fire!" [ibid, p82], ends the play.

BRENTON's VIEW

Consensus

As will be explained in the findings of this study, the nature of Bloody Poetry determines a significant difficulty in identifying a 'consensus' such as has been provided for other plays. The following report, however, on the open forum, might be considered to stand in for a 'consensus', since a significant number of respondents were exposed to the 'establishment view', either at the forum, or through reviews before seeing the play.

Open Forum

Brenton attended an Open Forum debate on Bloody Poetry during its run at the Haymarket (12.10.84), with Paul Foot (political writer), Judith Chadwick (visiting American lecturer), Phillip Dodd (Department of Contemporary Cultural Studies at Leicester University) and Geoffrey Matthew (Reading University).

Paul Foot (author of Red Shelley [1980]) criticised Brenton for undermining Shelley's political significance in the play. Foot saw Shelley most importantly as a great political (rather than poetical) writer, an agitator, investing a political movement with hope and energy. Brenton, he claimed had limited the effectiveness of the Shelley character for such a role. This was because Brenton had 'allowed in' the reactionary response that Shelley could not cope with his personal problems, and therefore his revolutionary ideas were worthless.

Judith Chadwick stressed the importance of audience preconceptions, suggesting that these are even more important in the case of a play about real people. She felt that the audience's knowledge (or even half-knowledge) about Byron and Shelley led to a break down in the suspension
of disbelief. For example, Shelley's reaction to his child's death, she claimed, was implausible because of what we already know of him. It was interesting that Phillip Dodd criticised the feminism in the play for stopping short: the women characters were merely victims, not seen as autonomous or resilient. Yet one attempt to show Mary's assertiveness — her demanding 'Will you marry me', was criticised by Judith Chadwick as being autobiographically inaccurate, and therefore unbelievable. Geoffrey Matthew also stressed that erroneous characterisation was 'inescapable' (this emphasis might be expected from a panel of Shelley and Byron experts, but might not be expected to trouble a non-expert audience so much). He identified the importance of Harriet's ghost in weakening the ideological impact, because the figure effectively mocked Shelley and Byron's ideas and implied they were merely silly.

A man from the audience who said that he was 'not academically connected', praised the play as 'incredibly successful'. He lamented the 'pitifully small' audience for the play, and criticised those who had attended for being 'incapable of picking up the nuances, the allusions and the humour'. He wondered whether Brenton was trying, with this play, to criticise precisely these kinds of small, closed minds of an audience who 'sat there like puddings'. He actually considered the small numbers of the audiences and the 'pudding-like' reaction 'a great compliment' to the play, because it was a 'real play about real issues which these people can't appreciate'.

Brenton commenced by trying to put his play and his comments into perspective: 'after all, for most people it is just a night out'. He said the most important thing was that Byron and Shelley were trying to alter the way things were, through personal struggle. He suggested there was a parallel between the state of the country then and today. But they failed. He felt it was most important and interesting to dramatise what they did wrong. He wanted the question to emerge — 'then how can we have success, do it right?'.

Brenton was asked about his inclusion of the Julian and Maddalo piece, for which his justification was, 'I love the dialectic'. He maintained that he tried to make the play simple to understand; for instance, the presentation of Platonic ideas in the shadow scene. But some things are not simple, and he asserted, a playwright has got to have faith that you
can explain anything to anyone on stage, otherwise he becomes patronising. 'I wrote it as best I could'.

Brenton admitted that he became more interested in the communistical love aspect, its problems and failings, than in the purely political aspects of Shelley and Byron's story. Criticised for his negative positions on socialism, he contended, 'you do what you can'; his contribution, he felt, showed what is not endorsed. He conceded that this tendency to an interest in the failures (which in itself, it will be argued, can be related to the kind of decadence in late Romanticism), did conflict with the original motivation to celebrate and rediscover Shelley's greatness as 'a bomb that has never gone off in English literature'. Brenton had wanted it to be a very entertaining evening, and to provoke at the same time. He felt Bloody Poetry was a half way effort towards the great utopian play he wants to write, if it were not for the fact that the problems and failures always distract his interest.

Questioned about the intellectual and historical remoteness of the play from the Leicester audience, he countered that he had had no idea in mind of the audience he was writing for, insisting: 'you have to have faith you can address whoever wanders in'. Asked why he chose a subject which was obviously going to put most people off, Brenton repeated his interest in rediscovering Shelley who had been too neglected.

Theatre Quarterly
In 1975 Brenton was interviewed by Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler for Theatre Quarterly [Itzin and Trussler 1975 p4-20]. This interview provides an interesting perspective on Brenton's subsequent comments at the forum about Bloody Poetry.

To begin with, Brenton's justification of a subject which it was claimed would 'obviously put most people off' seems at odds with his earlier recognition of the importance of reaching a wide audience as a priority:

I want to get into bigger theatres, because they are, in a sense, more public. Until that happens you really can't have any worth as a playwright [ibid.p10].

At the same time, he shows an awareness of the dangers of entering
'establishment' theatre...
...its a terrible tension. You can't reconcile it. The theatre is a bourgeois institution: you have to live and work against that [ibid.].

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Brenton would have been able to more successfully 'work against that', if he had not allowed his 'artistic' interest (in making a better play out of Shelley's failure) to interfere to such an extent with his 'political' motivation to celebrate Shelley's socialism. Brenton is asked by TQ why he works within commercial mainstream theatre and he replies that fringe theatre has failed because it becomes sealed off from the greater part of reality. There is only one society, it is not possible to have an alternative society growing within it or it becomes hermetically sealed off. Fringe went wrong, he claims, because its audiences became too sophisticated - 'the fringe circuit audiences became spuriously sophisticated... it was becoming arty' [ibid.p11]. In Bloody Poetry, however, the subject itself and Brenton's preoccupation with particular aspects of it, are conducive to such 'spurious sophistication'. He seems not to accept that his chosen subject or form of address might determine which kinds of audience choose to attend. Some sense of responsibility for making his own audiences to a certain extent seems to be lacking. This is echoed in his rather naive comment above about addressing 'whoever happens to wander in'.

The TQ interview gives the clearest of indications about Brenton's 'position' as a playwright, or at least, what it was in 1975:

...Feelings of revolutionary socialism...
Q: You do think, then, that there is some practical effect that theatre in particular or art in general can have?
Yes I do. I think its crucial that, in public, truths be told. Also I dream of a play acting like a bush fire, smouldering into public consciousness. Or - like hammering on the pipes being heard all through a tenement. No playwright of my generation has actually got into public, actually touched life outside the theatre. But it can be done. I don't think any of us have written well enough yet. I know I've not got anywhere near the real world.

- Do you think that apart from, as it were, warning people with whose ideas you are in sympathy, you can reach, or if you
like you can convert or at least influence others?
You don't write to convert. More - to stir things up. For
people to make what they wish of it [ibid. p20].

There are some contrasts and inconsistencies between the Open Forum and
TQ statements. These are either to be explained by Brenton's developing
political stance, or by an important difference in his theoretical
ideals and 'the practice of it', as his character Byron points out in
the play [Brenton 1985 p44]. Despite his attested position of
'revolutionary socialism', his interest in the art of the playwriting
for its own sake seems to take precedence in Bloody Poetry. Artistic or
aesthetic criteria have dominated the crafting of the play. Recognising
the importance of this kind of dilemma for Brenton himself reveals the
play as as much a medium of self-discovery for him as socialist
incitement. After all, the audience are left to 'make what they wish of
it'.

Those academics assembled at the Open Forum who were not preoccupied
with the accuracy of the biographical aspects, together with the author,
seemed to have decided that the play was most importantly a political
statement. However, interviews with members of the audience do not
support, and indeed sometimes refute, such an emphasis.
RESPONSES

Theatricality

Harriet’s ghost

The use of the ghostly figure of Shelley’s dead wife was an element of the play that respondents felt least self-conscious about discussing. The lack of diffidence here was particularly noticeable even when respondents admitted to not understanding the significance of the figure at all (in contrast to embarrassment about other uncomprehended aspects of this or the other plays). This, together with the rather flippant tone of some comments ("she kept wailing all the time" FARRAH, ".hanging around at the back oohing and aaahing" WALDEN, "prancing about all over the place" ABLE), suggests respondents identified something quirky, jokey even, in the theatricality here which allowed them to treat it lightly.

Responses to the ghost were not exclusively frivolous, however. Although FARRAH found it annoying that the ghost "kept wailing all the time", she elaborated on her reasons for finding this "distracting" lucidly:

...it was really strange. She didn't seem to fit into the play,...but I suppose then she was out of character, in that she was cockney, lower class sort of person who didn't fit in to what they were doing. But I didn't like that bit.

FARRAH did not see Harriet’s ghost as effective criticism of Shelley, but as having, "more of a doom effect", giving the impression of "leading Shelley towards death...". This suggests that in her own mind, FARRAH associates the dramatic importance of Harriet’s ghost with the idea of Shelley as a rather dark, brooding, detached, ethereal figure. The Shadow Scene [Brenton 1985 p36] emphasises this image for her, creating an 'atmosphere' which contributes to the idea of Shelley as a dramatic, conceivably, romantic (to be more carefully defined later) figure:

Shelley seemed doomed to death, he had a closer contact with death than Byron... had more to do with death and spirits, and less with people.

HINCHOLIFFE and the REEKIEs did not pay much attention to the ghost. Certainly it did not focus any criticism of Shelley for them. They approached it from the assumption that a play like this must be posing some kind of intellectual puzzle by such theatricality:
I couldn’t quite see what he was getting at by having the ghost around all the time. Puzzled. He’s obviously trying to say something but it hasn’t come through to me. (HINCHCLIFFE)

I’m sure it must have some significance. (Mrs REEKIE)

WALDEN was equally nonplussed, but less humble and more frustrated by the oddness of the presentation; its unconventionality appeared quite esoteric, leaving him wondering “what the hell it was about”:

I thought it was a bit absurd really (sniggers). I had a problem coping with the lady behind the muslin screen... I was really having to puzzle - what the hell is that about? - now was she Shelley’s wife?... I thought, Ah, Ok, that’s the wife who’s been hanging around.

It was only after probed that WALDEN pursued the issue of the wife’s ghost beyond it’s mere peculiarity. Then he agreed that she seemed to be “more mocking” of Shelley than heightening the tragic air. He did conclude that the ghost, "raised the other idea that perhaps it wasn’t so brilliant after all, his ideas". Although the presentation of the ghost also offended two members of the adult education class, this suggestion that it might undermine sympathy for Shelley was out of the question:

CHARLES:...the girl who was floating round, his wife, I didn’t like that particularly.

ABLE: ...he was very sad about his wife’s drowning, I mean, I know that he left her, but, erm. ...It seemed too, artificial...she looked so much alive, I mean she was prancing around all over the place, and I just didn’t like her.

Q: Did it make you think less of Shelley...

ABLE: Ooh no! No, I was just annoyed at the production I think.

PETERS’ response was a complete contrast. Characteristically, although he said the ghost was not a memorable element of the play at all, when it was referred to, it was its significance for Shelley’s sense of responsibility which he recognised, rather than the novelty of the presentation:

it was obviously some sort of memory haunted him and he felt he was responsible, the one thing that perhaps he did have a sense of responsibility about (long pause) - no I mean until
you mentioned that, I'd completely forgotten it, it hadn't said much to me at all (laughing).

The ending
Despite the dramatic staging [ibid. p82], not many respondents could actually remember how the play had ended. WALDEN did remember it, but only in response to a question as to any parts where he 'became bored or lost interest':

The last speech of Shelley's, I thought it was a waste of time...maybe I'd lost all sympathy by that time...I'm not seriously into that sort of poetry ...I thought, you know, I could do without this, he should have croaked and they should've got rid of him (laughs heartily).

Certainly he did not see any meaning or significance in the recitation at the end. He presumed it was "just to show that he was a good poet or, try and get some sympathy for the guy". In common with other respondents, he criticised the unremarkable ending, "there could've been a bit more of a punch at the end". PETERS was similarly lukewarm about the ending:

...I can't remember it in detail, it seemed to have a fair amount of impact (long pause) - it seemed a logical place for the play to end - I suppose I wondered how they took so long to get there! (laughter).

The ending clearly lacked any real power or sense of resolution for WALDEN then, and PETERS would have us believe that for him, this was true of most of the play, as well.

Although CHARLES was enthusiastic about the play in general, the ending failed to live up to her expectations. This was partly because prior knowledge of the story was not authenticated, but also seemed to be because of a preference for dramatic resolutions in general:

It went out on a whimper at the end. There's this business of his heart not burning isn't there, but there wasn't even a flash of lightning ...I wanted a bit of - well it disappointed me actually. I seem to be always disappointed at endings.

HINCHCLIFFE is spared the disappointment of conceding that the ending was ineffectual when he realises, with a laugh of relief, that its very unmemorable nature must have been significant:
It doesn’t stay strongly in mind, the ending - is that significant? I’m struggling to remember - it doesn’t really intend to be conclusive, does it. It doesn’t give answers, it asks questions (laughs) which is really what good plays do.

Neither did the ending have any great impact on Mr REEKIE. In fact, in common with Mr LANE, he had difficulty recalling it. Mrs REEKIE remembered quite clearly how the play had ended, but rather than any powerful crescendo, she saw Shelley blotted out with a significant finality: “All this sort of pent up emotion and then - (clicks fingers) - it was gone once he was dead”. Her impression of the ending implies a mixture of such profound disillusion and awareness of the artifice of the piece as to suggest that for all its idealism, the play (as Byron and Mary suggest the poetry does [Brenton 1985 p44,55,62,74]) at least partially fails in practice.

FARRAH was exceptional in remembering the ending as a powerful part of the play. She found it a fitting resolution and an aspect of the play’s entertainment value - something which was not so often referred to with regard to this play:

It was very entertaining. It was funny, a woman coming out said, 'it didn't leave you feeling very good at the end, did it?', but I thought you came out with this sense of power. When Shelley recited all that bit after he’d died, you came out with this idea that there was a great sense of power behind what they both had.

Poetry
There was more qualified approval of the inclusion of passages of poetry in this play than might have been expected. Certainly more than assumptions like BAKER and FOX's might lead one to expect: "'Poetry' would put people off"(FOX), "That would be it - it would put Leicester people off..they're just not interested in it"(BAKER).

Despite his assurance that he was not “into that sort of poetry”, it was not the inclusion of poetry per se to which WALDEN objected. Although the final poetic rendition was a "waste of time", he was prepared to accept it at other junctures in the play:

there were the bits, in the evenings, in the dining room. When
they were reciting poetry. And I thought there was a sound reason for that...I could appreciate it, although, yes, perhaps I wasn't totally into the poetry and convinced it was marvellous and great, I could understand why they did it.

FARRAH, was much less equivocal about the poetry content. She liked the passages of poetry and thought they were not out of place. Perhaps more surprisingly, PETERS was also committed to the inclusion of the pieces of poetry in the play:

No I mean it was part of the play, it was their life...oh yes, I don't see how you could've had a play about those characters and and their life without that.

HINCHCLIFFE did not claim to enjoy the poetry, but conceded, "the passages went well". His rather hedging statements about it suggest that he may have felt he "really ought" to have enjoyed it in the same way that he "felt at the time that I really ought to read some Shelley". Although he was "not a poetry reading man", he gives the impression that it is he who is at fault because he has to say "I don't know which poems they were, I meant to look it up and didn't". The poetry itself was "not at all out of place, or too much of it".

As will become apparent, the poetry functioned similarly to other esoteric references. It will be found that to a greater or lesser extent, these created either an exclusivity which could alienate some respondents, or enjoyable gratifications, depending upon the extent of prior knowledge and familiarity with the subject.

Staging
A number of scenes were commended by respondents for their staging or theatrical impact. FARRAH particularly liked the picnic in Italy scene because the "atmosphere was very good - the contrast of the hot sunny day to the winter in England - came over really well, the feel of the different climates was very good". These scenes employed skilful use of stage lighting and careful staging. Very bright lights diffused by plain pale blue hangings across the back of an almost empty stage were used for the Italian summer scene [ibid. p59]. The thin white clothes, the picnic spread and languorous movements of the actors contributed to the feeling of summer drowse. In comparison the winter English garden scene [ibid. p48] shows a contraction of demeanour, heavy clothes, a bare stage, bleak lighting.
FARRAH also mentioned the 'split' scene [ibid. p42] "because you were aware there was somebody else there, your attention was taken to the others, but it still kept it as a whole". This was also commented on by WALDEN who thought the illusion of the two scenes going on simultaneously, whilst each was unaware of the other was "very good, considering the lack of, props etc...excellent". The cleverness of the idea seems to be what has gained his appreciation here. The boat scene was also mentioned in response to questions about particular parts which were liked or remembered, by FARRAH, WALDEN and PETERS, although they were not expansive about this (e.g."the storm on the boat I remembered as quite good" PETERS). This may simply have reflected the interest provided by a change of staging and effects. The storm sound effects may be considered to have the 'instinctive' interest of direct sound association provided by simulation of many sounds (also birds, streams, etc.) from the environment [Wilson 1985 p119].

When asked for parts of the play he thought were particularly good, WALDEN referred to some of those already mentioned, in addition saying that he "liked the bit...in the dining room...":

... when Mary seemed to have these ideas about, the Frankenstein story, and she started almost sort of having visions...that was particularly good, that was one of the best bits of the whole play for my money... the bit where they were on the boat. On one side of the screen - the screen, it sounds like on the cinema, the stage, whereas the other two were actually on... they carried very well.

WALDEN does not make any connection between these scenes being "particularly good", "carried very well" etc. and emotional impact. If enjoyment of a heightened emotional state does not explain his preference for these scenes, an appreciation of the professional theatrical skills they exhibit (e.g. mimesis, p96) is an alternative explanation.

A number of respondents said that they liked the shadow scene depicting Plato's cave [Brenton 1985 p35]. Even WALDEN responded quite favourably to this. He showed an awareness of the philosophical implications, rather than simply enjoying the dramatic effects for their own sake:

A concept I find interesting ...when I was an undergraduate we did that in philosophy of science... so I was familiar with the
ideas . . it was quite good . . it helped to put across the idea that they were . . trying to think outside of themselves . . to think outside of what was going on around them and try and be slightly more off on a tangent than everybody else.

Although PETERS did not respond as positively as this, in the context of his insistence: "I can't remember very much from the first act at all", the shadow scene did represent one of the "rare glimpses" he could recall, if only as a vague memory of "the images on the back wall".

The LANEs mentioned the shadow scene as their favourite:

Mr LANE: the bit that I remember best is where they were going through that, poem . . . they re-enacted it, and the shadows.

Mrs LANE: Oh I liked the shadows . . . I just like that sort of thing, though,(laughs) I like playing, and doing making shadows.

Mr LANE: Yes, and the prisoner, where they tied that chap up as the prisoner, where all he could see was the shadows, and then, what his reaction would've been if it was, when he saw the reality of it rather than his own, impression of it. Yeah that bit stood out, I remember that bit quite well. I can't remember which poem or work it was that they were quoting.

Part of the attraction for the LANEs may well have been that the scene was slightly 'scary'. In the 'gothic horror' tradition of flickering flames and thunder storms, it may have triggered quite habitual responses of 'fear'. But it also successfully conveyed a new way of looking at things, a new idea, that there is a reality beyond that which our habitual impressions reveal. This in itself may have had a strangeness about it for the LANEs which made the scene more 'scary' and dramatic. In contrast, the REEKIEs either did not grasp the implications of the theatricality, or they see platonic ideas as simply old hat. It was not "dramatic", "haunting" or "scary" enough for them.

Mr REEKIE: I don't think it was as dramatic, the effect wasn't as haunting as it should've been.

Mrs REEKIE: It was supposed to be more dramatic than it came across, because he has a fit doesn't he so I think it must've been pretty sort of scary.

Mr REEKIE: It doesn't seem to have any sort of, effect like that.

Mrs REEKIE: You could see what they were getting at.
Mr REEKIE: I mean Polidori is quite sort of, perturbed by it isn't he, but, its difficult to see why from the way it was done.

The REEKIEs were unusual in finding the shadow scene disappointing. The possibility that, as regular theatre-goers, their responses were a little jaded, might be one which can be investigated. Only HINCHCLIFFE was similarly unimpressed. He seemed unable to forget the importance of the play as an intellectual puzzle for long enough to get anything out of this scene:

I was puzzled, not sure what that was getting at. This is why I'd liked to have seen it again - being dim anyway, I have to see things twice for them to sink in (laughs) . . . I quite enjoyed it, but when I'm puzzled, I tend to just, leave it at that, hope that on reflection things will come, and if they don't it doesn't matter. I wasn't really bored by it. It had a certain amount of - theatricality.

Given their other priorities, a similar reaction may have been expected of some members of the VAUGHAN COLLEGE adult education class, but perhaps it is significant that none of them mentioned the shadow scene and neither did their tutor introduce the scene for discussion.

**Modern Idiom**

There were several instances in the play of modern idiom, in particular, Byron's use of modern expletives (e.g. 'the young shit' p18, 'I keep on getting pissed' p65, 'you poor sod' p68 [Brenton 1985]). FARRAH was primed for this kind of device because "you almost expect that sort of thing today". WALDEN, however, did not share expectations that theatre would do "that sort of thing". In fact he seemed rather to expect theatre to present historical authenticity, which meant that he thought Brenton might simply have slipped up here:

The one thing that did bother me about the whole play... this'll sound really prudish, cos I suspect it's the sort of language I use around the lab - I wasn't too sure if his word usage was accurate...the use of words, I didn't know were necessarily exact for the era... I wasn't too sure whether he was trying to put it into a modern vocabulary, or trying to recreate vocabulary that might’ve been used... he referred to Shelley as never being a piss artist... Now I can understand that because the vocabulary doesn't necessarily offend me... it
didn't seem right in the context. I'm not trying to sound too prudish (laughing).

It is interesting that it was two men, WALDEN and DENNIS, who were prepared to say that they had their reservations about the swear words.

I object to him using this fuck cunt thing just to do it you see... he could've done it in a better way (DENNIS).

Two women who commented on this seemed to be much more anxious that they might be labelled as prudes if they objected, and perhaps with good reason. Whilst ABLE nervously qualifies her distaste, "the way he brought today's language into their mouths... was a bit distasteful, actually, I thought, but, er, nevertheless it was quite interesting", CHARLES is eager point out that "it wasn't half as bad as I expected". These comments indicate a certain amount of anxiety to claim a liberalism which could accept the contemporary expletives Brenton uses.

I was not alone in suspecting some of these respondents of using the play in this way:

CHARLES: You see, surprisingly enough, to ladies such as myself, the language wasn't half as bad as I expected.
DENNIS: No - you were disappointed (laughing) - I'm sorry about that. You should come to our house someday.
CHARLES: Erm, I've heard far worse, I think. Is that what put you off?
DENNIS: No it didn't - well, it did in a way, but not in the way that you're suggesting.

DENNIS' was an interesting objection as it seemed to stem from a cynicism about a kind of inverted snobbery. He may have felt that the cultured upper classes were trying to cash in on a part of his culture, his language, and assimilate it into their forms and structures. This could be related to the possibility that male respondents disliked Shelley because he was not masculine (e.g. see p184). DENNIS in particular, seemed on the verge of articulating a frustration with the emasculation of left wing ideals in this "rather nice middle class" context, and the emasculation of 'his' language (language which CHARLES would hear if she were to take him up on his offer to "come round to our house") gives him a "very strong feeling". There is the suggestion that he sees the play as an agency for the exploitation of this kind of language:

its sort of titivating ... for the same reason as posh people
used to go and see the elephant man, they could go and see him and it was rather a posh thing to do.

The importance of the 'Romantic' image which seemed to inform FARRAH's responses was reinforced by her response to the use of modern idiom. The fact that it increased the forcefulness of the Byron and Shelley figures, made them seem more special and set apart from the rest of society, can be seen as an evocation of the traditional role of the Romantic poet:

It brought over the scandal of their life even more, made them seem more strong and rebellious against norms ... Having established them as rebellious historical figures it made them seem even more different, made you sit back a bit, and see them as against everything.

If we compare this with a theoretical critique of the Romantic artist, we can see that respondents do respond to things that are part and parcel of Romanticism, particularly the idea of the tragic flaws in the special individual:

We can take the idea of the artist as a special kind of person, and of the 'wild' genius, as far back as the Socratic definition of a poet in Plato's Ion. [Williams 1968 p54]

and again,

the tendency of Romanticism is towards... the claim that the artist's business is to 'read the open secrets of the universe'. ... The artist perceives and represents Essential Reality, and he does so by virtue of his master faculty Imagination. In fact, the doctrines of 'the genius' (the autonomous creative artist) and of the 'superior reality of art' (penetration to a sphere of universal truth) were in Romantic thinking two sides of the same claim. [ibid. p,56]

The importance of the 'master faculty Imagination' is one of the aspects of Romanticism which became prone to interpretation as a lack of robustness, a debilitating facet of impossible idealism. In fact it was not the Romantics themselves who were preoccupied with the hopeless nature of idealism (the play itself would seem to support this - "For a poet to despair? Obscene!" [Brenton 1985 p70]). It was in the generation which succeeded them that Romanticism became a preoccupation with illness, failure, etc. By the end of the 19th Century, it had degenerated into the elevation of the Romantic pose, where the doomed-
to-fail artist was invested with great idealism [Kermode 1971]. In the use of the word here to describe an aspect of what respondents are relating to, 'Romantic' retains this breadth of meaning, as in this context, these associations are unavoidable. Even though un-trained respondents might not be expected to recognise such associations, there are a number of indications that in fact, they come close to doing so (e.g. "Shelley seemed doomed to death" FARRAH, "it was as if he wanted to die...he seemed so disillusioned" Mrs REEKIE).

Theme
Politics
To begin a discussion of response to theme in the play under this heading, could be open to misinterpretation. Thus it is worth reiterating (see Methodology, p58 and p86) that this section does not report data elicited in response to direct questions about 'Politics'. It merely serves as convenient grouping of responses which help to convey an impression of what respondents understood to be themes.

Although FARRAH had done English A level, she claimed to know "very little" about Byron and Shelley, which amounted to knowing "vaguely that they were a bit scandalous at the time, especially Shelley". On seeing the play, she had such preconceptions confirmed - "they went totally against the norms of the day really, didn't they?". When I asked her in what way they went against norms, she said they were:

...rebelling against society, and the middle class way of doing things. But Byron said they could live a communal way of life because they had enough money to do it, [and that] seemed [a] terribly ironic sort of comment because you can live that sort of life if you have got the money to do it.

This shows an awareness of important flaws in their rebellion. FARRAH said their ideas and the way they lived did not seem attractive. Byron seemed "very lost, hopping from one thing to another", and Shelley "seemed to be looking for something he couldn't find". In this sense, their "rebelling against society" was seen to create personal dissatisfactions and inconsistencies. Mr LANE's understanding of Shelley's failings may seem more simplistic, but in fact he also identifies the basic contradictions in the man which make him a dubious hero for those of the left. He was not convinced by Shelley's reaction
to his wife's death:

He perhaps felt a bit guilty, for a while, whether it would be with him for the rest of his life... No, he was just, back in his own world in a way.

Having said this, it will be shown that Mr LANE retains an objectivity about Shelley which allows him to see a number of different facets to his ideas. FARRAH, on the other hand, as long as the poets' failings could be related to their "sensitive" or poetic temperament, was not quick to see the single-mindedness verging on the selfish and "callous" that the rebelling relied on.

For HINCHCLIFFE any doubt about Shelley's idealism did not seem to arise at all. His only criticism was directed at Byron for his self-centredness. The problematic nature of the meaning of 'theme' (intended to have no more than administrative implications here) is well illustrated by HINCHCLIFFE's response. His (volunteered) view of the theme or 'message' seems to be grounded in a conflict of personalities, with no evidence of this having any social or political significance.

It sounds pretentious, but ...to me the play was about two poets, one rebellious and anti-social because society's convention got in the way of him doing what he wanted to do to amuse himself etc, etc, fulfil himself, bla, bla, bla, where the other one was anti-social because he had a vision of society that was totally different from what society was, to me that's basically what the play was about.

He did not seem to be aware of any criticism of Shelley's self-centredness, or at least, not in any way which might undermine his admiration for him. This was largely because although he found Byron and Shelley "easy to follow and understand", he "couldn't quite relate to the women characters". He thought this was "because I don't know the background enough", but this seems insufficient to explain such a total lack of sympathy with Mary that he could find her predicament 'amusing'. Not recognising Mary's incisive criticism of Shelley's idealism, he registered the possibility of the problematic nature of such idealism in a most mechanical way:

I found Mrs Shelley a little mysterious (grins). I was amused by her preoccupation with who's going to pay the bills and so forth and so on, which is a very natural reaction. I suppose Brenton was saying this is part of life. It's alright men
having their dreams, but it's the women that mop up the mess, perhaps that's what he's saying.

His "amusement" at this worldliness manifests either a degree of chauvinism, or perhaps a positive identification with Shelley's unworldliness. Similarly, Shelley's reaction to Harriet's death made little impression - he was "obviously distressed" but beyond that Shelley's response was merely "odd". He was prepared to admit that Shelley's life was "not successful according to conventional... [ways of looking at it?]", but the implicit approval in HINCHCLIFFE's responses suggests that it was successful as far as he was concerned. The kind of views which endeared him to Shelley were his unconventional approaches to relationships, rather than his political ideas:

I thought one of the most significant lines in the play - Shelley said, why shouldn't I have two or three families if I want to, there's nothing in nature says no.... (...an arrangement which might be expected to appeal if the suspected chauvinism should be actual). HINCHLIFFE seemed about to expand on the social significance and validity of this insight into familial relations..."On the face of it it's true, but society doesn't work that way...", but a disinclination to pursue such issues surfaced quickly - "No, we're getting into deep waters a bit beyond me now (laughs)." So his only recognition of Shelley's political significance was touched on in a passing way (making its 'fascination' for him unconvincing) as he registered his familiarity with the left-wing scene:

and of course Shelley has always been the darling of the socialist movement, at least in more recent years, it took them quite a time to decide that he was in a sense one of them, but once they did decide, he's become...well, one of their boys. Oh I found the whole thing fascinating.

Again, a fairly mechanical recognition of parallel contemporary political outlooks suggests the esoteric satisfaction of one for whom the play "preached to the converted" (as he later admitted):

The way society closed ranks after the French revolution parallels the way things are moving now with the right wing government...very relevant, but then I did expect this with Brenton.

Preaching, as it were, to other converted, the adult education class leader, RICHARDS, probed his group three times, for indications of "what
Brenton was trying to do", his reasons for choosing this subject, the significance of is historicity or contemporary relevance. He asked them whether, "anything came across on that level", or "if it was all just so oblique...". In response, CHARLES reiterated that "there's always angry young men ...there are still people who are prepared to stand up and be counted". Pursuing this idea (to the perplexity of RICHARDS), BAKER pronounced:

I've got it - its the spirit of the thing. People, possibly like us - well, I don't know if we've got high ideals or not, but we've got standards, which we see going down and down. And it makes us very angry. And I think this is what he was trying to put over. That there are still some of us left who feel this way.

This testimony is all the more surprising in view of the fact that BAKER had been aware of the possibility that a playwright like Brenton might attempt to undermine such standards:

..they were classed as the Romantic poets, and anything of that age today is looked upon as over sentimental and rather sickly, so I thought perhaps it was going to be on a cynical vein ..that Byron and Shelley are outdated, are old hat.

BAKER's understanding of Shelley's kind of idealism and what it means in personal and societal terms, remained unchanged, but this group did show awareness, at some level, of some of the dilemmas in Shelley's situation. The point is that although intellectually some of the themes were followed, emotionally, the people speaking here seem wedded to an idea of Shelley which is not open to revision:

EALING: Shelley had it in for Bishops didn't he, and the church

CHARLES: Yes I mean he'd been sent down for atheism hadn't he ...and he wrote The Mask of Anarchy, in protest against, erm, sort of, British... (pause)

BAKER: Mask of Anarchy was all about the government, and he fought for reasonable freedom in private life.

Like HINCHCLIFFE, EALING seemed to be aware of different possible interpretations of Shelley, but only in a mechanical way because she did not identify with them:

Marxists remember Shelley for his politics, but we only know of his poetry. Obviously they see him as a forerunner of Marx, but I don't know anything about that.
ABLE's vision of Shelley seems even more inviolate, as she is impervious to the irony and anger in the scene where he is insensitive enough about his child's death to attempt to justify his irresponsibility - 'Let it be - a poem - for our daughter', and Mary returns - 'Bury it in your daughter's coffin, poet' [Brenton 1985 p74]. In response to the bitterness here, ABLE can still conclude: They comforted each other, really, though didn’t they...

Whilst for HINCHCLIFFE, Byron and Shelley were "very clear", WALDEN claimed to be to be "a bit bemused" by them. This was partly because language cues were too ambiguous for him to decide whether they were 'historical' or 'fictional' characters. But he nevertheless felt that he had grasped "the aim":

I was constantly thinking... well would they really be saying that... I could understand what they were up to, why they were in exile... and I presume the aim was, to show the sort of clashes of interest and the idea of having the previous wife committing suicide... showing Shelley’s, problems in coping with that loyalty and what he’s setting up to do. He felt that Harriet’s ghost was effectively "mocking" Shelley’s ideas, and this theatricality gave rise to his conclusion that:

...shirking his responsibilities of what he’d done in the past, I think that was raised ....it all may have been terrifically wonderful and great whereas he’d screwed up in the past and was trying to escape that ...Shelley was a lot more shallow than I expected.

It is possible that this ratifies an intention of Brenton’s, to eradicate the mystery or depth to these characters, since the shallowness of their presentation was also remarked on by CHARLES - "almost caricatured Byron... comes out in a somewhat superficial way".

For WALDEN, the dramatisation of these "clashes of interest", between "what he’s setting up to do" and the way "he’d screwed up in the past" was what came across most strongly. Asked whether he saw the play as promoting revolutionary ideas, or as questioning their validity, WALDEN revealed that the ideas Shelley was trying to promote had been successfully undermined by this theatricality:

..if the playwright wanted to put in revolutionary ideas, he would’ve been a helluva lot more direct with it... after the
interval, it seemed to me as if he was putting up a straw doll or something... you could see some of the problems with it, with the emotional hang-ups that the women were getting, and also Shelley had himself... on balance I got the impression that, oh yeah, its great to be able to do that but, you see the price you have to pay for it. I wouldn't have thought it was a revolutionary play - (chuckling) by any means.

WALDEN implies that to be 'revolutionary', a play must be 'direct', in other words that it should offer a one-dimensional view. The number of different facets which are offered in Bloody Poetry preclude it from having such a function for WALDEN. The "major thing that stuck in mind" for PETERS was also the questioning posed by the play which seemed to undermine Shelley's ideals. Although claiming to have "spent an awful lot of time thinking well what the hell is this about", in fact he seems to have grasped the fundamental oppositions very clearly:...

I had a glimmer of something coming through... when Shelley's wife said that their daughter, was dead, and he says oh I'll write a poem for her (laughter), the limit of his feeling sort of thing. Romantic image sort of thing, but nothing behind it. Erm, that, that is the major thing that sticks in my mind.

PETERS was able to remark confidently that "there was a message in it about lifestyles and attitudes, the lot...it wasn't just a story about two poets...but about the way they approached life". Yet he rejected this way they were shown to approach life rather scathingly:

He had all these ideas but I didn't think he lived up to 'em, the way it was portrayed...Socialist ideas are fine provided that you've got a good income so that you're buffered from the normal situation.

WALDEN's criticism was similarly inimical:

..Byron was saying how they ought to go back and lead the revolution and start something. Write poetry. And I suddenly thought well I'm sure the people who were actually in England at the time wouldn't've given a shit whether Byron were there or not.. they were just rich guys chasing round Europe having a fun time, and they're totally out of touch with reality.

Interestingly, WALDEN seems to be making an assessment based on a 'common' sense of 'reality' which Byron and Shelley cannot be identified with. This is of a rather different quality than the realism respondents related to at an individual level in Blood Brothers.
Mr REEKIE's attendance at the Open Forum before the play might be said to make his responses 'unrepresentative'. Issues of 'representativeness' have already been addressed, but in this case, there is also the fact that it is reasonable to assume that all those who attended the Open Forum would be likely to see the play. Given the relatively small audiences for Bloody Poetry, this would make the people who had been to the Open Forum a reasonable percentage of each audience. Mr REEKIE's prior knowledge does provide some interesting perspectives on responses. For example, although he reports that the forum had primed him in advance, nevertheless, the politics and the feminism he had been led to expect seemed somehow elusive:

The discussion thing before it... was heavily based on the political side of it, and the socialist side of Shelley, and yet I don't think that came over, as strongly as I expected from what everybody was saying beforehand. ...And the women - Claire particularly, didn't seem as strong as I expected.

How had Mrs REEKIE fared, without the benefit of the briefing beforehand?

It was there. Yes definitely, you thought about the different things he said... the thing is David went to the forum on Friday, so we knew what to look out for... that he was comparing the troubled times then with times like now or even through all the centuries that there's always some sort of political strife. ... but my friends who had seen it, who go to the theatre quite a lot, it didn't come across to them.

This seems the clearest indication that the socialist, or political significance of the play relied heavily on some kind of 'priming' in the audience. The effect of this priming, however, was rather equivocal. In the REEKIES' view, the romantic 'revolutionary' figure in the play ultimately cannot stand up to the prevailing ideology in society: "he was saying that you can't be free, really, you know, no matter how much you try, you're still, you cannot". In this light, the play can be seen as reassuring the REEKIES that they therefore have no need to take up the unequal struggle. Thus they can cling to their romantic idealism without being in danger of the anarchy which its realisation would imply. This gives a literal truth to Mrs REEKIE's final reply to my question:

Q: ...he was saying that you ought to try to strive to be free, then, or that doing that would just cause all this trouble?
Mrs REEKIE: Well I think - they were all trying to be free in their own way...they were trying, but they just couldn't - I mean there's no harm in trying (laughs).

Perhaps on a more optimistic note, one of Mr LANE's closing comments suggested that maybe he (who was not the avid biography reader his wife was) had not entirely fallen prey to the supremacy of the individual, to 'history reduced to biography', at the expense of an awareness of the greater significance of the literary works:

That came over as a priority, their relationships with one another, rather than the works themselves, and whether they'd achieved or failed to achieve their own ambitions in writing. One might have to concede the possibility of reading too much into this, if it were not for Mr LANE's apparent genuine interest and pleasure in the poetry. In contrast to his wife, who had been bored by it, he had "quite liked some of that poetry" and as a result was "more interested to read some of their poetry". Mr LANE was the only respondent to express an interest in reading poetry as a consequence of the play. In view of this, perhaps some dissatisfaction is detectable with a bourgeois interest that he does not share. An interest, perhaps, akin to that which is deplored in the play as a curiosity about 'the behaviour of the rich and famous in bed' [Brenton 1985 p72]. This emphasis detracts from the significance of the poetry and ideas which Mr LANE proved to be interested in.

Womens' Roles.
The relative 'strength' of the women characters has already had some mention as it was one of the aspects of the play respondents tended to focus on. As we have seen, HINCHCLIFFE seemed the least impressed by Claire and Mary. He "couldn't relate" to them. Although he suggested that "Mary was trying to adopt a lifestyle in advance of the times, maybe", he obviously did not give her much credit for this. His amusement with her preoccupation with bills, and the fact that he did not see her as a very strong or independent character suggests that he may have seen her efforts in this line as rather misguided or confused. This might be expected since his acceptance of Shelley's outlook was apparently total.
FARRAH saw Claire and Mary as "quite strong characters" but this did not give rise to a particular admiration or sympathy for them:
The women knew what they wanted and all that, they were quite strong characters, they seemed independent but they were dominated by the two poets. I didn't particularly sympathise with them suffering at the hands of the men. They'd both made a decision.

WALDEN's rather more positive view tends to discount the possibility that negative or indifferent responses might have been due to poor acting, rather than inherent aspects of the play:
I couldn't identify necessarily with Shelley or Byron, I was able to with Mary Shelley ... her part was the best I thought of all of them, I didn't know if it was the acting or the actual part, and the other girl, I could understand her as well.

It is interesting that WALDEN expects to be able to separate "the acting" and "the actual part" in order to validate his assessment. He repeats his appreciation of "her part" later.

PETE'S differentiated strongly between the two women characters. He saw Claire as "just a sychophant, just a literary groupie, a hanger-on, wanting to be associated with people she thought was wonderful". This in contrast to Mary Shelley:
There were times when she said things which were very much to the point. It seemed that she, she knew, she could see what was going on, she could, stand back and look at it.

WALDEN was also even more impressed and interested with Mary:
Out of it all, I was more interested in Mary Shelley than the rest of them, actually. ..she seemed to be a person I could identify with, and she seemed to have a lot of substance there... She, for me was the best of the lot, I came away thinking that I knew her better and I could see, the emotional entanglements she seemed to be getting into - I came away appreciating her a lot more, and if I had the opportunity of finding out more about her, I would.

The sincerity and sensibility of appreciation and identification here is rare among responses collected in this research. It seemed to be based on an understanding of her difficulty in organising her life around her man's more dominant role. His reported familiarity with this kind of
dilemma may explain his sympathy; there is a hint of gentle irony here suggesting some directly relevant personal experience:

..on balance I think she suffered at his hands, although there were times when she seemed dominant and sensible ..a good influence on Claire, she seemed to be the much more stable of the two, although, she was more manipulated by Shelley, trying to sort out what she was doing with him, and what she was doing herself, developing her art, and having kids. .Sort of thing that's a major problem for scientists (laughs), so I was sympathetic with that (laughs). That came to me very very clearly, that's one thing that I see around here a lot so I guess I'm more aware of that.

WALDEN saw Mary Shelley as struggling, albeit admirably, to sort out her life with Shelley. But those elements of control, stability and dominance he admired, can be contrasted with the assertion that she was "manipulated" by Shelley. Although she was the character he liked best, there is always the possibility that is might not have been so true if he could not have seen her ultimately as manipulable.

The quality of these responses to Mary, however, do seem to suggest that she as a more 'rounded' character than the men. The response elicited from WALDEN is comparable with the kind of authentication MINLAW, for example, provides for Mrs Johnstone. He refers to a life of the character projected beyond the play, where a complex role as wife, mother and artist is envisaged. We can deduce from his criticisms that Shelley, by contrast, has been a self-limiting character for WALDEN. This leads to the proposition that the single-minded idealism which WALDEN sees as the driving force of Shelley's character is not something which he can authenticate or develop in the same way. Some of WALDEN's reservations may be explained as a consequence of such characterisation, which leaves less of a creative, authenticating role for the respondent. A character which does not command this contribution, might be expected to command less sympathy.

The female characters were of much less significance to the REEKIE's, possibly because of the predominance they gave to Shelley and Byron. Rather than an appreciation of what it meant to be liberated as women from the constraints of prejudiced society (something even the men struggled to achieve, at this point in history), the play succeeded in
narrowing the field of reference to a focus on their private lives for these respondents, too:

I thought Claire was supposed to be more of a feminist... she seemed, a bit silly, not really caring. I was surprised that they could remain friends in that situation, I was trying to think how I would feel (Mrs REEKIE).

Mrs REEKIE seems here to be interpreting actions in terms of eccentricities of behaviour unrelated to social context. This might be compared to the way in which things are seen to be going wrong for the Johnstones in Blood Brothers because Sammy is 'a bad un', or simply because 'that's the way things are'.
ANALYSIS

There are fundamental inconsistencies in *Bloody Poetry* which make the distinction between accordant/discordant etc. more than usually ambiguous. To oversimplify the case; the subject, the form and the theme present oppositions requiring an explanation as to which of these respondents are being categorised as being 'accordant' or 'discordant' with. This means to imply that there is a discrepancy between the socialist intent of the play, the elitist subject, and the popular form. The socialist intent is presumed on the evidence of Brenton's stated view. 'Elitist' is used to denote the distinction the play makes between members of the audience who are familiar with Byron and Shelley's lives and poetry (BAKER, CHARLES et al, FARRAH, HINCHCLIFFE, REEKIEs) and those who are not (LANEs). Aspects of the form will be identified as having associations with 'entertainment'.

Responses suggest that the theme and the form are translated according to the underlying compatibility of the respondents' profile with the subject of the play. The subject - Byron and Shelley - is more or less inseparable from assumptions about the particular status and significance of these figures. The level of respondents' accordance with such assumptions seems to be a greater factor than any other in determining responses. Thus although respondents may not have the same response to the theme or the form, they could be grouped as having the same profile. For example, BAKER and REEKIEs are both classed as 'accordant', because they accord Byron and Shelley the same kind of importance, even though BAKER's interpretation is positively right wing whereas the REEKIES' is more liberal.

Accordant

(Accordant (FARRAH, HINCHCLIFFE, Mr and Mrs REEKIE, BAKER, CHARLES, EALING, ABLE)

Accordant respondents tended to accept the 'establishment view' (e.g. as suggested by academics at the Open Forum) of Shelley and Byron. They shared, with Brenton, the idea that they were important figures who have their status confirmed by a consensus that their poetry is part of the great tradition of English literature.

There are indications that FARRAH, for one, can be located within this kind of cultural frame of reference. She made her decision to see this play on the basis of reviews in the *Guardian* and on Radio 4 (compare and
contrast this with, for example, LANE's decision to see the play - just because it was included in a season ticket deal). Although she makes a reference to the play being "very entertaining", the context in which she uses this description suggests that 'entertainment' does not necessarily have the same connotations of 'light' as opposed to 'heavy' for FARRAH, as for other respondents (cf. JENISON: "never anything heavy like Chekhov", PAWLEYs: "all very intense and all that", WALMSLEY: "it would've been far too serious...but there were the little light bits that jolted you out of this" etc.):

I'll go and see anything really as long as its entertaining. I like more thoughtful things, things with a sort of underlying message, I suppose.

HINCHCLIFFE and the REEKIEs also have the kind of profile which allows them to share the preoccupations of the play. HINCHCLIFFE decided to see it because it was Brenton's newest play and he already knew of Brenton - as "a name, and a controversial name". He was nonchalant about the 'high brow' nature of the play...

Yes, well we know that Brenton is a socialist writer, don't we...I expected a controversial evening.

Similarly, he affected to be casual about his familiarity with the literary scene. He knew something about Byron and Shelley, but "only what most people know". Like FARRAH, he claimed to be catholic in his tastes - "but then I enjoy the theatre and I go to most productions". Perish, the thought, however, that he might go to the theatre to be entertained:

I wouldn't go to the sort of play that bores me...most people go to the theatre just to be entertained by something they're quite certain they'll be entertained by...I positively take the other point of view.

His preferences were for "all the classics", particularly Shakespeare ("I know Midsummer Night's Dream backwards"), Wilde, Sheridan and Shaw. Whereas FARRAH refers to the Guardian and Radio 4, HINCHCLIFFE checks his responses against the Observer, "I've read the review in Observer since, but I'm not sure if its any clearer...".

The REEKIEs showed their familiarity with the literary scene in their particularly interest, which comes to light, in the references to Wordsworth. Also like HINCHCLIFFE, the fact that Bloody Poetry was a new
work was an important reason for their attendance. They applauded the Haymarket for being "a bit more adventurous" in putting on this play, in contrast to "the old standards" and "safe plays" they thought were usually produced. Although they are regular theatregoers in any case, the REEKIEs were particularly attracted to this play:

When we had the list, it was one of those I thought ooh lets go and see that cos it sounded interesting (Mrs REEKIE). They looked forward to something that would be "demanding" and "stretch the imagination". Mr REEKIE even went to the limbering up session - the Open Forum, making an active effort to flex the intellectual muscles which would be tested at the performance. He did, however seem to recognise a certain eccentricity in the idea of preparing for an evening's entertainment in this way, with his references to the "cheating" this involved. He views this preparation for the play with a slight self-consciousness which he chooses to find amusing:

(laughs) it's cheating in a way isn't it really, you get the really difficult bits perhaps explained to you before you go.

There is some suggestion of theatre as a kind of mental gymnasium in all this. The very importance of the newness of the work, for example, suggests the experience is seen as experimental. The 'puzzle' of working out the difficult bits, the bits that "must have some significance" is something HINCHCLIFFE also enjoys, in fact, he would have liked to have had a second try at the game - "I really would've liked to have seen it more than once, if I'd had time I'd've gone back".

The importance of coping with "the difficult bits" was exaggerated in Mr REEKIE's mind so far as to confirm him in the surprising expectation that he would be part of a highly informed audience:

If you go and see a Howard Brenton play you should expect that really though, shouldn't you, like with the Romans in Britain, he was comparing a lot of that with today, the strife in Northern Ireland, things like that, you know that he's going to do that type of thing so you're going to look for it.

It is difficult to believe that he genuinely expects Brenton's political leanings to have such a high profile for the general populace. Either his perception of the catchment area for audiences in society is very restricted, or he is simply using this as an opportunity to let it be known that he himself is familiar with Brenton's work. The possibility of using Bloody Poetry as a means of augmenting social status in this
way cannot be overlooked. Elitism of this kind can easily go hand in hand with superiority and it will be argued that Mrs REEKIE in particular provides some evidence of this.

Their attitude to theatre-going in general helps to explain accordant respondents' enthusiasm for this particular play. Far from the more usual criteria of the 'entertainment value' of 'a good night out', they saw the value of the play in very different terms. They were, in fact, dubious about its entertainment value, but this was not important; there were other respects in which the play was in some sense 'good for you' in an almost prescriptive way. Mr REEKIE certainly conveyed this impression with his rather surprising opinion:

...Its just if they turn up, that's something even if they don't enjoy it... I don't think it matters necessarily if a play's not very good, as long as it's interesting...even if it's bad, it's nice to see something different.

The REEKIEs tried to make a claim for satisfactions to be gained from theatre which represented a definite opposition to 'entertainment'. In response to the very suggestion that the play might have been 'entertaining', they gave the impression that they sensed the trap of a 'trick question', and were not going to be caught out by it:

Q: Did you actually enjoy it...
Mrs REEKIE: Yes,
Q: ...sort of as an entertaining evening out.
Mrs REEKIE: Ah, well,
Mr REEKIE: Ah (laughs).
Mrs REEKIE: No, we enjoyed it but we thought it was the sort of play that you tend to reflect upon, rather than it being a lot of visual entertainment, a play that you would think about, and learn from, and the more you thought about it, the more we realised how good it was, the way he'd written it..
Mr REEKIE: ..it was a play more to reflect on than to sort of instantly enjoy as you’re there, I enjoyed it, I mean I wouldn’t say it was a trial to sit through or anything, it was, enjoyable, some of the things he was trying to say I don’t think came over very well, but I thought it was good..

This kind of qualified enjoyment may not be so persuasive as more convincing manifestations in other respondents (e.g. CRAWFORD, JENISON). But it could be just as important to the respondents themselves. In any
case 'entertainment' might retain a very narrow sense of meaning to the REEKIEs. Similar, perhaps to the narrowness HINCHCLIFFE implies in his assertion that "most people go to be entertained...(above)". The REEKIEs' use of 'visual' and 'instant' to describe aspects of entertainment would support the view that their sense of the word is restricted to a quite particular one.

The play as an intellectual puzzle was clearly attractive, particularly to HINCHCLIFFE. He was bemused by the sheer theatricality of the shadow scene, since he could not work out what it was "getting at", but immediately went on to suggest that in fact this kind of obfuscation was actually a positive element:

I'd be bored by a sort of conventional play, where it was all straightforward and just boring because there's nothing there. What some people call a nice slice of life (laughs).

Another satisfying aspect for these respondents of their relationship with this kind of theatre was that it was not one shared by the majority. They contrasted their attitude with what they imagined to be that of others who visit the theatre, as a source of satisafction, and presumably, enjoyment:

Mrs REEKIE: A lot of people, to go to the theatre, it's quite an event. But we go, quite a lot so it's not so much of an event, we will go and see other things, whereas some people, because it is an event, they want something safe. Mr REEKIE: ... there's a lot of people there it is a sort of, an evening out, you can tell by the way they're dressed...

Mr REEKIE latched onto the idea of other people being interested in the seamier aspects of public figures' private lives (rather than the important contributions they might have to make to society). This he interpreted as a natural, if unworthy, human tendency. He was not provoked to consider the reasons for this deflection of public interest (e.g. the reference to the Daily Mail [Brenton 1985 p68] did not suggest to him that it might be in the interests of press barons to undermine the status of figures whose ideas, if taken seriously, would result in the loss of their own status in society). Instead, there seemed to be some pleasure to be had in the recognition that there are these nasty traits in other people:

Mrs REEKIE: It showed you how little human nature has changed,
because [Polidori] was still, out for what he could get in the end,
Mr REEKIE: Yes, sort of selling these stories,
Mrs REEKIE: .. you can really relate that, it happens so much today..
Mr REEKIE: I like this idea of the bourgeoisie being more interested in who they were sleeping with rather than what their poems said, I suppose its not changed.
Mrs REEKIE: Well it's like today, look at the daily- well a lot of the dailies... the real news a little tiny paragraph on the inside page or something like that.
This reveals another aspect of the play's function in assuring them of their membership of a cultured elite in opposition to the widespread philistinism manifest in "the dailies" and "a lot of people".

Although in fact Mrs REEKIE's reflections on the play did not particularly reveal any more insight than those of other respondents, she was pleased to report that she had been able to explain to her less perceptive friends what the play was about:
..things that Shelley said, like man is haunted by, the ghosts of what he would like to do if he was truly free, we sort of thought, were they truly free? And neither group was really. So we were looking for it all the time, but I don't think my friends..know much about Howard Brenton, ..they were a bit disappointed. And when I explained to them what we thought about it, they could see then, what he was getting at, but it was only, when I started talking about it that it became clearer.
I am not sure that this reflects concern that some prior knowledge is necessary in order to understand and enjoy the play, so much as a satisfaction over the role of 'interpreter'. These same unfortunates who had failed to "see what he was getting at", unsurprisingly, "didn't like it very much". Similarly, HINCHCLIFFE contrasted his own response with those of presumably equally clueless types:
A lot of people I talked to said they were bored or they didn't like it, but I thought it was a fascinating evening. Suspicions of the theatre functioning as social capital here become stronger with the REEKIES' evident amusement at a naïve review in a local paper:
Mr REEKIE: There was a, a review of it in a local paper (Mrs REEKIE laughs)... and the woman who did it had totally missed the point of it, there was nothing at all about that in it was there... as far as she was concerned it was a story about Byron and Shelley

Mrs REEKIE: ...The Blaby Courier - she just took it for the face value, she didn't really think about it, you know.

The REEKIEs and HINCHCLIFFE were basically sympathetic towards Shelley's predicament. They did not feel the frustration of other respondents over his self-centred and impractical idealism. This sympathy, however, advanced no socialist ideas for the REEKIEs. It was a sympathy for the disillusion and frustration Shelley felt because of his inability to affect the social prejudices that fired his verse. To this extent, the REEKIEs' sympathy relied upon the impotence of the character. They give the impression that they see social problems as here to stay, they are unchanging ("there's always some sort of political strife", "things haven't changed" etc.) - there is no sense of progress, or hope:

Mr REEKIE: ...he was a bit disillusioned wasn't he cos he felt that no one was taking any notice of his work..

Mrs REEKIE: Bit frustrating I suppose it was, yes... obviously had his followers, but most of the country ..weren't interested, they were just closing their eyes to it.

Such sad disenchantment forms part of a romantic image with which they identify - the artist as specially gifted person, different from your run of the mill library colleagues if you like [see description of the artist as 'special kind of person', ironically said to 'specialize the imaginative faculty...and thus to weaken the dynamic function which Shelley proposed for it' Williams 1968 p60]. The Romantic poet is seen as struggling to cling to his ideals of freedom and love in the world where 'money, money, money' (as well as the sordid revelations of the dailies) are the crass realities of life:

They were unhappy ...Shelley who, went in for free love, and tried to live, freely shall we say, was constrained by money, it was always money money money, they never had enough (Mrs REEKIE).

Thus the REEKIEs cling to their appreciation of culture in a world of philistinism as represented by the Blaby Courier. There is an apparent struggle against the constraints of society - but a struggle wedded to a
Romanticism that is too self-consciously esoteric to genuinely seek the democratic realisation of its ideals. From a Marxist point of view, we would be able to acknowledge here that a predominant conservative ideology ensures that it is the very ineffectuality of such idealism which is attractive. The responses outlined here certainly provide some evidence to suggest that the play functions to assimilate Shelley's 'revolutionary' ideas in the image of an attractively whimsical and romantic aesthete who is as far as possible removed from the world of social change and action. Presumably this does not necessarily coincide with Brenton's intention.

In general, theatre affords the opportunity for the REEKIES themselves to aspire to the status of critic, a role for which they again prepare by consulting the reviews. They say the critical response is more important for them than one of the enjoyment of an entertainment. In this respect, their criteria for evaluating a play appear to be quite opposite to the LANE's (see p189). However, the couples have enjoyed the same kinds of productions, and both of the men express a marked preference for musicals. This suggests that the REEKIES are quite capable of enjoying the entertainment value of this kind of production. Further, it is possible to compare Mr REEKIE's protestations that he had enjoyed the play, with the LANE's reticence in criticising it (e.g. "I mean I didn't sort of give up half way through, and say, Oh I've had enough of this and walk out" Mr LANE and, "I wouldn't say it was a trial to sit through, or anything" Mr REEKIE). But while the LANE were quite clear that Bloody Poetry was not their type of play, the REEKIES, although failing to find anything worth noting as particularly enthralling, amusing or entertaining, nevertheless seemed quite pleased to have had this encounter with culture, with the opportunity to exercise and display their critical abilities and appreciation.

Discordant
(WALDEN, PETERS, DENNIS)
Although WALDEN has a sufficiently compatible intellectual background (e.g. he had studied Plato's cave as an undergraduate in philosophy of science), he did not share the basic premise of the play; that poetry, and these two poets in particular, are important to culture (in the widest sense). His were not the same cultural assumptions about the importance of theatre, literature in general, and Shelley and Byron in
particular, as accordant respondents FARAH, HINCHCLIFFE, REEKIEs, etc. He does not claim an allegiance with this kind of background, but rather with that of the more 'popular' medium of cinema — "...On balance, I much prefer going to the pictures. So I'm not a great theatre-goer at all really". His unconscious slip into filmic language ("on one side of the screen..." where "stage" was intended) confirms film as an important medium for him. And when asked about the kind of productions he preferred, he reiterated that he had "not been to plays regularly enough to be able to say that I think I would prefer a certain sort of a play or another". This confidence to admit to unfamiliarity with the scene can be contrasted with respondents who evade the issue by saying they "can't remember" etc. (e.g. BROADHURST). Asked about playwright's he might be likely to patronise, he was unembarrassed to admit, I'm not familiar enough with the names of the people to be able to say that I would definitely go out of my way to see. Preferences he did have were related to the more 'mass' media .."one guy who's done TV plays who I would like to go and see...". What previous knowledge WALDEN did have about this particular play, came more from 'popular' sources, than from a 'cultured' literary background. He had heard of Brenton because the scandal of his Romans in Britain had travelled the atlantic and he had read about it when he was working over there. Basically, the play was considered to be a viable night out with friends: I saw it in the paper: so I just asked around the lab, and we all just sort of said, well Ok, we'll do it. He did have some interest in going to see this particular play stemming from a radio adaptation he had once heard, of Polidori's memories of that trip... I thought if it was going to be similar to that - it was only that it interested me very vaguely. I enjoyed the radio series and ended up buying the book and I read it several years ago. The effect of this previous knowledge, like Mr REEKIE's attendance at the Open Forum, is not considered to render WALDEN such a problematical respondent that he should be discounted, for similar reasons. Compared to respondents who were more familiar with Byron and Shelley's poetry etc., WALDEN was still slightly out of step with the play to start with: So I had an idea of the background to the story, although I must admit, [Polidori's] portrayal was a helluva lot different than what I was expecting, because he was seen in a very bad
light I thought ...put across as being a scandal-monger, 
braggard, and a general boaster. Whereas in the book, he's 
seen as a low-key shy character who's put upon a lot. 

This could offer one explanation for some of WALDEN's negative responses 
since it challenges his 'loyalty' to his initial idea of the Polidori 
character. Having said this, his main objections appeared to be to 
Shelley's lifestyle and ideas. His reliance on other people's status was 
one aspect of this - "a whole devious sort of intrigue to hang on to 
Byron's coat tails success". This kind of response links up with 
FARRAH's emphasis on "having the money to do it", something referred to 
again by PETERS: "Socialist ideas are fine provided you've got a good 
income so you're cut off from the normal situation". We may find, 
however, that the inferences of this aspect vary according to whether is 
is seen from an accordant or discordant view. In the case of PETERS and 
WALDEN, it is one of a string of negative criticisms 
...you could put him down for being extremely selfish, very 
blindered and very much a me, me, me sort ..actually, I'd 
forget Shelley, I thought he was a waste of skin. (WALDEN) 

It is WALDEN's aversion for Shelley which is distinctive about his 
discordant response to the play. Other characters did not come in for 
this kind of scathing criticism. PETERS on the other hand extended his 
cynicism to Claire, a "sycophant" and "literary groupie", also. Whereas 
WALDEN said he could identify with Mary, and understand Claire, he was 
"bemused" by Byron and Shelley. There was something about Byron with 
which he seemed able to identify: 

He was a real lad (chuckles)... [Byron] seemed to be true to 
his position, whereas Shelley was a lot more wishy-washy. 

There is an interesting contrast between this "wishy-washy" Shelley, and 
the Shelley who FARRAH sees as being more "sensitive" than the rather 
"callous" Byron. Both WALDEN and PETERS indicated a strong preference 
for the Byron character: 

I felt more in sympathy with Byron because he was just totally 
cynical about the whole thing, whereas Shelley had this sort 
of romantic notion...(PETERS). 

Overall, WALDEN was unenthusiastic about the play. When asked 'would you 
say you had enjoyed the play, on the whole, then, was it a good night 
out?', he was slow to give the answer: 

I found it interesting [note: equally stressed syllables -
unusual in "interesting" in this context, this was definitely an equivocal use of the word. I wouldn't necessarily race to go back to it. I found it, interesting, but Ok, I wouldn't say that it was one of the best I'd seen, far from it I think, actually, it was, for me average, below average.

It is noticeable that WALDEN is hesitant about building up to the criticism "below average", here. Despite the extent of their negative responses, both WALDEN and PETERS displayed the common reluctance to unequivocally reject or devalue the play. The kind of comments they do make, however, are about as negative as any respondents have been prepared to make in the whole series of interviews:

..entertaining in the sense that it was very different but I don't think it was the sort of play I'd rush back to see again...it was too long, it could have been condensed to one act and still have had the same content...I can't remember very much from the first act at all...I wasn't keen, I wouldn't be bothered to see another thing like this (PETERS).

In contrast, when they were asked about the entertainment value of Bloody Poetry, the adult education class all responded very positively, with the single exception of DENNIS, who maintained, "No, I didn't think it was. If I'd not been coming here I wouldn't have gone back for the second half" (although he later qualified this - "But I was glad I did come back to the second half. It wasn't that bad. No I wouldn't say I was bored"). DENNIS made some of the most negative statements in the whole series of interviews. His views on theatre as a "rather nice middle class thing to do", seem to be just as strongly entrenched as those of the "crowd of upper class ladies" in the group. His biases, however, guarantee a totally discordant response:

I get impatient with this explicit sex thing, part of the sixties thing - people with a privileged background suddenly found it was nice to say fuck and shit...that seemed to be the predominant part of it to me. These highly privileged people. They were rebelling against the establishment and doing things kids do today...it all seemed rather childish...its hard to say that in front of a crowd of upper class ladies, but that was my very strong feeling about it..it's just playing games..good box office stuff for the kind of people who go to the theatre..it's sort of titivating...if
you just went to a pub and used that kind of language, you'd consider yourself to be not quite it, wouldn't you, you see.

The strong and often apparently predetermined objections which prevent him from enjoying the play are objections to the theatre as an institution, as much as to this particular play. 'Theatre' for DENNIS seems to have a meaning which is inextricably associated with a sense of class loyalty. His response comes closest to an example of an 'oppositional code' in operation, apparently almost always reading 'upper class thing to do' for 'theatre' (cf.'national interest' becomes 'class interest' p75).

Neutral
(LANEs)

_Bloody Poetry_ was directed at more specific types of audience than the other plays in the study. The interesting phenomenon of the 'filtering' process which occurs before an audience ever gets to the theatre was particularly in evidence here. This is a phenomenon which it is difficult to collect information about, since the process by which potential audiences determine their attendance at particular productions can only be explored in the positive. Those who decide not to attend remain anonymous, and therefore cannot have their reasons for non-attendance analysed. However, the LANEs admit that they would not normally choose to see a play like this, and only attended because of special ticket concessions. These respondents should therefore have been a good potential source of information about criteria for attendance and non-attendance. However, it was difficult to identify what reduced the appeal of this play for the LANEs, other than its poetical reference:

> I can't remember very much about when we first read all those through but, I remember saying that I hope that one's not just all poetry. But because you paid for three out of four - you don't really worry. But whether I'd've said yes I'd go if I'd've had to go and book it, I don't know, I don't think I probably would've, not being a fan of poetry.

The advertised poetical subject turned out to be only one aspect of the LANEs' uneasiness about the play. The sense of the playwright addressing predetermined audiences, who would share his interests and assumptions, was an important negative as far as they were concerned. This sense of exclusivity, (which might somehow have conveyed itself to potential audiences, thereby possibly accounting for low attendances) was
profoundly realised by the LANEs who attended despite their misgivings. Their responses to the performance illustrate just how important the function of theatre in reinforcing group identity is. It is all the more marked in this case for the group being formed largely of a quite specific kind of elite.

Obviously he's got a set audience that he's aiming at, whether he was aiming at us or not, I don't know ...it depends for what purpose he wrote the play ..the satisfaction of producing a work which he thought was the right way of doing it or.. to fill the theatre ..he didn't fill the theatre but maybe he'd achieved what he hoped to achieve by writing it. (Mr LANE)

The LANEs' criteria for evaluating a production, indeed, the basis of their responses to it, were markedly different from those enshrined in the play. The play implied a role for literature and art as a force for change in society, a role which demanded an immersion in the art work and a taking to heart of its profoundest truths. The LANEs, however, employed a different perspective. They emphasised the role of theatre as what they understood to be entertainment. Theatre which can offer elements of distraction proved important to them in a number of comments they made about this play not being of the kind they would normally choose to see:

Mr LANE: You like a three act play, (laughs) ...a good plot..
Mrs LANE: That's right, yes (laughs). Something happening all the way along. Although I read biographies, not to go to the theatre to see, I like something more entertaining
Mr LANE: normally a light-hearted comedy.. this was more of a history lesson.
Mrs LANE: it was deeper, it made you think more, or it was meant to make you think more.

The kind of plays they stated preferences for were comedies, musicals, and farces:

We go to a lot of musicals.. Barnum sticks in my mind ..it's the musicals that I remember most.(Mr LANE)

Their unsolicited enthusiasm about plays - musicals - they had really enjoyed, was much more convincing than the 'interesting' features they tried to comment on in this play.
Of the assumptions the 'set audience' could be expected to share, the most obvious is perhaps that Shelley and Byron are interesting characters for a play to be based on - those who do not share this assumption in general presumably would not attend. The play assumed a shared appreciation of certain literary references or genres which it became clear that the LANEs did not have in common with the expected audience (and indeed with myself). Mr LANE's understanding of the term 'tragedy' in this context was much more prosaic than I had expected. For him, the real meaning of the term is rooted in the practical deprivations of life, not in pity and fear for the self-wrought distractions of a 'great mind', theatrically portrayed. Whilst he could see that some personal dissatisfactions may have afflicted Shelley, his 'type of existence' appeared to remain quite comfortable in practical terms:

"You got the feeling about his life being somewhat tragic in a way. I mean it wasn't really a tragic type of existence, Erm, you quite wondered what he'd achieved in his life, apart from his poetry.. perhaps it was a bit tragic (Mr LANE)."

The LANEs were not used to responding to this kind of play and therefore had no 'ready-made' criteria by which to evaluate it [cf. e.g. KNIGHT - recognises the play as a part of the entertainment business, then a pre-determined set of responses about 'being entertained' come into play]. Despite, or maybe, because of this, the LANEs actually displayed more sensitivity to aspects of the theatricality and important themes than other 'clued-up' respondents (like the REEKIEs):

"..standards which you would normally expect to find in society - they just didn't see any reason for having to conform. ...it came across when they were talking about things like getting married just because it was the expected thing, rather than because they really wanted to ...Yes, it brought home some of the things that we normally expect, like of society, just because we've been conditioned to expect it rather than any real reason for it, like the marrying institution. (Mr LANE)

These positive responses however, were undermined by the play's capacity to reinforce the group identity and values of an elite to which the LANEs did not feel they belonged. The LANE's alienation registered in their reiteration of the feeling that it was "not our sort of play". They assessed their own responses to it in comparison with those of the
"set audience" they believed the play to be addressed to:

Mr LANE: It wasn’t our sort of play really... I don’t know whether I’d recommend anyone to go and see it... we perhaps missed some of the finer points of what was coming over.

Mrs LANE: Because we’re not avid theatre-goers and we don’t usually follow that sort of thing ... (giggles) I don’t go and start thinking deeply like that (laughs).

Mr LANE: The two main points of the plot that we missed! (laughs).

The actual social event was probably more crucial to the LANEs sense of alienation than the theatricality of the play. They seemed very aware of their position as outsiders:

Mr LANE: When we were having coffee there was two ladies there, on the same table, now they were obviously into poetry..

Mrs LANE: Oh dear, they were quoting it at each other, Mr LANE: ..quoting..various works, so, I mean, they obviously went, for the finer points

Mrs LANE: and the chap in front was writing every word (laughs), every little bit down.

Mr LANE: ..quite a few there with notepads, writing about it ..a lot of academics there, who were studying it for its own right... you’d got the people who really wanted to see it there. And a few others. ... a lot of the academics there were more interested in Byron’s life probably. They probably knew about it anyway and wanted to see how it had been portrayed.

Interestingly enough, Mr LANE's assessment turns out to be remarkably accurate when we consider these declarations of interest:

I know Midsummer Night's Dream backwards, but it's nice to see how other people do it (HINCHCLIFFE).

Surely if they knew the ending they’d want to see how - I’d be very interested how they made his shipwreck at the end.. more interested in the way it was produced, in a way (CHARLES).

The fact that Mr LANE’s assumptions are as well-founded as they are might suggest that the exclusivity they felt was in some important sense 'actually there' (i.e. it was not on the level of subjectivity which might be explained as 'paranoia', for example).
Mr LANE identifies important inconsistencies in Shelley, but unfortunately, perhaps, in the face of the rallied forces of a literary elite, noticeably present at the particular production he went to see, it is understandable that he should not feel confident enough to give voice to what could easily be interpreted as philistine criticism of the great man. In fact, both the LANEs preferred to see inadequacies in their relationship with the play as peculiar to themselves, rather than rooted in the theatricality of the production.

Mrs LANE: I don't think you can comment on the presentation, because on the whole, the presentation was good. It was just me, I got bored. Er, a little, I mean, I don't mind a little bit, but I do get a bit fed up after a while, with poetry.

Mr LANE: ..you see I can't remember now what it was they quoted. So it can't have had any real lasting effect.

This is symptomatic of a kind of embarrassment on their part at having wandered into a kind of club of which they were not members. Because of the predominant social status of the elite of which the audience was largely comprised, the LANEs were not angered or resentful of this exclusivity, but anxious to show that in fact they accepted it; almost apologetic for stepping out of place. Part of their discomfort over the discrepancy between what the play assumed about its audiences, and what the LANEs took along with them, may have stemmed from their feeling presumptuous.

This fear of presumption (which is not, incidentally, something easily attributable to theatre producers!) is partly suggested by the LANEs use of language. They tried to talk about the play in a way which was not natural to them, with consequent uneasiness and uncertainty. To the extent to which one accepts Bernstein's distinctions [Bernstein 1971], part of what they felt they had presumed to lay a claim to, may have been a particular kind of language use. Educationalists have suggested that Bernstein over-emphasises the difference between private/public language use. It is assumed here that there is a significant difference, even if not so pronounced as he suggests. The clearer distinction, which he makes between 'restricted' (working class) and 'elaborate' language use is the one which seems more appropriate here. The LANEs may have felt discomfitted by a feeling that they had pretended to such 'elaborate' use, when in fact they did not really have the ability to use this kind of language.
This is further evidence of an important emerging finding. It is not uncommon for respondents to try to make use of a language with which they are not at ease when talking about these plays (e.g. PAWLEYS p255). This seems likely to be related to specific ideas about 'culture' (as part of an 'elitist', rather than 'organic' set of values) and the status which association with it can impart. Theatre often seems to provide such respondents with the opportunity to lay claim to enhanced social status, by claiming a particular kind of 'face' [Goffman 1955] (especially in front of an academic). In this case, however, it seems the LANEs may have been under the pressure of acquiring a status they did not want, simply by attending this play. They may have felt they had unwittingly laid claim to "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" [ibid.] simply by being present at this theatrical event. Thereafter, they may have felt in danger of 'losing face', or being 'outfaced', if they did not attempt to keep up the use of language appropriate to this 'face'.
Commentary

New Message or Old Outlook

It is interesting that although PETERS obviously had a good grasp of the play's 'message' (see p169) and made some incisive criticisms, still he did not feel that he had 'understood' it. He felt cut off from it, in so far as he saw it not as a theatrical experience of which he was a part, but as some alien artefact he had been subjected to. For instance, he was the only respondent to refer to "how long it took" etc. In spite of the fact that - "most of it was obscure", "most of the play is a void", what he claims were merely a "few instances, a glimmer of something coming through", "just these rare glimpses", were actually the mainforce of the issues ("...romantic image but nothing behind it...there was a message in it about lifestyles and attitudes..." etc.). 'Correct' identification of the message, then, does not necessarily guarantee satisfaction with the enjoyment of the play. Other responses provide further evidence of this interesting finding. Although their experience was mostly one of alienation, rather than enjoyment, it is possible to say of the LANEs that they responded more richly to some of the themes and ideas of the play than some accordant respondents. The LANEs' preferences, especially contrasted with the REEKIES', support the suggestion that an 'elitist' or 'intellectual' response involves less contribution, emotional investment, authentication (characterised, for example by MINLAW's input at Blood Brothers). Initially, it might appear that the LANEs responded more to the direct theatricality of the piece, than to its metaphysics, whereas the REEKIES responded to the more abstract ideas of what the play, or even the occasion, symbolised. But it is interesting to note that in talking about the parts of the play which they liked best, it is the neutral LANEs who reveal more of a grasp of the fundamental themes, whilst the accordant REEKIES' attentions are directed at more superficial aspects.

For Mr LANE "the prisoner...what his reaction would've been...when he saw the reality of it rather than his own, impression" particularly "stood out". In contrast to the LANEs' choice of the very visual shadow scene, the REEKIES picked out a detail of the script for their special interest. Rather than a new experience, the script introduced them to a new idea, new information. The appeal here is to esoteric knowledge, rather than the kind of personal insight Mr LANE seems closer to.

Mrs REEKIE: I was quite interested when they were discussing
their poetry, and Wordsworth's poetry 'cos I always thought that Wordsworth was quite well liked by everyone ... I was quite surprised that he was disliked by them and I found that interesting.

Mr REEKIE: Yeah, their attitude to the sort of Wordsworth's sexist -

Mrs REEKIE: Yes, yes, that was interesting wasn't it... Yes you sort of see that sort of poetry in a different light, you tend to think they were all Romantic poets.

It is striking that such an arguably inconsequential item, the brief critique of Wordsworth [Brenton 1985 p28-31], should also prove of paramount interest to another accordant respondent, HINCHCLIFFE:

The scene with Byron reading Wordsworth stayed strongest in my mind, and the portrait of an ostensibly left wing writer who supports the French revolution suddenly ratting on it all and becoming the very acme of convention.

This part of the play is significant to these respondents because they share certain knowledge and assumptions about Romantic poets. It evokes the satisfaction of refining already specialist knowledge, of moving further into an inner sanctum of lit. crit., pursuing an identity as part of a special group of cultured people. This is clearly an important function of Bloody Poetry, since even respondents without an appreciation of the political and feminist content [e.g. BAKER, CHARLES], still gain the simple satisfaction of recognition of the poetry, of being 'in the know' about Mary's Frankenstein, Byron's limp, etc. Some of the esoteric references did seem particularly gratuitous: what, for example could the significance of Byron's limp, conceivably be, other than to enhance a sense of elitism in the respondents like Mrs REEKIE ("..except that he didn't have a club foot - they'd forgotten about that..it didn't come over why he hated doctors so much because of that..."). Brenton is open here to the criticism Eco makes of Fleming for using 'literary' references in such ways as to give the reader a 'thrill of poetic emotion' by reading into them references to earlier literary sources, or to different literary styles [Eco 1961 p172].

Although some respondents with accordant profiles may not necessarily 'get the message' (e.g. FARRAH, HINCHCLIFFE and REEKIEs to some extent, members of Adult Education Class to a greater extent), this may be less important than other satisfactions of the play. The indications are that
being able to enjoy those aspects which confirm the value of a particular 'cultured' outlook is a more important function of this play, for more respondents, than discovering new points of view. Audiences with the appropriate 'cultured' outlook are limited and this must be partly responsible for the low attendance figures for Bloody Poetry. For audiences with the 'right' background, the play can become one of social integration. This, it has been argued, is a characteristic which determines a play's popularity:

The emphasis is on the social duty and social integration rather than on existential independence from social obligations [Goodlad 1971 p40].

For other audiences, however, the emphasis is likely to be on Shelley and Byron's 'independence from social obligations'. The very title is likely to advertise the play's preoccupations sufficiently to deter many of these, whilst it will encourage accordant audiences to expect a play in which they can enjoy familiarity with an esoteric subject. Accordant respondents made references to a number of books and radio programmes concerning Byron and Shelley, offering various items of information about their lives. I learned from respondents that Byron had a limp and that his mother spent hundreds of pounds on doctors trying to cure it. Shelley's heart did not burn when his body was cremated. Harriet, or her father, took out a private law suit for 'atheism' against Shelley. Rochester, in Jane Eyre is based on Byron, The Aspern Papers was based on Claire's refusal to part with her love letters, etc, etc.

In Bloody Poetry, the bourgeoisie are criticised for being interested in gossip about the private lives of the rich and famous (rather than in political activism which results in the shooting of peacefully protesting workers). It is ironic, therefore, that even in such a play as this, within the prevailing ideological biases, the importance of Shelley and Byron still remains today as the objects of such preoccupations, rather than as the focal point for social revolution.

From the evidence that has been collected, it is possible to say that the conflict of interests in Brenton's play - the inherent incompatibilities between the subject and the proposed theme - prove to be decisive. We are able to report the critical finding that in this case, accordant respondents failed to see the political or social significance of Shelley's idealism. In addition, discordant respondents
who were aware of these aspects, found their presentation unacceptably equivocated. It may not be insignificant that it was for the men—WALDEN, PETERS and DENNIS—that the play was most dissatisfying, even though their profiles were aligned towards a liberal left viewpoint more akin to Brenton's than some of the right wing 'accordant' respondents. The possibility of the romantic appeal for women of Shelley and Byron may explain why Brenton's play misfired so markedly for so many of them. Mrs LANE was the only woman who had serious doubts about Shelley. The others were either all only too prepared to make allowances for his artistic temperament, or simply so far convinced of his status as a kind of romantic hero as to remain oblivious of any possible criticism. This kind of engrained idea is, as might be expected, at its most concrete in those respondents of the older generation.

Class

WALDEN and PETERS based their objections to Byron and Shelley's ideas on the grounds that they were "totally out of touch with reality" and "buffered from the normal situation". To DENNIS, they were "just playing". Even FARRAH found their reliance on other people's money suspect. This showed there was some wariness of idealism which could not be seen to work in a realistic situation. These respondents were unable to see the lifestyle in which Shelley and Byron tried to live their ideas as normal or real. This comes back to the reluctance which has been noted elsewhere, to invest input, especially of an emotional kind, unless it is clearly being invested in something 'worthwhile'. In an important sense, 'worthwhile' has to be read as 'realistic'. In Bloody Poetry there is a sense of respondents feeling that 'it's all very well for them...', but that the problems of their own lives preclude the kinds of ideals which are being presented. Ultimately, despite their personal traumas and difficulties, Byron and Shelley are seen as "highly privileged" (DENNIS). They are seen as part of an elite class with which these respondents do not identify. People like BAKER, on the other hand, see them as representative of "people like us", champions of the "standards" which are going "...down and down...". DENNIS meanwhile, is embittered by the way ideas and language can be appropriated as the property of those who count themselves "the chosen few". This bitterness coincided with an awareness of class differences partly emphasised by Bloody Poetry. It can be contrasted with the resignation with which awareness of class differences in Blood Brothers was met. Even more
negative, perhaps, than this kind of bitterness and frustration, is an
insidious undermining of certain 'class' values.

In as much as the play made outsiders of the LANEs, it was almost as
much of a contradiction as the character of Shelley himself.
Unfortunately, the elitism of the literary world, and the tenets of
revolutionary socialism are at odds in a way which Brenton failed to
resolve. This was the most important factor in creating negative
responses which offer to seriously undermine Brenton's 'faith that you
can address whoever happens to wander in'.

The LANEs, were not confident about criticising the play, believing, or
saying, rather, that their own inadequacies were to blame for perceived
shortcomings. Their lack of enthusiasm then, was couched in terms of
their own unsuitability for this play with comments along the lines of,
"it's just me.. it just wasn't my cup of tea"(Mrs LANE), ".. we didn't
get that you see ...missed the finer points"(Mr LANE). However, whilst
accepting that their response to the play was not the same, and
implicitly, not as good, as that of the majority of the audience, they
retained the option of vindication through populism. That is to say that
as a counter to these perceived shortcomings they resorted to the idea
of the entertainment value of the play. This is an appeal for a
different set of criteria to be invoked - a set more closely related to
commercialism and consumerism than aestheticism. They might not be such
good critics - "We're not English lit. scholars, are we" - but they can
be good consumers.

(giggles) I don't go and start thinking deeply like that
(laughs)...you just don't think, I mean...entertainment value,
and you come home, and that was sort of it. (Mrs LANE)

It is interesting to compare this with the REEKIES' response, invoking
quite the opposite criteria - unable to find the play 'entertaining',
they make claims for it being "thought-provoking" (see p178).

Mrs LANE was in company with a number of respondents (e.g.HINCHLIFFE,
PAWLEYs, FARMER, DEVINE) who make it clear that they do not go to the
theatre to be made to "go thinking deeply like that". However, they are
not above making social capital out of the image the theatre has of
being the kind of 'cultural activity' which does improve your mind (e.g.
FARMER p119). In this case, Mrs LANE takes up the 'populist' line more
strongly than Mr LANE:

Mrs LANE: It obviously didn’t appeal to people did it.

Mr LANE: ...that’s probably unfair a bit because,

Mrs LANE: But there again you’ve got to take the view that everybody’s tastes should be catered for.

Mr LANE: ...it’s difficult whether you put things on to give everybody a chance to go and see various things, or...to fill the theatre. That obviously didn’t fill the theatre at all.

It is Mrs, not Mr LANE, who tries to take advantage of her visit to the theatre to claim a more 'cultured' 'face'. Hence she is anxious to point out that they will follow up this cultural activity with further involvement:

Mr LANE: ...so that’s what I shall now believe happened.

Mrs LANE: Until we get round to reading something.

Mr LANE: Yea, probably, I know, but that may be years...

Also, although it is clear that the most important elements of the play for Mrs LANE are those usually identified by respondents as providing entertainment (eg. musical interest, good plot - "something happening all the way through"), she lays claim to a different kind of relationship to the play, one which reflects the views which she perceives to be predominant (and superior) in the rest of the audience:

Well, presumably the point of each play, irrespective of whether its a comedy or serious, is to bring over to the audience what the writer wants to say.

A Marxist interpretation would point to the hidden ideology of the play to explain how in this way Bloody Poetry functions to undermine the LANEs' own value judgements, causing them to accept that they, not the play, are inadequate, and effectively reconciling them to a social hierarchy, which though partly discomfiting for them to experience on such an elitist occasion, nevertheless has its attractions. It is worth noting the striking similarity between Mrs LANE’s comment here, and Mr PAWLEY’s in relation to Joe Egg:

My attitude certainly - is to rather to sort of appreciate what the playwright is trying to do...

Similar kinds of influences seems to be in operation here although the PAWLEYs and the LANEs do not share the same cultural backgrounds. What they do have in common, is an element of dissatisfaction with the play they have seen. These statements may be attempts to salvage some benefit from the experience.
Romantic Hero

Unique to the particular subject matter, were certain self-generated limitations to the theatricality of the play. Previous knowledge of any kind acted as a major bias (e.g. WALDEN's viewed the play from the assumption that Polidori was a sympathetic character - this skewed his view of the poets when they used Polidori as a scapegoat for their criticisms of society). A crucial example of such prior knowledge, was the way in which ideas of the Romantic poet informed responses.

The Harriet figure appeared to undermine preconceptions about Shelley as a "quieter, more thoughtful...sensitive" (FARAH) person. The fact that ABLE, CHARLES and FARAH did not like the ghost, who, "didn't fit in", and was "distracting", supports the idea that there was a clash here with a preconceived idea of Shelley as Romantic poet, and Brenton's attempts to 'rediscover' him. In view of the fact that most respondents found the ghost off-putting, it is possible that the theatricality used was itself rather odd, or inappropriate. However, FARAH's particular criticisms of the ghost, one of the most obvious devices of Brenton's questioning of Shelley's motives, might also suggest that she would rather be left with her preconceived model of Shelly intact. There is a parallel here with Judith Chadwick's feeling in finding Shelley's reaction to his child's death unacceptable - the theatricality contrives to show Shelley behaving in a way Chadwick's biographical knowledge tells her is inaccurate. CHARLES, ABLE and EALING try to excuse this behaviour. FARAH did not refer to the scene without prompting and seemed momentarily to find it difficult to express her response:

Shelley seemed so distraught, I couldn't understand it. He came over as almost Byron-like, not callous, but almost. I thought of it as him not understanding, not wanting to know his child had died.

The intimations of this scene and the theatricality surrounding the ghost, may well appear inappropriate to these respondents because of previous 'knowledge' or 'image' of Shelley which is less precise than Chadwick's, but equally important.

The theatricality of some scenes seems to have been decisive in determining the interpretation of Shelley's revolutionary ideas for some respondents. The scene showing Shelley's reception of his child's death was all-important to WALDEN, and especially PETERS, for instance.
However, the relative instrumentality of the theatricality and of the respondent's profile is an interesting issue. 'The same' theatricality did not evoke any spontaneous mention, for instance, from FARRAH, and when she was questioned directly on it, she preferred to see it as Shelley "not understanding... not wanting to know his child had died". We have the revealing evidence then, that the accordant respondent, appears to see his reaction as a reflection of mental anguish, whereas the discordant respondents see it as lack of the same. In this way, the accordant respondents' original romantic idea of Shelley as somehow on a higher plane can be confirmed. A sufficiently strong underlying cultural belief in this kind of poetic idealism allowed accordant respondents to see the theatricality as marking him out as special, confirming his poetic status, rather than as critical. HINCHCLIFFE saw Shelley as a man with "a vision of society". For FARRAH,

Shelley was quieter and more thoughtful .. had more sensitive socialist type beliefs. He was more tolerant of other views.

This is a view completely at odds with WALDEN's discordant assessment: extremely selfish, very blinkered ..shallow ..a waste of skin ...

...wishy-washy.

The acceptance of Shelley as a sensitive artistic idealist is markedly contrasted with discordant respondents' rejection of Shelley and preference for Byron. Compare PETERS' invective on Shelley:

Shelley had this sort of romantic notion of how wonderful it was and all this freedom and free love but really he didn't give a shit about anyone,

with FARRAH's wistful expression of her conclusions:

They seemed to want this high idealistic life, wanted to live a dream almost... it wasn't as ideal as he wanted it to be. There was a while when they'd reached this ideal, but then it was always tinged with something, not quite right.

Yet even for FARRAH, Byron and Shelley's idealism, whilst it is "always tinged with something" is acceptable and fitting to the Romantic image in a way that their political ideas are not. FARRAH referred twice to the question of the financing of their lifestyles as an important factor in her being able to see that whilst the idealism was only "tinged with something", their politics were "ridiculed" and "undermined":

Byron said that because they had money they could live like this, after that, it almost seemed to ridicule their political ideas... the way they were living and spongeing off other
people for money, seemed to undermine it.
FARRAH was the only respondent to respond positively to the ending of
the play - the fact that it imparted a sense of power supports the
conclusion that FARRAH has an important preconception about the kind of
significance these figures have. It may be a vague concept which she
does not consciously acknowledge, but it seems that in spite of
Brenton's attempts to 'rediscover' and 'demystify' Byron and Shelley,
the play is assimilated into her ideas about these men as Romantic
literary, not political, figures.

Gender differences in response
It is interesting to note that both Mrs REEKIE and Mrs LANE seem
slightly more concerned with the social capital they can make out of
their theatre-going than their male counterparts. There is an
interesting contrast here with the developing criticism of the
competitive male [e.g. Lakoff 1975]. We can see this as another aspect
of the function of theatre for women, helping them either to make
statements about their own identity or 'face' (e.g. Mrs LANE, Mrs
REEKIE) or to have a group support for that identity confirmed (eg.
WALMSLEY, FARMER). Both Mr LANE and Mr REEKIE, despite apparently
totally different cultural profiles have a less anxious and assertive
quality about their responses than their female counterparts. They make
more ruminative, tentative and qualified comments (see Appendix B). This
contrasts again with current expectations of the assertive male, since
it is the women who seem to be concerned to be in control of the
theatre-going experience. Both women conveyed an anxiety about giving a
'correct' report of the play, Mrs LANE so much so that for the first
half of the interview, she could not bring herself to commit herself to
words at all (Mr LANE finally asked her directly: "What do you think?"
but Mrs LANE initially retreated into giggles and "don't ask me"). Both
Mrs LANE and Mrs REEKIE make efforts to correct their men's
forgetfulness over the ending of the play, for example:

  Mr REEKIE: I think I've lost, I can't think what it was now, I
  know, he was on a boat trip wasn't he...
  Mrs REEKIE: That's right he went on a boat... recites that long
  speech...

and Mrs LANE even seems embarrassed by her husband's deficiencies

  Mr LANE: ...I can't remember now what it was they quoted. So
  it can't have had any real lasting effect.
Mrs LANE: (laughs) That’s about typical.
Mr LANE: ...You know, I can’t remember how it ended.
Mrs LANE: Oh dear! (laughs) ...It wasn’t a good ending in your book then.
Mr LANE: ...Quite a dramatic ending (laughs), you see I’d just forgotten it (laughs). Yes. Yes, I suppose it was quite a good ending in a way. I was going to say it had quite an impact...
(Laughter)
Mrs LANE: It had such an impact, you can’t remember it!

The women’s responses also seem to be more differentiated by their different social backgrounds than the men’s. Their aspirations are to different levels of sophistication, relating to the difference in their current social status (not least, compared to that of their interviewer, my own). Mrs LANE’s tone is perceptibly defensive, whilst Mrs REEKIE’s is assured. Although it does seem that theatre has some role for both REEKIEs in defining their socio-cultural sophistication, this is more true of Mrs REEKIE than Mr REEKIE. He said he preferred the kind of atmosphere at a theatre which was casual and relaxed enough to reflect the fact that this was not some special evening out. In a sense he is criticising the kind of bourgeois cashing in on the 'culture' and glamour of theatre which his female counterpart is partly guilty of. This kind of difference is perceptible in the tone of their comments. Mr REEKIE’s tend to reflect a more genuine concern that theatre should form a more natural and important part of society. There is no obvious assumption that theatre-going must be an elitist activity: his discriminations between audiences do not assume that appreciation of the theatre is the prerogative of a certain class, or that only certain correct responses are acceptable:

...just because people are quiet and that it doesn’t mean to say that they’re not taking notice ...it’s practice in a lot of cases, if you’re not used to going to the theatre and listening to plays you do miss things ...it is a habit really ..if you go and see one Shakespeare play, you’re not going to get a lot out of it, but if you’re used to going to see Shakespeare, and you know the sort of language he uses and the type of jokes and things like that, you’ll get more out of it. The idea that only a question of 'practice' prevents people from appreciating theatre is close to a recognition of the importance of
equal opportunities for such practice. There is quite a contrast between this view and those of other respondents (e.g. BAKER, CHARLES, et al). Mrs REEKIE, however, is quick to evaluate audiences on the more elitist grounds, comparing them to her own 'expert' view of theatre:

I really am surprised [about the small audiences]. We were wondering if people were a bit unadventurous... when I explained to them what we thought about it, they could then see, what he was getting at.

There is no concession here to the important financial constrictions which might determine a tendency to go for 'something safe', mentioned by FARRAH:

...as long as it's got some fairly good reviews (laughs)
because I haven't got that much money to go and see them all.

Another aspect of gender preference was revealed in different evaluations of Shelley's and Byron's personalities. WALDEN and PETERS approved of "good old Byron" who "just drunk through everything", because he was a "real lad", and "totally cynical". This is an interesting contrast with FARRAH's view of Byron as "callous... gushing... arrogant and debauched". A tentative suggestion which would be one explanation for this is that perhaps Byron is more of a 'man's man', whereas Shelley might appeal to the more 'caring' nature of women. Such a preference was not, however, definitive. Mr REEKIE responded quite sympathetically to the character of Shelley. He saw him neither as the Romantic poet who stood for standards of literary excellence for some (FARRAH, BAKER), nor as the political hero who was intended to be the hope and inspiration of others. He did manage to retain a view of Shelley as a basically caring and compassionate man:

Other people have described Shelley come over as an insipid character... he wasn't that weak, he was, quite sort of normal really, caring and passionate sort of person...although you've got this bit about going to write a poem because child died which I suppose is a bit odd, but he just reacted to it in a more introverted way than other people would've done. But I think he did care really, cos he cared about, the society and what was happening to, other individuals, perhaps he just couldn't cope with his immediate circle...you get a lot of people who've made a great success out of their public life but in private they cannot cope at all (Mr REEKIE).
This assessment of Shelley's reactions to his wife's and child's deaths bears a strong comparison with FARAH's. As we have seen, discordant respondents WALDEN and PETERS were quite eager to grasp the suggestion that Shelley cared more for his poetry than his family. Whilst FARAH and Mr REEKIE opposed their approval of Byron being "a real lad", but Mrs REEKIE concurred that that she "liked" the Byron character:

Mr REEKIE: I didn't like Byron very much I don't think.
Mrs REEKIE: Oh I don't know I think he came over what I thought he would be like, and you could really see why he was Charlotte Bronte's Rochester... You could see a lot of that, I thought he was good, really good.

Mrs REEKIE "liked" the character then, because he fulfilled her informed preconceptions of what he should be like, historically. Her criteria for evaluating the character are concerned with how much esoteric material from literary allusion and anecdote he accommodates. Mr REEKIE seems to see the theatre as fulfilling a function which has more to do with receiving new insight and experience than confirming existing notions. Because of expectations of such a worthwhile role for theatre of this kind, he is unlikely to be very critical of it. Shelley, as an artist himself, commands respect for his contribution to the greater good, mitigating any character weaknesses.

Artistic autonomy

Brenton's avowed intent (at the Open Forum) is to 'rediscover' Shelley, whom he considered an 'unexploded time-bomb in English history', as a figure of major political, as well as literary significance. These Romantic poets have been potential champions of the left for some time. Writing in *Left Review* in 1937, Jack Lindsay urges socialists to "apply the solution of Shelley and Byron in terms of the new situation" [p515]. However, his desire to realise what Shelley and Byron envisage...

to rediscover the secret of poetic diction as the first step towards the re-creation of an homogeneous audience - an audience that would feel a solidarity of sympathy...
is not entirely successful in Brenton's latter day attempt. At times the homogeneity of the audience seems to be the very problem.

Whatever his motivations, Brenton did admit to what was quite obvious in the play - the fact that he had become preoccupied with Shelley's personal and amorous entanglements with Mary, Byron and Claire. These
elements seemed at times to be presented in such a way as to bear minimal relation to a celebration of his political significance. This offered more encouragement to accordant respondents looking to Shelley as a conventional Romantic poet for reaffirmation of their aesthetic, intellectual (and sometimes stereotyped) values, than to those seeking socialist inspiration.

The actual subject matter of *Bloody Poetry* has proved to be inherently problematic for its theme, if not, indeed, self-defeating. It shares assumptions of the status of poetry in particular and art in general, which are the medium of post-Leavis criticism. This compromises the play’s equivocal dialogue with such a view of Romanticism. Shelley is also full of contradictions as a focal figure for the left, since his literary prominence is part of an elitism which the revolutionary ideas surrounding him cannot ultimately sustain. A good argument can be made (as WALDEN suggests) for Mary being the real heroine, who struggles with her ideals in the real world, not an idealistic one, like Shelley (or even a theatrical one, like Brenton and some members of the audience?).

Whilst Shelley oscillates between being haunted by conscience and buoyed by his conviction to acting and writing 'as if he were free', Byron's commitment to free living allows him to "leave diseases in married bedrooms", abandon his pregnant mistress and deliver the resultant daughter to an early death in a convent with apparent ease. This translation of idealism into 'filthy, private things' [Brenton 1985 p51] is recognised by Byron - "All your idealism... all trumpery! The practice doth make us dirty.." [ibid. p44] - but entirely unrecognised by all but one or two respondents, who even then do not register this kind of incision.

At the end of the play, the significance we have been led to believe that Brenton wished to claim for Shelley is in any case, overshadowed. He cuts a fine romantic figure while reciting his poeticisms, but there is a disillusion bleak enough to be cynicism in his final utterances. The *Mask of Anarchy* is neutered by the easy cynicism of

"Sh! Sh! "voluptuos flight" - "volup - tu - ous flight!"

*He laughs*

Ha! An easy rhyme there - with "night".

*A blackout.*[ibid. p82]
This, together with the concluding images of decay and destruction (the mutilation of Shelley's body and the burning) effectively dissipates any dynamism which may have centred around the poets' idealism. The sum of their radicalism at this point is nought – at least it is not registered at this point by respondents – FARRAH being the single exception. Byron is left to conclude the play with the oration 'Burn him! Burn us all! A great big, bloody, beautiful fire!', which becomes little more than an extension of the pervasive disillusion which colours the end of this play. It has the sense of wishing to obliterate the futile attempts and expressions of radicalism which the play has portrayed.

One of the findings of the research is that respondents were able to retain the possibility of interpreting Shelley as a conventional tragic hero. The play uses a number of aspects of tragic form: a sense of fate, of justice meted out, the predictable tragic consequences of the hero's fatally flawed character and the resolution of conflicts at the end. These can be seen in Mary's prophetic utterances [ibid. p62], the taunting presence of the ghost waiting to see Bysshe get his just desserts, and the fatal flaw of his commitment to 'act as if I were free', prefiguring the therefore more predictable drowning, in the earlier boat scene [ibid. p46]. These formal elements, together with the sense of resolution suggested by the valedictory gesturing at the end, can be seen as offering some reassurance of the stability and order of the world, where deficiency and weakness are exorcised. The fact that these satisfactions are also the satisfactions of narrative, offers one level of comparability with the otherwise very different play, Blood Brothers. Having said this, the symbolic content of Bloody Poetry assumes more significance than in Blood Brothers, requiring more contextual implicature. Russell ensures that this can be readily supplied, calling for ready-made implicatures from respondents' own cultural backgrounds. The nature of Brenton's invitation is more alienating – the implicatures are not so readily available. Because the inputs Brenton requires are sometimes less easily recognisable than the often habitual, or stereotyped ones Russell calls for, the risk of the 'wrong' notions being brought to bear on the play are higher.

Byron himself has been shown to have a healthy appreciation of the shortcomings of their philosophising [ibid. p44, 66, 68-69, 76-77], and it is tempting to see him as something of a mouthpiece for Brenton's own
doubts. Doubts which are understandable given the nature of the risk Brenton runs by the kind of input solicited. The risk is all the greater because of the limitations of the conservative institution a theatre like the Haymarket embodies. Especially if it is considered to embody the characteristics of 'Bourgeois Art' which Bürger claims 'negates the autonomy of art' [Bürger 1984 p46]. A marxist view would assume that Brenton cedes control of his art in this context since the mode of production is taken out of the hands of the artist (one reason for the different kinds of success of e.g. community theatre, where the involvement of the artist is immediate).

In spite of problematic elements, Bloody Poetry could be said to have met with some measure of success with some of the respondents who saw it. Notable as indications of 'success' are the responses of LANE, who indicated some sense of having gained new insights about conventionality, etc., WALDEN, who revealed a richly sympathetic understanding of Mary's position, and FARRAH, who went away with the overwhelming impression of the "great sense of power" behind what they both had. Such responses testify to the play affording an enriching experience for some of its audience, even if they are small in number. This last remains an observation which must serve to undermine in some respects what Brenton tries to do. In the play, Shelley asserts: "there must be a revolution in England, I write for it, every morning" [ibid. p50] but - "No one will publish it. ...the great revolutionary, English poem - unpublishable!" [ibid. p74]. His poetry then is not published, not 'bloody'?, and perhaps most importantly, maybe not read: "I write poems. But most of the world cannot even read" [ibid. p45]. Brenton writes plays, but most of the people of Leicester do not even come to the theatre. The findings of this research indicate that at least of those who do, not all of them will take up his rhetorical invitation to "Be satisfied, justified, be smug!".
A DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG

SYNOPSIS

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg was performed by a specially assembled company (including television stars Christopher Timothy as Bri and Barbara Ewing as Sheila) in the main auditorium of the Haymarket Theatre, Leicester in September 1984. The play was first performed at the Citizen’s Theatre, Glasgow in May 1967.

The play opens abruptly with Bri, a teacher, hectoring the audience in the place of his class. After school, he returns home to his wife, Sheila. Bri plays the fool and teases her amorously, but Sheila seems to find this wearing at times. Her mind is on the imminent return of their severely handicapped daughter, Joe, from the day centre she attends. Joe arrives on stage in her wheelchair and her parents talk to and about her in a matter of fact manner combined with a certain music-hall knockabout comedy routine they have obviously developed over the years.

Sheila is going out to the amateur theatrical society and Bri annoys her with his teasing about her supposed affair with another member, Freddie. Bri tells the audience about his longings for Sheila’s sexual and general attentions, explaining that she is too busy “embracing all live things” [Nichols 1967 p26]. In her turn, Sheila addresses the audience, explaining Bri’s jealousy of all her interests, and particularly Joe. They go into a ‘party piece’, acting out the events of their marriage, Joe’s birth, the early diagnoses of her problems by unsympathetic doctors, the desperate period of hoping for improvement, for a miracle. They explain how they have come to resign themselves to living with her disability through their games of inventing personalities for her. Finally, Sheila, left on her own, confides that whilst Bri has given up, she still hopes and dreams. The normal, happy, active and articulate little girl of her dreams comes skipping into a spotlight and announces the end of Act One.

In Act Two, Sheila arrives home with the friends from the amateur theatrical society, Freddie and Pam. Left alone, Freddie reveals his over-anxiety “to help” [ibid. p48], Pam, her aversion to “the weirdie” [ibid. p50]. Sheila and Bri join them and Freddie brings up the question
of why they do not have another child and send Joe to a residential school. They reject these possibilities in their usual pseudo-comic manner. Bri reports on the problems he has had with feeding and toileting Joe during the evening and follows his description of her grand mal by relating how he put a cushion over her face to put an end to it all. There is a momentary pause before Sheila realises this is another of his jokes, but Bri wants to know whether she had thought even for a moment what a relief it would be: Sheila replies "of course not" [ibid. p61]. A debate about the ethics of killing ensues between Freddie and Bri. Pam breaks away to confide in the audience about her extreme distaste for anything "NPA" (Non-Physically Attractive) [ibid. p63].

Joe is carried in and seems to be "worse than usual" [ibid. p65]. At this point, Bri's mother, Grace, calls and delivers a solo on the minutiae of her existence to the audience. The text informs "in her presence, Bri is more boyish and struggles to escape her maternal allure" [ibid. p65, italics as in text]. Grace is indulgent of Joe, but wistful: "wouldn't she be lovely if she was running about?" [ibid. p67]. Sheila becomes concerned about Joe's condition and efforts are made to get some medicine, but Bri appears unco-operative in this. Sheila becomes convinced that Joe, who seems to be unconscious, needs the doctor. Bri again makes light of this, but by now Freddie and Sheila are beginning to suspect his actions, and they go to the phone box to call an ambulance. Bri disappears through the back door, into the snow, carrying Joe. There follows a series of farcical entrances and exits while Sheila tries to find Bri and Joe, until Bri carries her back in, announcing, "I think it's all over" [ibid. p82], explaining that he has been trying "to stop them saving her again" [ibid.].

In the aftermath of this attempt at euthanasia, Bri explains how Joe was saved again, and how he has come to realise that he cannot live as just another part of Sheila's menagerie. He plans to sneak off, abandoning his job and former life and we see him pack. Just then, Sheila returns with Joe, promising that things will be a little different from now on. She is feeling amorous and insists Bri takes the day off. She makes her way upstairs, but, saying he is just going to the phone box, Bri takes one last look round, picks up his case and leaves.
THE CONSENSUS

Joe Egg was perceived as mainstream entertainment; i.e. respondents did not see it as a production from a canon of classic drama, or as an experimental fringe event. There was an element of 'reliability' to the play. The presence of Christopher Timothy (a well-known TV star of All Creatures Great and Small fame) on the bill as leading actor lent weight to this idea. Respondents made an association between the kind of entertainment he is most famous for and the kind of thing they expected to see him involved in here. Expectations, then, were generally of an evening's entertainment of a professional nature which could be relied upon to be understandable and enjoyable.

In addition to the perception of the expected entertainment value of the piece, there was an assumption that there would be some call upon the emotional sympathies of the audience. It is probably true to say that this element of the play was greater than expected by most of the respondents. In most cases this was seen as a bonus, providing a more 'worthwhile' evening than had been anticipated. In fact respondents expected their social conscience to be played upon. It seemed odd that none of the respondents mentioned the title of the play as an influence on their expectations (to me, the very word 'Death' in the title suggested this kind of 'seriousness' and the scrambling of the title of a well-known rather sober book - One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch - might have suggested that whilst serious issues would be addressed, this would be done in a 'popularised' way).

A certain liberalism in the ideology of the play was important in defining the consensus as to what the play was about and how it worked. This could be described as a commitment to an openness or honesty in society, an aversion to the idea that 'unpleasant' aspects of social life should be kept strictly under the carpets of some kind of bourgeois code of polite behaviour. The play relied on an assumption that care of handicapped people was an issue, i.e. - they should not be simply done away with or kept locked up somewhere. For example, this assumption makes it almost impossible to see Pam's distaste at merely the sight of Joe as anything other than repugnant. A shared notion of emotional outlet and expression was equally definitive of the play. Respondents recognised that role playing and humour were a way of coping with what was going on inside; the idea that 'bottling up' of emotions is a bad
thing was important in defining the terms in which the play was to be understood.

Whilst these basic positions might seem too broad to form a coherent consensus, their importance in defining the terms of relation between stage and audience can perhaps best be seen by considering what they exclude. The 'liberal' ideology of this consensus, for example, is exclusive of the kind of ideology which asserts social duty over personal expression or fulfilment - the 'stiff upper lip' mentality which prevailed in time of war, for instance. It would be difficult to get much out of the play at all by looking at it from the point of view that such problems should be dealt with as matters of expedience and in private whilst an unchanging public face is presented to the world. This point of view would defuse the conflicts which form the core of the play when it is viewed from the consensus point of view.

Joe Egg uses theatrical conventions in some unusual and interesting ways. However it conforms with enough of the basic conventions of theatrical production to be recognisably 'mainstream', in the sense that it would be unlikely to use techniques of agit-prop theatre, for example. The play's venue and peripheral events are probably the most decisive factors here. One of the questions to be addressed is how far such factors can still be decisive in spite of some transgressions of convention in the play itself.

Respondents recognised that this play was relating to its audience in a way which was not as conventional as other plays they had seen, in a way which was not quite what they expected. This difference was acclaimed as being "very clever, the way it was done" (WALMSLEY). The way the relationship between the actors and audience kept changing was identified as the notable difference: it was unpredictable, and yet convincing. The play used humour to deal with a difficult subject and make sure it remained palatable. However, it was not what could be described as 'a comedy'; whilst some of the play was genuinely funny, some was seen as 'black humour'. The respondents were aware of the humour as device; Brian's use of it was a 'way of coping', and the playwright had used it in the play similarly, to facilitate an encounter with an uncomfortable subject without shutting off from it.
The play was seen to be about the difficulties encountered between husband and wife under the stress of coping with their handicapped daughter, Joe. Joe was severely handicapped, almost a 'vegetable'. Brian, her father, worked at a job he found difficult, as a teacher. Sheila, the mother, was devoted to caring for Joe. The two of them had developed a slapstick humour to cope with the difficulty and tragedy of life with Joe. Brian used a kind of hard edged sarcastic humour almost all the time to cover his inability to cope with the problems of his life. Sheila humoured him when possible. Brian's mother was a 'typical' mother-in-law figure who chattered unceasingly and unhelpfully about trivialities. Of their friends Freddie and Pam, Pam was a stereotyped middle class woman who hated to have to be involved with anything that was not quite nice. She was seen as totally preoccupied with looking after herself and her family to the exclusion of all others. Freddie was an earnest but ineffective do-gooder for whom the world had to be seen in black and white.

The play was considered to be about the different points of view all these people had on what should be done about Joe. It showed that there is no one easy answer and called for sympathy for both Brian and Sheila, and indeed all those in a similarly unfortunate position. The sanctity of marriage and the importance of family duty were strongly present in the play for respondents. The picture is slightly confused, however, since many of the middle class norms in the play are there as targets. The ending of the play was an unhappy one, because Sheila was too devoted to Joe to realise that Brian needed more of her attention, and he left the home as a result.
RESPONSES
Theatricality

Joe Egg may be said to use unconventional techniques in its theatricality since they were identified as such not simply by myself, but by many respondents. It was recognised that the relationship between stage and audience was somewhat unusual. This was most often characterised as 'clever' by the respondents. There was the feeling that the play was being 'clever' in playing with ordinary conventions of the stage, although what exactly these 'ordinary conventions' are, it is difficult for anyone to be sure of. Some are clearer than others. For example, Bri's address of the audience in the opening of the play was different from the 'ordinary convention' of the actor pretending the audience is not there. Offset against this 'unusual', 'clever', element, however, were important aspects of respondents' perceptions of the play rooted in their expectations of its 'entertainment' value. Almost all respondents, regardless of their other motivations or satisfactions, mentioned their enjoyment of the social evening out. In a sense, the play could be seen as just a part of their overall experience of the evening, which included meeting friends, having a drink or possibly a meal.

Entertainment

Respondents seemed to differentiate between different kinds of entertainment provided by the play. There was 'the serious side of it', which 'made you think a little bit as well'. This was something which was associated with learning and understanding; education almost (cf. p119), rather than sheer entertainment. This was distinct in the respondents' minds from the type of entertainment which was not specific, but could have been provided by other functional equivalents (e.g. a dance, a concert). Comments that "you go to be entertained" (WALMSLEY), you go for "fun, and enjoyment, and have a laugh as well" (MANNING) suggest that respondents brought expectations of relaxation and light-hearted good humour to the play. In this context, the humour in the play was most easily identified as fulfilling these expectations.

A range of responses can be grouped under 'entertainment' because they are characterised as less problematic and more passive by respondents. These responses contrast with those where respondents feel they are
responding to the 'message(s)' of the play, when more complex emotions and feelings come into play.

Although KNIGHT knew that the play would be about handicap (she knew that it was based on Nichols' experiences with his own spastic daughter), surprisingly, she did not expect the play to reflect the potentially 'morbid' nature of the subject:

I didn't think it'd be really serious, because I didn't think people would perhaps go and see a play like that if it was going to be, really sort of heavy and - morbid.

KNIGHT obviously puts faith in the power of audience tastes, believing them to determine what type of theatre will be presented. This is commensurate with her attitude to the theatre as an entertainment service. On this occasion, for example, her visit to the theatre was part of a "super night out" which had been arranged as an anniversary celebration. For KNIGHT, the play has an obvious function simply to entertain its audiences and to provide them with what they want.

KNIGHT was much more tolerant of the theatre than of other forms of entertainment, specifically "the pictures". She could say that she had enjoyed every play she had seen at the Haymarket, and had "never felt I wished I hadn't bothered, like I sometimes have done when I've gone to the pictures". The fact that she can affirm, "I do enjoy Shakespeare as well", tallies with her ability to receive any transmission from an institution redolent of 'show business' as fulfilling the same function. KNIGHT's expectations of entertainment refer not to the play, but to the night out, at the theatre:

I like to have a laugh at the theatre. ... I enjoy any sort of..I just like going to the theatre, I like the idea of going out and seeing something different.

The entertainment she does anticipate is characterised by 'having a laugh', 'going out' and 'something different': amusement, diversion, novelty and variety.

In Joe Egg it was particularly easy for KNIGHT to identify the play as 'entertainment' (in terms of her own ideas of what entertainment is), because of the form Nichols had chosen to present the subject. This is especially true of the characterisation of Sheila and Brian. The tone of their relationship, of their communication with each other, was what was
attractive and memorable for KNIGHT:

The way they joked and nattered between themselves... That I think - if I had to pick a still out of the whole of the play, it'd be when the two of them were on the stage... When they were nattering in front of her, and she was in the background (reproduced in full context in Appendix B).

The PAWLEYs go to the theatre to "relax and forget", their expectations are of a form of diversion from the problems of life, rather than of concentration. Seeking such diversion, the PAWLEYs are unlikely to find the kind of 'high brow' theatre which focusses on those areas of social order which are most under stress very appealing. They have quite clear ideas about which kinds of theatre may present such vexing possibilities. Hence Mrs PAWLEY is "not that keen" on Shakespeare; "it's the thought of it that puts me off", and Chekhov comes into the same category:

Mrs PAWLEY:...but we didn't want to see Cherry Orchard
Mr PAWLEY: All very intense and all that -
Mrs PAWLEY: - it just puts me off
Mr PAWLEY: No doubt very well written and all that, but...

The occupational therapists obviously enjoyed the sheer entertainment value of the theatre, and the social occasion of attending, but they felt they wanted this to be supplemented by something more 'important'. It is obviously inappropriate to try to be categorical about this kind of expectation, and indeed it will vary from individual to individual. However, we can suggest that it implies a role for the theatre which can be seen as closer to the ritual/efficacy functions characterised by Schechner (see p47) than those of sheer 'entertainment'. These respondents said they used the play to "think about something a bit more deeply". In extending their understanding like this, they said they felt that they had encountered some of the problems of "the social side of life", had faced up to "the seriousness of it". Whether this relieves some kind of anxiety or guilt, they clearly felt that good theatre should have some lasting effect on its audience.

LAFTOE: I like something that actually says, something about, the social side of life, and that did, that was something that I could relate to as important.

Q: Is that what most of you would say you go to the theatre
for, I mean you go to the theatre looking for - what sort of expectations do you have, how hard do you want to have to work, you know, do you want to be made to think about something, to have your attitudes challenged perhaps, or do you, go to be entertained, to sit there and have something -

STANTON: I think it's a combination of the two, sometimes it's just to be entertained, other times it's just to be able to think about something a bit more deeply.

Q: Just depending how you feel at the time...?

DRYDEN: Yes and depending on the play.

MANNING: ...fun, and enjoyment, and, even, I like to go and have a laugh as well but... what I take away from the play is the serious, side of it ...so its nice to be able to sit in an enjoyable atmosphere, and have a laugh, and go with friends, and have a drink afterwards, whatever, great, and, a night out in itself, but also to come away with something for that to last, and for that to affect maybe the way I think and feel, is very powerful.

It is interesting to note that the sheer entertainment value was of greater importance to the most enthusiastic theatre-goer in the group,

LAFTOE:

In Derby I didn't miss a single play that came on at the playhouse... I think a lot of it is the sheer entertainment value of, the occasion, and...actually, the atmosphere within the theatre itself, I mean I'd much rather go to a theatre than a cinema, because you're actually watching live people, you can get the smell of sort of the costumes and the make up, and...ice creams and things... its just got a whole magic to me compared to anything that you'd see on the telly ...I would sort of say, well at least its live, you know.

There is a relish in this response which identifies the enthusiast. It suggests a degree of indulgence which might preclude more discriminating criticism. The respondent herself puts the emphasis on what a keen theatre-goer she is, not on her critical appreciation of plays.

WALMSLEY AND JENNINGS also spoke of the dual satisfactions of being entertained and "being made to think a little bit as well". Whilst the humour enlivened the play and made for its entertainment value, they saw in Joe Egg the potential for a certain 'depth'. There is the suggestion
that this tendency needs to be kept in control, and the humour fulfils that function for WALMSLEY:

I wouldn't've enjoyed it had there not been the comedy pieces. I think it would just've been far too serious, I might've switched off mentally, but there were the little light bits that jolted you out of this (laughing) morose feeling.

That "morose feeling" is sufficiently incompatible with the idea of an evening of entertainment for the juxtaposition of the two to elicit this chuckling disclaimer:

JENNINGS: Well I always like happily ever after quite frankly (rising laughter).
WALMSLEY: Yes, I do, I enjoy happy endings, but it would've just been -
JENNINGS: - too twee -
WALMSLEY: - to have a happy ending, it'd got to be an ending which made you want, well, made you think on.
JENNINGS: Yes, I agree with that, I think for it all to have turned out well thankyou very much wouldn't've been right at all.

The happy ending is what they want in order for the play to constitute entertainment, but they are ambivalent in this case, feeling that this would somehow undermine the other, more worthy function of the play.

Humour

Respondents indicated that in Joe Egg, humour had an important role to play in allowing them some distance from controversial issues. DRYDEN indicates that comic presentation allowed her to overcome prejudices:

I was going to say, that the way they presented the attitudes was good, I mean it didn't really matter...whether it was an attitude you would like, or dislike, it was a funny way, which made it more, I don't know, more easy to identify with... you could see the funny side of even a bad attitude.

This respondent was an occupational therapist committed to improving the quality of life for the handicapped and therefore not in sympathy with Pam's views or Bri's desperate measures. Although these attitudes were alien to her, the humour allowed her to view them with some equanimity, to at least give them a hearing: The way the character of Bri uses humour allows for an ambiguity in the response of these respondents. They felt they were "not supposed to" like Bri, and felt "uncomfortable"
doing so because this would be a recognition of their own identification with his views.

Q: ...you didn't really like his character then?
LAFTOE: I think I wasn't supposed to, but because I could identify with him, I did.
DARKING: I think it makes you almost feel uncomfortable, because you can understand their attitudes, and also, its just a sort of uncovering the attitudes, in a way, that everybody perhaps tries to cover up, and doesn't admit to having, but in fact, it showed, it did show it quite clearly.

This is one example of the way the responses of the six occupational therapists, who were interviewed together, came to light through interplay between themselves almost more successfully than in response to the researcher's questions. A continuous section of this transcript is included in Appendix B, which illustrates this potentially interesting methodological point more clearly.

In the way respondents described their appreciation of the comedy, they seem to be saying that the chance to see the attitudes portrayed as a joke, rather than a serious assault on unsympathetic views of handicap, is crucial to their enjoyment of the play. Pam is a classic example of this. She is funny because she is over the top; a cliché stereotype of self-centredness. As such, the respondent is not forced to take her, and the implied criticism of the kind of exclusiveness and selfishness she represents (which must be universally identified with to some degree) seriously. However, despite being able to alleviate such criticism by dismissing Pam as a caricature, this respondent still recognised that she did in fact represent something 'true'. The respondent retained the choice of pursuing this realisation by taking up the challenge of recognising that what was true in Pam's character could be true in hers, and it was presumably this freedom to choose which allowed her to enjoy the play:

DRYDEN: ...some of the attitudes were shocking...it was shocking when you first thought about it, but then the way the comedy brought it out, it wasn’t shocking because it’s a true attitude, but I think if it hadn’t been comedy, if it’d just stated that attitude, I wouldn’t’ve enjoyed the play at all, I would’ve thought it was just too – stating the obvious, stating the facts, and I don’t think anybody likes to really
think that they know those facts.

DARKING: It's too frightening.

MANNING: I don't think they'd've got away with that either, I think you needed comedy to put it across.

DRYDEN can be credited here with identifying the very fundamentals of what Nichols does. She has recognised that, basically, he is stating 'the obvious' (attitudes); it is the comic medium through which he does this that makes the play more than simply 'stating the facts'.

Not all respondents felt that the humour was necessary, or even desirable. Mr and Mrs PAWLEY knew that the play was about a handicapped child, and therefore did not expect there to be any humour in it. They seemed to consider this serious, tragic subject unsuitable for levity, and something which it is generally accepted is to be kept out of the realm of 'normal life', conversation and so on. Whilst they were able to retain this view, even to the point of condoning the attempt at a final solution for Joe's disruption of 'normal life', they were made to feel uncomfortable about their attitude. Although they "could see the humour", they "didn't really feel like laughing, not really, to be honest". There is an indication that they may have been discomfited about their response since they find it necessary to point out that they were not alone in their reservations about the humour:

... the audience seemed the same in their reactions ...there was the odd titter, but no full-blooded laughter (Mr PAWLEY).

One other respondent was also unable to enjoy the humour. MANNING took the subject seriously:

Q: So did you find a lot of it funny?

MANNING: No.

LAFTOE: You didn't laugh at all to start with did you.

His reasons for failing to find it funny are presumably not the same as the PAWLEYs since it is hard to imagine that an occupational therapist could be disconcerted by the idea of disability being integrated into normal life. Unfortunately he found it difficult to articulate why he did not find it funny (some of his attempts to do so can be found in Appendix B), but both his and the PAWLEYs' responses can be contrasted with KNIGHT's unqualified confirmation of the play's humorous entertainment value.
KNIGHT was much more relaxed about the humour than the PAWLEYs. It did not disrupt her enjoyment of the play in any way. She enjoyed the banter between the couple, and found their jokes funny. The suggestion was that she was able to enjoy the humour for its own sake because she clearly identified it as device, as part of an artefact which had been constructed for her entertainment. There is no suggestion that the humour becomes a bit much, unacceptable for her in the way it does for the PAWLEYs. This is because KNIGHT finds it easy to make the distinction between her response to Bri's joking in the play as a member of the audience, and how she imagines she would respond to it outside of the theatrical context: did Bri's joking become too much?

I didn't because I was watching a play - I think if I was actually his wife it would've irritated me, to the extent he did go to to joking about her so much.

To KNIGHT this was entertainment which could only have been included in the play to be amusing and funny for its own sake. In fact she identified the sheer entertainment value of the jokes between the married couple, which she found quite funny, as one of the most enjoyable aspects of the play.

Farce
The uncertainty surrounding Bri's attempt at euthanasia is a good example of a theatrical device functioning to give a distance which enables the respondent to be more objectively critical about a moral question. The farcical presentation is crucial in creating the distance, or alienation which allows this viewpoint. Most respondents admitted to some confusion during these scenes, though responses to the confusion varied. The PAWLEYs and BROADHURST were very negative about it, as were the Occupational Therapists and GATEWAY students and teacher, although for different reasons. KNIGHT, WALMSLEY, JENNINGS and WINTER appeared to accept the device.

KNIGHT said that she found some of this interlude confusing; she "wasn't quite sure just exactly what was going on". She recognised that in spite of the slapstick "way they did it" there "was a very serious sort of thing underneath it". This apparent incongruity, however, did not prevent her from seeing Bri's point of view, even though it was not her own. In fact, her impulse - she "didn't really want him to do it" - was tempered by the fact that she "sympathised" with the father, she could
see possible justifications for the act.
Initially, I didn't think he was altogether serious, I thought it was just perhaps his way of joking again then I realised that he was serious, and I could see his point of view, but I didn't really want him to do it ... it was quite farcical, but although you knew it was sort of farcical in the way they did it, was a very serious sort of thing underneath it, which I was thinking about as well, thinking would he won't he, mm, you know, maybe he wouldn't quite, and you didn't quite know why... there were a couple of instances when you were wondering quite what was happening, I was a bit confused, but then, it did sort of ravel itself out.

BROADHURST was definitely alienated by the way Bri's attempted euthanasia was presented. There seemed to be two reasons for this. Firstly, it is possible that her own personal dealings with handicapped people have lent her a firm conviction against the idea of euthanasia:
Oh yes, I think they've all got their own characters, people like that. I think probably because years ago I did a child care course and I've been in a school, you know, with mentally handicapped, children... it's how she was, you do tend to, sort of make up your own language with them, you talk to them and answer yourself, and that sort of thing.
This may have made her feel that the presentation was undignified since she registered some distaste for this way of dealing with the subject. Secondly, BROADHURST seemed too genuinely puzzled by the form this scene took, to be able to go along with it, in the way that KNIGHT had, until it 'did sort of ravel itself out':
Sometimes, well at first, he seemed, the same as her, it sort of, I dunno, the changeover seemed very gradual... it, quite took me by surprise towards the end sort of thing, when you found out that he really didn't, want to carry on the way things were and everything... I don't think it quite sank in for a little while actually what was going on, not until, towards the end, when it was actually mentioned, I thought that bit was very strange - It seemed to turn into a bit of a - I dunno, farce sort of thing then, you know that, I dunno. I didn't think it was necessary all that, really.
Although she said she could understand "the strain being put on a
husband like that", she seemed to see this action of Bri's as curiously unexpected. The element of 'surprise' when she finally realised what he was doing, and the "very strange" nature of these scenes led her to use this behaviour as the evidence upon which her assumption that the mother "obviously must've felt more for the child" is based. This was the only instance of a respondent coming out so clearly in favour of one character as opposed to the other. Other respondents typically stressed the importance of 'being able to see both points of view'.

Like BROADHURST, the occupational therapists (also subject to actual contact with and experience of the handicapped), were dissatisfied with these scenes:

DARKING: I didn't like the bit at the end where, the mother was rushing round looking for her daughter, after he'd taken her out into the snow. I can't even remember if it was supposed to be funny or not, but I just remember not liking it particularly.

Q: What did anybody else think of that bit, when he was rushing in and out of doors and things?

LAFTOE: I don't think that would - I mean, it's realistic in the sense that, just going out in the cold could've killed her, but it wasn't realistic in the way they were dashing in and out of the house and kept just managing to miss each other, that annoyed me a little,

MANNING: Mmm.

LAFTOE: to be quite honest, but I mean I don't know how else they would've done it... I don't know if they could've finished it slightly different, just by, - I don't know, some way of, perhaps dealing with the thought of death, rather than actually going through with actually trying to kill her.

It seems that the occupational therapists commitment to care for the handicapped is too strong to allow them to be drawn in to colluding with the idea of Bri killing Joe, even though they do sometimes say they sympathise with him.

These rejections of the scene where Bri tries to bring about Joe's early death are based on respondents' objections to the idea of euthanasia, which made the farcical treatment particularly inappropriate in their eyes. The PAWLEYs, however objected to the form - the 'joke' Bri tries
to pull, rather than the content.

Q: Were there any bits of Brian's humour that you really didn't like?

Mrs PAWLEY: When he said he'd killed her.
Mr PAWLEY: Yes, that was an extreme, certainly.
Mrs PAWLEY: I thought that was a little bit...
Mr PAWLEY: He was trying to prove the point.

They said that they did not find any of this interlude funny at all. They did not feel anxious, or tense about it, but just wanted him to 'get it over with'. In fact, they agreed with the basic objective to remove Joe as an obstacle to the smooth progress of everyone else's lives.

Mrs PAWLEY: I agreed with the father really, and the guest, the lady. Perhaps not so much with her, but I agreed with the father's point of view that I couldn't see the point in the child living and really, affecting everyone else's life. And she was getting nothing out of it as far as I could see. I suppose you don't know what they're getting out of it, but I couldn't see that, I mean she was... she was really so badly. I didn't see she was getting anything out of it at all.

Mr PAWLEY: I tend to agree with the policy that if they are completely as a vegetable, as she obviously was, then there's no point prolonging the agony for the people round her, they're the ones that have to take all the agony of it.

Here they seem to the father's view as quite unambiguous: he simply does not seeing any point in the child living. We can also note that Mrs PAWLEY has managed to partially accept Pam's views in advocacy of the idea of euthanasia, even though they are the views of a character who is obviously 'sent up' as a target, to create and direct audience criticism of these kinds of views. WINTER's assessment, below, appears to be similar in some respects (cf. WINTER: "...couldn't think of anything life could possibly offer to her...", and Mrs PAWLEY: "didn't see she was getting anything out of it at all"). However, WINTER's sensitivity identifies a crucial ambivalence in Bri's struggle to confront the personal and moral problem in the play, which the PAWLEYS show no sign of recognising:

Even towards the end where he was trying to kill her, any mistakes he made in that respect were if anything due to his concern for her. He wanted to stop the suffering. In fact he
bungled it, you know, what seems like cruelty, taking her out into the cold, it's not really it's just a man who's not used to killing things if you like, and he just made a horrible mess of it, which you probably would in that sort of situation.

Q: Did you like him, then?
I was sympathetic towards him, yes, and I think perhaps he was trying a gesture to save his marriage, and having seen the state of the daughter, heard the medical history as it were I couldn't think of anything life could possibly offer to her, except possibly pain and fits. So yes I was sympathetic, even more so by the fact that everything went so disastrously wrong, he obviously didn't know how to do the job properly...

Compared to this, the PAWLEYs saw the issue in very clear cut terms. Bri should have killed Joe to resolve the difficult domestic situation. But not on stage. Mrs PAWLEY in fact experienced none of the 'would he won't he' anxiety of KNIGHT and others. She was so convinced of the unsuitability of such action on stage that she did not think Bri's attempt would succeed, "because I didn't think the censor would have let that happen". It is a measure of her expectations of propriety on stage that despite Mr PAWLEY's reminder: "there is no censor, dear", she remains disbelieving: "...I thought there was still a certain amount... surely there's something - No censor at all?". Mr PAWLEY confirms that they share a concern for propriety, expected limits to what they might encounter in the theatre, recalling an earlier, safer age:

When you see what is shown on the stage these days, it's a little bit different from what is used to be certainly - there's not much that's beyond the pale to those people.

Addressing the audience
The use of the direct address of the audience by the actors as a particular type of theatrical device posits a role for the audience as arbiter, but the possible effects of this have proved to be twofold. Appealing to the audience in this way may first of all imply that they have a judgemental responsibility requiring a degree of objectivity for its proper execution. However, it may also conversely have the effect of drawing the audience into the play, either in the role of conspirator, or through identification with one or other character, even if only
temporarily. It is worth acknowledging the difficulty of establishing with any certainty what type of response predominates, (or even whether one is exclusive of the other) since any one individual's response to a piece of theatre is not constant through time.

WALMSLEY, however seems to respond predominantly in the former way. She does not find the use of direct address so alienating as to switch off, quite the reverse. In his initial appearance on stage, for example, Bri not so much holds WALMSLEY'S attention, as demands it. In this particular production, the actor made use of the late-comers, and so on to make his admonishments appear specifically directed at individuals in the auditorium. WALMSLEY especially liked this opening, saying, "there was no struggle to get into that play at all". For her it ensured an immediate transition into a receptive mood, without relying on a gradual engrossment in the illusion to bring about a suspension of disbelief. BROADHURST's response was similar:

.. that was very good, yes, I thought that was excellent
...Well it sort of got you straight away, it held you didn't it, the way he came on.

It is interesting to note that there was very little resistance to what could be considered an unconventional opening. In casting the audience in the role of Bri's pupils, Nichols is presumably hoping to disrupt audience assumptions of the play as a predetermined artefact, 'closed' to them behind an imaginary fourth wall. Comments about the opening suggest that he succeeded in some measure. A number of respondents remarked on its unusual appeal and there is the feeling that respondents enjoyed being a part of a theatrical experience which was unconventional. Many of the respondents referred to the opening as a kind of shared joke between them and the stage:

This is it, (laughing) you felt like really sitting there with your hands on your head, sort of thing, yes I thought that bit was very good (BROADHURST).

I think the opening broke it down for me because I was terrified in case I moved and he said, Hey, you! (laughing) (JENNINGS).

I was beginning to wonder (laughing) whether I really ought to stand on my chair with my hands on my head (the group laugh) and shut up, I wasn't quite sure (LAFTOE).

The evident enjoyment here could be associated with an idea of
challenging convention, as if somewhere in the consciousness of the play and the respondents, there is a shared idea of some kind of conventional theatre which is perhaps rather stuffy, and which they are poking fun at together. For some, however, this kind of thing in itself has become rather old hat - some of the occupational therapists seemed more impatient that the technique must be so laboured, than amused, let alone disturbed at its originality.

STANTON: It was quite amusing when he/
LAFTOE: /It was amusing... /
STANTON: /first started off, but then when he carried on I thought Oh God, just get home and, do something else, I was a bit fed up with it by the time he'd finished
(General agreement).

These occupational therapists were regular theatre-goers, who may consequently have found a lack of sophistication in the play's determination to get across a 'new' relationship with its audience. The fact that they were also professionally involved with the handicapped also no doubt explains a certain impatience with the play's delay in getting down to its ostensible subject.

In contrast, KNIGHT's response indicated surprise, rather than impatience, at not being able to immediately recognise a conventional lead into the subject of the play:

It made me jump! - But when I first saw the opening I was thinking, Ooh, well I don't quite know what this is going to have to do with the rest of the play.
In retrospect she thought it had been a good way of showing what Bri had to cope with during a day's work before going home to what he has to face there, which was something WALMSLEY also commented on.

Responses suggest that the technique of direct address functions to cast the audience in the role of confidant (or, possibly arbiter) because the actors acknowledge that they are putting on a show to explain something to the audience. BROADHURST seemed to respond very positively to this aspect. It did seem to direct her to take parts of the play more seriously, as if there were genuine confidences being imparted:

I liked that. I came home and told Pete, you know, that I liked that...you felt more part of it, you felt as if they were, actually talking to you, telling you what was going
...you felt as if...they weren't just doing a play, if they were... actually standing there looking at the audience, and talking to them, as people, you know, but not in a play, sort of thing, (laughing). I thought that was very well done.

The 'set piece' sketches Bri and Sheila performed about the birth etc. were entertaining enough in their own right for the audience to become engrossed. WALMSLEY said that the vicar, and the doctor, were so convincing that she forgot they were being represented by Bri, as an 'aside' from his own character. But apparently throw-away remarks were occasionally interjected by the actors, acknowledging the presence of the audience, to emphasis that this was being acted out in order to actually talk to them, as people about what happened. 'No need to tell them everything' [Nichols 1967 p29], for example, means that you are in fact being told everything, and claims the kind of sympathetic ear a genuine confidence would. 'In this play we started doing...' [ibid. p43] suggests that Sheila and Bri exist outside of the play on a more immediate level of reality.

The 'ad-lib' effects [ibid. stage directions p31 and e.g. p37] emphasised further the possibility of a 'live', rather than scripted, relationship between stage and audience. Although some of the occupational therapists particularly appreciated this, found it hard to say why they liked it - except that it helped to "forge a link between the audience and the actors"...

LAFTOE: It was nice how they sort of kept coming back to their, little sort of husband and wife relationship, sort of thing, well that wasn't in it before, or (laughs)... I couldn't make it out actually.
DRYDEN: (laughs) There were a couple of bits...
LAFTOE: I couldn't decide whether it was written in ad lib or whether it was really like that.

WALMSEY and JENNINGS were equally intrigued by the apparent ad-libs as an additional element which kept them guessing; they seemed to find it all part of the fun and novelty of the play:

Especially when it seemed as though an additional line had been put in for the night, and in fact it hadn't. I thought that was brilliantly done. I really did enjoy that. You did too, didn't you? (JENNINGS).
The PAWLEYs did not seem to cope with the 'alienation' at all. They wanted complete immersion in illusion. Mr Pawley was acutely aware of the play as artefact. In general, he said he found it difficult to get involved with what he saw at the theatre, and to forget the surroundings and the rest of the audience. Whilst it was more common for respondents to identify this as the 'atmosphere of live theatre' which facilitated their involvement and enjoyment of a play, Mr PAWLEY found it positively prohibitive of the same. This seemed to be particularly true of a more modern theatrical setting where the hardware of the production; lighting arrangements, etc. are more obvious:

Frankly I find it difficult to suspend my belief altogether, I'm more comfortable with films and the television ... they [the audience] seem to take away the illusion - whether the old style theatre would be more comfortable, I don't know. It seems that he wants to be able to 'lose himself' in the illusion of the play, in the same way he can with the television. Theatre demands more than this from its audience, and this is what makes him feel 'uncomfortable'. He feels he can ignore these demands more successfully if the play has a less obvious relevance for him. Shakespeare is, "more real in a way than this sort of thing", by virtue of being "so entirely divorced from the present day by such a margin".

Mrs PAWLEY, although she liked the social atmosphere of the theatre, was also less than entirely comfortable with this kind of play: I don't think its the type of play I would choose to go and see, if there was something else that I could go to that I liked². Rather than wanting something less 'naturalistic', like her husband, Mrs PAWLEY perhaps had less imaginative capacity to engage in something outside of the realm of her own experience. She preferred "comedies, not farces", for example, suggesting that she appreciates something more plausible and ...the sort of plays they don't do very much now, just sort of normal life, sort of thing, which they don't do a lot of these days.

Although his routines did not work for the PAWLEYs, the theatrical device of Bri's multi-personality worked well for other respondents. WALMSLEY, WINTER, and the GATEWAY students certainly appreciated the
'cleverness' of the role changing. His antics were also often referred to as "his way of coping" (PAWLEY), of "keeping himself sane" (BROADHURST), "he was covering his feelings" (JENNINGS). His behaviour was seen as being realistic; it was a plausible response to the strain. His 'set pieces', therefore, were seen more as an insight into his situation and personality than as some kind of device to get some message across. Consequently, when he introduced himself in direct address to the audience respondents seemed to find it quite natural. There were positive remarks that this technique "helped forge a link with the audience" (DARKING) and "made you feel more a part of it" (BROADHURST). But there was no evidence that any respondents felt inclined to 'retreat' from the potential threat this kind of relationship with the stage might have posed.

After talking for a while to the recumbent figure of Joe in her chair, Bri admits: 'might as well be talking to the wall' [ibid. p25], and moves forward to address the audience, breaking through the 'fourth wall' at the front of the stage. But to engage in this address of the audience, he assumes the persona of the 'front-cloth comic'. As just one of a succession of imitations, it is quite in character for him to do this, but while breaking out of the normal coventions of this type of theatre, it usefully substitutes the conventions of a different context; the music hall, or working men's club. The effect is to create a moment of greater intimacy with the audience, on a level beneath the formal structure normally associated with this type of theatre. As responses have shown, this was appreciated by respondents. Even more disarmingly, Bri acknowledges the device, he goes on, 'seriously...' the text notes '(as himself)'. This allows for the recognition that the comic act is just a technique he is using to try and get through to the audience. And this recognition puts an obligation on the audience to respond to this deliberate play for their sympathy. With another remark Bri becomes the mouthpiece for the playwright, 'How shall I put it in a way that will prevent a stampede to the exit doors', acknowledging even more tacitly how the play contrives to relate to the audience. The acknowledgement is a most direct appeal for the collusion of the audience.

There was a particular scene in Joe Egg in which I found an uncomfortable awareness of theatrical device in operation which had not manifested itself in these aspects of theatricality. This was when the
normal healthy little girl of Sheila's dreams appears on stage, skipping, and informing the audience that there is about to be an interval [ibid. p45]. I found it difficult to see the point of this direct address here, since it only seemed to underline the contrivance of an already sentimental image (to me it represented a similar, if not so serious, lapse into quasi-melodramatic sentimentality as that of the scene in Our Day Out where the little girl is about to throw herself off the cliff [Russell 1984 p47]). The interviews, however, suggest it may have helped to heighten the responses of others.

This was the one part of the play which BROADHURST spontaneously and enthusiastically referred to as particularly appealing. She thought this scene was 'lovely'. She responded to it in emotional terms: "I was nearly crying...". There was a tear-jerking quality about it which she expected would be 'depressing' for some people. BROADHURST herself enjoyed the vicarious outpouring of emotion:

Q: Were there any bits that you particularly liked more than others, you know, that stuck in mind?
BROADHURST: Yes. I was nearly crying the bit where she (laughs at herself) - where the little girl, where she was dreaming about if they'd've had a - a normal little girl. I thought that bit was lovely. I thought that was very well done... because you know that..it could never be. And you realise then, how she was feeling, all the way through it. I think that’s what brings it down to you, how you would feel about things, but I did find that bit very good. Fitted into the play very well I thought.

Here BROADHURST seems to feel it neccessary to endorse the more personal appeal of the sentimentality in this scene (it was "lovely"), with the rider of a more formal type of criticism (it was "very well done". This might indicate an uneasiness with the 'validity' of her response because of its sentimentality. I felt that the rigour of the play’s handling of the 'pitiful' subject of handicap broke down here to allow, or even promote, more habitual responses, in the way that Russell often does.

Other respondents however, also authenticated this as an emotional moment. One of the GATEWAY girl students, WINTER and KNIGHT all emphasised that it intensified their sympathy and sadness for the mother. But there seems to be something gratifying, rather than depressing, about the emotion in the responses. Certainly for
BROADHURST, who thought it was "lovely", and also perhaps for KNIGHT, who "sort of felt a bit, aaw, its a bit sad really.." and WINTER who remembered "the light shining and the little girl there skipping and singing".

Theme
An all-round view
Respondents identified 'what the play was about' as being the different views of handicap that it showed. This seemed to them to be the aim of the play; to allow the audience to get an all-round view of the issue by showing different characters' different attitudes. This was seen to be such an important function of the play, that in contrast, the actual focus of these different attitudes, i.e. Joe, became little more than a device:

I don't think the child was portrayed in a way that you could feel for it... it was just a tool really to see everybody else's reactions more than anything else ...towards the end, I didn't really mind what happened to the child as long as you could see each person's attitude towards it at the end (DRYDEN).

The friends who appear in Act Two exemplified attitudes which were fairly easily identifiable by respondents as stereotypic:

...They were sort of caricatures of real people ...they weren't as real as the other two, but, you could see that they'd got different views from the other two anyway, and it was nice just to see, sort of four views of it. (KNIGHT)

they were excellent because - the typical, he was the typical do-gooder, but he didn't really understand the problem (WALMSLEY).

These, then, were not really seen as tenable positions, but as representative of the kinds of attitude which the play expected its audiences to reject. As such, their presentation can be seen as a part of the play's synthesis of a shared viewpoint with the audience.

Respondents referred to Pam, in particular, in a way which suggested that 'we' (themselves, the other members of the audience, myself, the playwright) all understood what she was like, didn't we:

It's the type of... there's always somebody that you hate in
it (laughing), isn't there. I found her a bit boring. I suppose it's because you feel that why can't they see what, you know, what they're really like. (BROADHURST)

The only exceptions to this reaction to Pam were JENNINGS' and the PAWLEYs'. In JENNINGS' case, there is an uneasy conjunction of values in her commendation of Pam's "honesty", and condemnation of how "stupid" she is. In the end, one is tempted to suspect that perhaps the lady doth protest too much in this exchange with WALMSLEY who is less anxious to either deride or defend Pam:

JENNINGS: Ooh! She was such a snob! (laughs) She was great ... Well at least she was honest.
WALMSLEY: And with her, I mean she was an honest person, ha!
JENNINGS: Honest enough to say, I have enough with my own children, and exclude everything else ... just keep her narrow little family to herself and not take on any other responsibilities at all. I found I was rather embarrassed at her reluctance to see Joe, I wanted to stand up and shout, what are you frightened of, you silly woman! (laughs)
WALMSLEY: It worked very very well because there are this sort of people who want to close their eyes to it.
JENNINGS: But at least she - she was honest about it though, she, she didn't pretend that... (trails away)
WALMSLEY: Yes. But that's the sort of person I would like to shake in reality (laughs), open your eyes, this does happen.
JENNINGS: Stupid! Stupid woman! (laughs)

The PAWLEYs were the only respondents who did not refer to the overt criticism of Pam in the play. They partially accepted the character, despite her grotesque characterisation, because they agreed with her basic premise (that Joe should be removed). Attitudes characterised by Pam, then, were fairly summarily dismissed by all other respondents, and Freddie was as easily identified as a caricature of a well-meaning but bumbling 'do-gooder'.

The attitudes presented by the main characters, Sheila and Bri, were perceived as more complex and 'realistic'. Respondents said they could understand these characters behaving as they did, identifying their reactions to the situation as 'how you would feel', etc. Because they were seen as authentic, rather than stereotyped, it was less easy for...
respondents to either reject or wholly identify with either of these character's attitudes. Whilst the fact that "you could see both points of view" was constantly referred to, the biases of respondents towards either one or the other are still useful indications of some of the cultural expectations informing responses. Most interestingly, conceptions of male and female roles and dominance informed respondents' views of Sheila and Bri.

Marriage and the Female role
WALMSLEY and JENNINGS' had a comparatively critical view of Sheila, but sympathetic attitude to Brian. They were quite clear that Sheila 'over-reacted', excluding Bri as a result of her concern for Joe. There was implicit criticism in their description of how she sacrificed married life to what they saw as "her own little world". It is worth pointing out that a completely contrary interpretation is just as feasible. For example, I felt the 'own little world' criticism could generally have been more accurately applied to Bri, in whom I found it difficult to ignore the kind of attention-seeking which betrays self-centredness. Sheila could be seen by contrast as a more expansive character who lived through the various lives she made it her responsibility to support. In contrast, although WALMSLEY and JENNINGS recognised Bri's deficiencies, they were not critical of them, but sympathetic:

   WALMSLEY: He became rather cynical in his attitudes to things. On the surface, he seemed to be coping, but it was obvious that deep down, it was very difficult for him.
   JENNINGS: He was covering his feelings, wasn't he, by being cynical, about life.

WALMSLEY and JENNINGS expectations of the male and female roles, particularly within marriage, seem not to be easily reconciled to those in the play. The way they describe their sympathy for Brian indicates that they see the man as a kind of free agent, who has a role and purpose outside of the domestic situation. It seems they do not expect Brian to have to do as much as he does at home. They talk about him 'coming in from work', leaving the demands of one kind of role for those of another. Sheila, however, is supposed to retain the unchanging identity of the homemaker. There is a sense of Bri entering the domestic world, where Joe of course, is, from outside, with an outsider's perspective, perhaps. A perspective which is not afforded
Sheila, who may consequently appear the more limited character in such a comparison (perhaps this is what is being identified as 'her own little world'?). At least for some reason it is significant to the respondents that part of the way they perceive Brian is to do with his coming into the little domestic world, from some 'real' world, of his job, etc., outside:

WALMSLEY: ...when he'd walked in and she'd said she'd reached out to grasp one of the bricks... you knew what he had to put up with during the day, the tensions of the job he was in.
JENNINGS: He was coming home, up to here, wasn't he, with tension.
WALMSLEY: Yes and he'd still got more to be burdened with.
JENNINGS: He then had to face , not just an ordinary family...
[implication: which would be bad enough?].

It is interesting to note how WALMSLEY's account of the opening scenes presents some apparent incongruities. She remarks on the couple's success in not allowing Joe to become a focus for conflict:

WALMSLEY: And that they could behave so naturally to start, before we actually saw Joe, to behave so naturally when he came in from work, and not be thinking, Oh Joe's going to be in and we've got to be doing such and such a thing for her.
JENNINGS: She'd slotted into their way of life to a certain extent.
WALMSLEY: Yes, they didn't treat her as anything special, which I thought, well that's what you'd have to do! You know, life can't revolve around them, yet, it turned out that hers did, very much.

This final rider; "it turned out that hers did, very much" shows that WALMSLEY is not unaware of Sheila's orientation, but chooses to emphasise the apparent 'normality' of the situation. In comparing this to Sheila's actual reaction, we can see a striking contrast between WALMSLEY's picture of the couple "behaving so naturally...and not thinking, Oh Joe's going to be in..." and Sheila's clear statement of her priorities.

SHEILA: What's the point of starting now? Joe's home any minute.
BRI: Well?
SHEILA: Well! She's got to be fed, bathed, exercised, put to
bed, you know that.
(pause.)
BRI: She can wait.
SHEILA: What?
BRI: Well, can't she?
SHEILA: Why should she? [ibid. p14]

WALMSLEY seems to fail to recognise this question of priorities as an explicit cause of the tension between Sheila and Brian. This important element lacking in her response which is worth illustrating by pointing out the number of indications that she does not pick up on. Firstly Sheila's irritation over the apparently innocent joke spider episode is indicative of the strain on her due to Brian's caprices from the very beginning of the play: her reaction suggests his fooling is no longer a joke:

SHEILA: Get Away!
BRI: Oh, look -
SHEILA: Why d'you do it, Brian, honestly? You know that would upset me and the first thing you do - [ibid. p12]. There is the resentment, or bitterness, suggested by Brian's sarcasm in bemoaning his 'swinging prospects' for the evening, and Sheila's impatience with Brian's tendency to 'sit about coining epigrams - wallowing in self pity' [ibid. p16]. Conflict seems evident in Brian's sexual advances, and Sheila's matter-of-fact rejection of them:

BRI: Oh, love, if you knew how I've been thinking of you -
SHEILA: You'll spill this tea.
BRI: Let's go to bed, come on.
SHEILA: Ow! - don't-
BRI: What?
SHEILA: Your hands are cold, you've just come in -
BRI: Let's go to bed.
SHEILA: At quarter to five?... [ibid. p12].

When it becomes clear that Brian has lost the competition for Sheila's attention, this conflict crystallises into Brian's crude taunting of Sheila over the supposed affair with Freddie. This was recognised for what it was by other respondents who obviously found it rather grating. KNIGHT says it would have "irritated her to death", and WINTER is even more explicit:

But the bit that annoyed me, was when he was teasing the wife about the supposed flirtation, the affair with the other chap,
probably because he knew there was nothing in it, he knew he was only doing it, to add a bit of spice, he also knew that if that was the intention that it was failing abysmally. And like his wife, I thought why on earth is he bothering.

WALMSLEY, however, makes no reference to these manifestations of incompatibilities between the husband and wife. She therefore fails to acknowledge or identify the important differences in Sheila and Bri's response to the problem of Joe. And she certainly levels none of the criticism which other respondents (notably, WINTER) do at Bri.

Despite their responses suggesting that the importance of the marriage norm was being undermined by Sheila's uncompromising attitude, it has to be said that WALMSLEY and JENNINGS did retain a fair amount of equanimity in their evaluation of how each character coped with their difficult situation:

Q: So did you think that one showed a more constructive attitude than the other, was more admirable, perhaps?
JENNINGS: No, I didn't, they each had their flaws and they each had their good points, but it was a personal and individual way of handling the situation... I couldn't've said that either one was better or worse at looking after her, because they both did the very basic things for her, or that's what you were lead to believe anyway. Erm, what do you think?
WALMSLEY: Well they'd both got their different approaches, and I was putting myself very much in their position, what would I do...

In contrast to WALMSLEY and JENNINGS, the weaknesses in Bri's character were decisive for WINTER, who said his final abandonment of his family made her "feel sick". BROADHURST also saw Sheila as the more sympathetic character:

Q: Did you sympathise more with one character than the other - did you think one of them had a more constructive attitude, or a more accepting attitude toward the child than the other?
BROADHURST: I think the mother, I think Barbara Ewing did a very good part, I think she obviously must've felt more for the child than the father,

(this is another instance - cf. e.g. p172 - of reference to the actress, rather than the character, indicating a confusion between response to
the professional mimetic skill of the actor, and response to the fictional character being portrayed). For BROADHURST, identification with Sheila was important in defining her allegiances, she did not recognise the ambiguity in the nature of Bri's response to the child. Neither did she identify the compulsive nature of his humour, the need for attention his lack of self confidence imposed upon him, and the subsequent strains on his marriage. Instead his reactions were classified along with Sheila's, as merely "their way of keeping themselves sane". Hence the revelation that Bri really wanted to leave, and had actually been trying to kill Joe came very late, and as a surprise (see p220 ). It is difficult to distinguish with certainty between what might be a genuine confusion on BROADHURST's part, and what might be an attempt to avoid a difficult subject (like JENNINGS' attempt to avoid the problematic implications of Bri's actions by steadfastly maintaining that "euthanasia didn't come into it at all"). In spite of this difficult issue, however, the reporting of responses grouped under 'theme' here, does allow us to gain the important insight that BROADHURST's interest and attention had not been focussed on the debate about the orthodoxy of the perpetuation of life at any cost, and the way this grates uncomfortably against other social norms (marriage, social interaction). Otherwise the possibility of euthanasia would have presented itself before 'it was actually mentioned'.

Interestingly, the PAWLEYs, who went against the 'consensus' of the play (because they saw no ambiguity in Bri's stance and "agreed with the lady guest"), responded defensively and negatively to the idea of a message behind the play. They both pronounced a disaffection with plays which, like Joe Egg, impress upon them their responsibilities as audience. Such plays demand a deeper level of response than the passivity which the plays and musicals listed among their favourites (e.g. Barnum, Same Time Next Year) will sustain. Mr PAWLEY describes the obligation he feels, (contrasting with his passive reception of entertainment on the telly) to interpret the play, to apply his understanding to the meanings it may have:

I think - my attitude certainly - is to rather sort of appreciate what the playwright is trying to do. At that aspect, you're an outsider looking in all the time rather than getting involved in the action.

Although this audience role of 'appreciating what the playwright is
trying to do' is acknowledged, the PAWLEYs do not relish the obligation to respond to a message in the play. Their dislike for the humour in the play can be explained by its function in promoting a reassessment of habitual notions. This was not stated explicitly by the PAWLEYs, but they clearly had an idea of certain types of play, which have a 'message', as problematic:

Mrs PAWLEY: You go to be entertained, to relax and forget all your everyday problems, rather than -
Mr PAWLEY: Have them thrust back on you.
Mrs PAWLEY: Yes (giggle).
Mr PAWLEY: No messages. Or at least not normally, but that certainly had a message - though exactly what it was is debatable.

It is interesting that although their cultural profiles are markedly different, there are strong parallels here with MINLAW's assertions about "anything heavy like Chekhov" ..."there are enough troubles in the world without bringing more into it" (Blood Brothers p113).

Notes:
1. This may, however, be a response to a perceived stereotype: happy ending = entertainment, rather than a voicing of self-knowledge, since some of the most eminently popular movies, for instance, in fact have sad, sombre or indecisive endings (e.g. Casablanca, Gone With the Wind). As noted, it is resolution, be it happy, or unhappy, which is crucial. 'Resolution' is a very widespread feature of narrative structure. A happy ending may serve deep-seated expectations to have action, plot, etc. resolved better than a non-happy ending, because to a certain extent, resolution is inherent in the notion of happiness. Non-happy endings can still be popular, however, if convincingly presented as a logical end-point of a process (e.g. Tale of Two Cities).

2. The PAWLEYs' reason for attending this play was actually the fact that this was a very rare opportunity for them to go out, due to commitments to a sick relative. Hence, they would rather go and see anything, while they had the chance, than nothing. The fact that Christopher Timothy was appearing in this one was enough to reassure them that it would be something reasonable, since "someone like that wouldn't appear in something that was no good".
Analysis
 Accordant
 (WALMSLEY, JENNINGS, WINTERS, DARKING, MANNING, STANTON, PARKES, DRYDEN, GATEWAY.)

These respondents identified the broad view of the play as commensurate with their own. This is not to say that they all saw the play the same way. The actual details of the 'position' they identified were even on occasion opposed to those of others in this group. However, an important fundamental accord between play and respondent was a perceived emphasis on social responsibility.

These respondents recognised a role for the theatre in 'making you think'. There was an underlying assumption in their expectations of the theatre that it should provide a worthwhile experience. Their comments implicitly suggested that they considered theatre as a positive, humanising, liberating force: they had expectations of it being 'good for them'. The emphasis is implicit, rather than explicit. It is there in the stating of preferences for particular kinds of plays and a distinction between what is simply entertainment and what 'makes you think'. In a somewhat circular argument, it seems to me also a part of the often widely assumed status of theatre-going as an activity associated with decent thinking people: people partly assumed to be decent because they go there.

All of these respondents had had further education beyond the age of 16. I am prepared to assume that education at this level is characterised by a belief in the 'cultural' benefits of literature and drama. Indeed, the GATEWAY group were the subjects of a concerted attempt to convince them that theatre can be fun and approachable; an attempt motivated by the establishment (college) precept that they should be cajoled into theatre-going because it is a good thing. Expectations of moral and intellectual improvement are reflected for example in an enthusiasm for the 'cleverness' of device. There is also some evidence that the kind of discrimination has been imparted in this process which allows respondents to feel they can identify the kind of play which should be taken 'seriously'. It is taken seriously because it is doing something good to its audiences, per se, apart from, or as well as, its internal merit.
One reason people like to think that theatre has a serious side is that it appeals to the social conscience... it is 'good for them' because it makes them take life more seriously, renews their awareness of dilemmas. In this role it contrasts with the superficiality and triviality many people (and particularly those in this group) assume is characteristic of modern life. In this context, theatre-going as an entertainment or leisure pursuit can be legitimised. Respondents can tell themselves it is socially beneficial. It can be seen as promoting the cohesion of society through understanding, etc. It is more attractive for this group of theatre-goers to see their attendance in this light, than as motivated by a desire for purely personal satisfactions or hedonistic pleasure. There is some gratification to be gained in the idea that they are facing up to some of the hard facts of life, as this is a socially responsible thing to do. WALMSLEY, for instance says "there are this sort of people who want to close their eyes to it" and this recognition might allow her to use the play to identify herself as an individual who does not simply respond like "this sort of people", i.e. she is more caring, compassionate, open-minded. Using the play to reinforce this image of herself, does not necessarily mean of course, that she is not more caring etc.

An interesting, and rather surprising, finding is that BROADHURST, who does not share the overall outlook of this group, nevertheless reveals a similar response: "A lot of people say, oh, I couldn't go and see something like that, its depressing, sort of blocking it out of their minds". Because of her other, more 'neutral' set of responses, she might have been expected, like KNIGHT, to recognise the potentially morbidity of the subject, but assume that it would come in an 'entertaining' format. KNIGHT, it is worth noting, shows no recognition of these opportunities for self-congratulation.

Distinct from those aspects which fulfilled the expectation, "You go to be entertained", that quality which "sometimes.....makes you think as well" (WALMSLEY) was stressed by accordant respondents. To explain the contrast in the duality of this response, it is tempting to make the distinction between the 'entertainment' of the form, and the 'culture' of the content. But the way in which these different satisfactions are met is not adequately addressed by this deceptively simple explanation.
The problematic nature of such response is illustrated when the respondents talk about the endings of plays. 'Happily ever afters' are what they say 'like' and 'enjoy', but this is almost guiltily confessed (e.g. p216). In any case, there are good grounds for suspecting that by 'happy' ending, respondents may simply mean a 'satisfactory', or well-resolved one. Certainly responses to the ending of Blood Brothers provide convincing evidence for the fundamental appeal of resolution, which has been recognised by other commentators [most notably, Kermode 1967]. However, there is still a sense of these respondents being suspicious of their own preferences for the easy option of a 'twee' ending. This suggests it is better to sublimate the gratification of resolution to the higher good of being made to 'think on'. A relatively irresolute ending, such as this one, is associated by these respondents with the theatre as a cultural activity. It helps to identify its audience with more serious, intellectual, and liberal thinking. This concern to be identified with a group image which the theatre enables may be used to explain for example, some of JENNINGS' apparently contradictory responses. She sometimes appears to struggle to find a 'liberal' interpretation where one does not naturally arise. She was, for example, the only respondent who found it necessary to temper her enjoyment of the banter and 'sketches' Bri and Sheila performed, qualifying the entertainment of these parts in a slightly self-conscious way:

...not amusing as such. It had a light hearted touch to it, but it was rather pathetic in a way that...or sad, I felt that they had to resort to this escapism. But I suppose that was their way of dealing with the problem, and, not having been in that situation, I don't know how my way would be, so, although I found it amusing, I found it very sad.

JENNINGS also seems a little discomfited to find Pam an almost sympathetic character, realising that to admit to this would be most unliberal. There is then, some conflict of interests here, between those satisfactions of entertainment, which might be said to relate to the gratification of individual or personal expectations, and those of a cultural kind, which relate to social expectations, and particularly social position and its mobility.

It is easy to see why Joe Egg fulfilled the expectations of its role for respondents with this kind of background. It was perceived to be
advocating greater understanding and tolerance towards handicap. Therefore it was exercising a positive social influence. The confirmation of this was that they came away feeling that they had had a worthwhile experience, that they were, in fact, the 'better' for it. But in what sense had this experience been 'good' for them?

Respondents were able to feel suitably chastened by this presentation of those less fortunate than themselves ("I thought of my own perfectly normal children....and we don't know what they go through..." WALMSLEY). It could be that the sympathy they feel may be seen as their contribution to the artefact of the play. Its status as a socially beneficial institution relies on their collusion in this. The fact that they seem to seek and enjoy this feeling of being chastened suggests a relationship between them and the theatre something like that of a naughty child with a guilty conscience, who feels better after being chided with mock anger by the ultimately indulgent parent or nanny. Stuart Hall suggests that this tendency is a national trait; writing about the the appeal of Thatcherism he claims:

She speaks to something else deep in the English psyche, its masochism, the need which the English seem to have to be ticked off by Nanny and sent to bed without a pudding.

[Hall 1989]

There is a perceptibly indulgent and benign quality registered by respondents in the chastening they receive from the paterfamilias of theatre. It is in this atmosphere that the guilt of complacency is being assuaged. And the relinquishing of complacency is something sought after and appreciated by these respondents; it makes them feel better about themselves. These are important characteristics which imply significant disparities between respondents' actual experience of the play, and the experience which producers hypothesise. Significant parties and bodies within the theatre encourage the belief (see p4, p149-153) that much of their work aims to dispel complacency in the audience, to disrupt, disturb. In fact, the responses outlined here suggest that for groups sharing a cultural profile which sees theatre as improving, as social conscience, it is gratifying to be conscious that one's complacency has been disturbed. This, I think, is not to be disturbing in the sense that such producers intend, since it is replacing one kind of complacency with another. Ultimately, however, it may be necessary to concede that an implied 'model' lack of complacency - 'ideal' moral responsibility,
or 'goodness', which is not qualified by personal interest, etc. - is a purely idealistic concept.

The reason these respondents appear to enjoy having their complacency challenged could be that they live with a guilt about their complacency most of the time. In other words, that their somewhat exclusive tastes are in constant tension with their moral sense of egalitarianism. All of these respondents were 'professional' people (3 teachers, 2 occupational therapists, 4 students). They had either attained, or had good prospects of attaining a comfortable lifestyle. The fact that none of them were directly involved in accruing these material comforts through explicitly capitalist ventures may also be significant. An obvious contrast comes to mind with WAY, also a woman, but a company director, who shows no awareness of any hypocrisy in her lack of sympathy for the less fortunate in _Our Day Out_. But this is not to claim that it is the occupation which dictates the response in some prescriptive way (for instance, HIGGS, also a teacher, in her responses to _Our Day Out_ revealed more similarities to WAY's responses than those of the 'type' we are discussing here).

Guilt and fear, or awareness, of complacency have emerged as important factors. Is the satisfaction of their purgation then, proportional to the initial extent of the complacency? The answer rather hinges on one's definition of complacency. Can these respondents really be 'complacent' if they spend so much of their time worrying about being complacent? Is WAY the more complacent in her hard-nosed rejection of the appeal from Russell's Progress Class, or is she simply oblivious? The relative degree of moral certitude in the respondent seems to be decisive. WAY for instance, is confirmed in a view of the world which makes no allowance for people who cannot make the grade. It is not so easy to identify a similarly well-defined position in these 'accordant' respondents. They are rather characterised by their anxiety over what their position ought to be. At the risk of seeming partisan, one could say they are more open-minded, and that this is reflected in their choice of occupations. Not that this is to claim a person's occupation always shows how much moral conviction they have. It is not within the scope of this thesis to philosophise about determinism and careers.
It may be significant that all of this group but one, were women (and the only male was engaged in a 'caring', perhaps traditionally feminine profession: occupational therapy). Whilst recognising a degree of open-mindedness in this group, the married women in particular were biased in their tolerance of Bri. It is an interesting and rather unexpected finding, then, that only WINTER came close to recognising the strong possibilities that I found in the play for seeing Sheila as a positive figure. The reasons they give for their uncertainties about Sheila suggest that they share a culturally induced idea of a 'proper' marriage that is strong enough to block out many of Sheila's positive qualities.

Those married women in their thirties to forties were the ones who responded the least positively towards Sheila. This may be related to their awareness that they are dependant for their continued security, and comfort, upon the institution of marriage, since these respondents were benefiting from their husband's occupational status. The influence of this on their personal situation could be seen as almost more powerful than the cultural influences which determine their basically liberal view. It is clearly not easy to ascribe a woman's view of herself, or female roles in general, to either personal or cultural factors. Both come into play. WALMSLEY's defensive, apologetic comment "I don't usually hang about in theatre foyers on my own, you know!" for example suggests a culturally induced idea about appropriate behaviour for women like herself when they are on their own. Both such concerns for behavioural norms for married women, and their own personal experience as wives are likely to have a bearing on WALMSLEY and JENNINGS' view of Bri. Any criticism of his attitudes and actions is tempered by their view of his rights as a husband. On the other hand, WINTER and the younger single women occupational therapists did not display such tolerance for his failings. Although the occupational therapists' personal experience of working with the handicapped must be taken into account, age difference may also suggest that cultural changes in the perception of men and women's roles have some influence here.

The moral question of euthanasia was also one which accordant respondents attempted to view from a responsible, 'liberal' point of view. Through Freddie and Bri's exchanges [Nichols 1967 p62], the play
exposes an aversion to the idea of euthanasia as a conventional matter of form, rather than a deeply held belief. This puts pressure on respondents to avoid becoming similarly exposed. There were two respondents in this group whose equilibrium about the subject had already been unsteadied by personal experience.

While JENNINGS struggles to maintain the apparent tolerance and sympathy towards the handicapped which her cultural profile suggests is appropriate, confusion and contradiction are revealed in her responses. She indicates that she has had some personal experience of the trauma involved in caring for a handicapped person, and it is possible that this makes her wary of the kind of bland assertions which that can be made as gestures towards caring attitudes. This may explain an otherwise puzzling response from her, in which she alone of all the respondents fails to acknowledge what it is Bri is trying to do:

I didn’t think he really would, I think he thought she was dying at the time, and he was just helping her out of it, I didn’t think that euthanasia came into it at all, but that’s how it left me, I didn’t feel he would do anything, to hurt her.

Although "helping her out of it", is a euphemism wide open to interpretation, it does serve to remove the obligation for JENNINGS to pass any judgement on the ethics of Bri's attempt at euthanasia, since she does not accept that this "came into it at all". A similar uneasiness manifests itself in her overdramatic condemnation of Pam's unwillingness to face up to Joe – "Stupid! Stupid woman!".

DARKING also had particular reasons not to want to feel sympathetic towards Bri, not to want to feel complicity in his actions, since her own brother suffered mental handicap. She is more explicit about the guilt she feels in identifying with Bri's view: "its just a sort of uncovering the attitudes...that everybody tries to cover up". In fact, their attitude to the handicapped seems more important to all the occupational therapists than their attitudes to male/female roles. WALMSLEY, JENNINGS and WINTER have the same basic instinct towards the handicapped, but their personal as well as cultural history have created attitudes to male/female roles which allow them to give more sympathy to Bri. Although such sympathy with his predicament does not necessarily align respondents with his resolution of it (JENNINGS), it allows it to
receive a more tolerant hearing. In this confusion of conflicting priorities or attitudes, Bri's attempt to kill off Joe comes out as less anarchic than Sheila's unquestioning commitment to all forms of life. The play involves respondents in some complicity over the 'mercy' killing. They are aware of their guilt in this, but excuse it in terms of the cost to the marriage. They may also be aware of some complicity in wanting the burden removed, not just from the marriage, but from the play, from their attention.

Neutral
(KNIGHT, BROADHURST, LAFTOE.)
The term 'neutral' in this context is not meant to suggest an incapacity for involvement. It merely differentiates these responses from those who more obviously have an identifiable point of view defining their relations with the play. Neutral respondents are less likely to espouse or attack the stance or message of the play, than to allow the experience to wash over them. Political or moral issues are considered secondary to the entertainment value of the piece. What they mean by 'entertaining' is associated not with matters of convention (cf. PAWLEYs), but with being able to 'let go', to 'lose yourself' in the experience.

Contrasting with the kinds of occupation of the accordant group, these people have occupations of a manual/practical nature (nurse, shop assistant, occupational therapist). Although not necessarily decisive in determining responses, it is possible that the nature of a person's work may play a part in predetermining their expectations of theatre. These respondents have a clear perception of theatre as entertainment which might be connected to the kind of distinction they make between work and leisure. The connection is not to be made in a simplistic sense: it is obvious that not all shop assistants see theatre as entertainment, while all teachers see it as an educative experience (in fact, the teacher, FARMER in her responses to Blood Brothers reveals the same attitude to theatre as entertainment as the respondents in this group).

What we might be able to say, is that the degree of coherence between a person's working life and the rest of their life could be a factor in their preconceptions of theatre. If their lives are compartmentalised, their working time sharply differentiated for them from the rest of
their lives, they are probably more likely to see theatre in the same sort of way. Whereas those who see their work, their home life, their visits to the theatre more as part of a coherent developmental experience will be less likely to put theatre into a category marked 'entertainment only'. As we have said, those with this 'coherent' view of life seem to have found occupations which allow for 'overspill'. It is unlikely that BROADHURST, for instance, had such a choice. In her case, perhaps, the occupation is likely to have more influence on the outlook, rather than the outlook determining the occupation. Although as a nurse KNIGHT could be said to have chosen quite decisively to take up what is often seen as a vocation, one can imagine how a 'work hard, play hard' ethic would go quite naturally with such a profession. Given that these respondents are seeking 'play' (in opposition to 'work') in the theatre, how can the 'serious' subject of handicap fulfil their expectations?

KNIGHT chooses an interesting way to sum up her view of the play:

...if I had to pick a still out of the whole of the play, it'd be...when they were nattering in front of her, and she was in the background (full text in Appendix B).

The choice of a single frame of the action gives us a good picture, a close-up, of those aspects of the play which were important to her.

Quoted by a respondent whose perception of the theatre is heavily informed by the criteria of 'entertainment', this highlights the importance of features of the presentation which are recognisably linked with traditional popular entertainment: the music hall banter, the sketches, the use of TV popularised stereotypes (the newshound, the mad German doctor, vicar) and so on. These techniques can be identified with media like film and TV, which are perceived as more uncompromisingly part of the entertainment business than theatre. Confronting the subject of handicap in this kind of perceived context will be found to retain considerable advantages for respondents.

Expectations of this theatre of entertainment are well defined, in relation to its role as a relaxation. This is not to say that such expectations necessarily exclude the possibility of positive responses to the unexpected, but that initially quite particular kinds of emotional satisfactions are being sought. Neither are these satisfactions exclusive to this group, but they are of primary
importance to them. The desire for a 'happy' ending, for example, is strong in this group, but WALSMLEY and JENNINGS also said, half-jokingly, half-apologetically, that they "always like happily ever after, quite frankly". The importance of the happy ending is magnified, however, for respondents who see the experience as an entertainment 'package' which needs to be neatly tied up (but see Fn. p237 and cf. the success of Blood Brothers ending, especially with FARMER, whose enjoyment of the surge of emotion is followed by putting it completely out of her mind).

KNIGHT said that she found the ending 'a bit flat', and did not particularly like it. She said she felt, "a bit done, that he was leaving". There is the sense that she feels betrayed by Bri's cop out at the end. This is easy to understand when you recognise that between them, the two central characters have drawn the audience into an intimate relationship with them and their daughter. It is indicative of the play's capacity to break down the conventional nature and distance of the relationship of the audience with the stage that the respondent feels 'cheated' in this way.

After being drawn out of the conventional security of the audience seated behind the fourth wall, by the confidences and appeals for sympathy and critical judgement made by these characters (especially Bri... 'What right has he to abdicate his responsibility?'), it is almost as if Bri has transferred some of the responsibility for caring for Joe to the audience when he leaves. No wonder KNIGHT "would've preferred he'd stayed". He turns his back on the problem when he walks off the stage, admitting his inadequacy, the fact that he just cannot cope with the pressure. But Sheila is still there, with an unquestioning commitment to life to see her through. And so are we, the audience, somewhere in between the two points of view. Ours is the real problem, since we presumably do not share Sheila's kind of pagan commitment, yet will be admitting the same inadequacy that is so pathetic in Bri's leaving, if we, too, turn our back on the problem when we walk out of the theatre. This possibility is in such complete opposition to expectations of a 'happy' ending as to cause some respondents to 'switch off'. In fact, precluding the possibility of dwelling on the onerous connotations of Bri's departure, KNIGHT's recollections had undermined the importance of this final dereliction of
duty:
It didn't preoccupy my mind over the rest of the play though, and you know, thinking about it now, I had to think about what was actually at the end.

One explanation for the attraction of what might be considered a 'morbid' subject is that it provides the opportunity to exorcise one's guilt about that subject. While this seemed to be appropriate to respondents with an accordant outlook, other factors usurp its importance for this entertainment-based group. Job satisfaction, level of education and standard of living give clues to the different gratifications to be gained from the subject of the play for neutral as opposed to accordant respondents. The lifestyles that the accordant group enjoy do not necessarily help them to implement their social conscience; the opportunity to reaffirm their image of themselves as caring, liberal people therefore appeals. Conversely, it is possible that the neutral group feel deserving of more out of life (their preoccupation with entertainment itself casts theatre as a well-earned treat); they are seeking distraction from what they perceive to be its shortcomings.

This introduces the possibility that there is the same kind of satisfaction to be found in Joe Egg as Sharratt [1980 p280] claims for melodrama and other popular entertainments. This is the appeal of escapism back into reality after being confronted with a worse scenario. His argument specifically addresses working class audiences for popular art. It is based on the assumption that the life experience of much of the working class is characterised by economic insecurity and political impotence. Insecurity can, of course, be a feature of anyone's life. Indeed, respondents from the accordant group also showed that this kind of escapism played some part in their responses (e.g. WALMSLEY realises afresh how lucky she is to have "two perfectly normal children"). But Sharratt presumes vulnerability to economic vagaries to be more characteristic of some social groups than others, and that "it is the more insecure groups who make up the characteristic audience for popular art" [ibid. p292]. This popular art of which he speaks is that in which he presumes the working classes seek escape from mundanity. Here we can see that the argument is most significant for our 'neutral' group of
respondents who identify such a role for theatre as entertainment, although it might also play some part in the responses of other groups.

Sharratt considers that in a range of popular cultural activities - circus, fairground, disaster movies, gambling - an essential element is the experience by the audience of actual or vicarious fear. He argues that in the worlds of fear, terror, horror and violence which these provide it is the fear itself which is enjoyed, rather than the long-suspended, last-minute catharsis. In fact, there is no such catharsis in some of these 'thrill seeking' popular entertainments, such as the fairground, only a return to normality afterwards. Sharratt accepts that explanations such as Freud's displacement theory are possible, but prefers to explain the phenomenon in Strindberg's terms, from his *Dreamplay*:

'Sleep the, liberator often, appears as a torturer, but when the pain is at its worst, the sufferer wakes - and is thus reconciled with reality. For however agonising real life may be, at this moment, compared with the tormenting dream, it is a joy'. The escape, and fantasy, provided by melodrama may essentially have been not so much an escape into its world as an escape back from its world into the familiar world which, however insecure, irrational and hostile it might actually be, was then experienced by comparison as not as horrific and risk-laden as it might be. [Sharratt 1980 p280]

It is easy to see how comparing the family's plight in *Joe Egg* with their own lives could make what sometimes seem mundane, now seem safe, familiar and attractive to respondents; what they are shown is so stressful that their actual circumstances take on the appeal of a longed-for condition.

It could be argued that there is little explicit evidence in the interview material to suggest significant levels of gratification in this kind of escapism. The subject of handicap, however, is surrounded by guilt and social taboos against inappropriate responses to an extent which might debar their articulation. It is not easy to imagine respondents making direct statements about the fact that they enjoyed the play because they were able to think 'thank God this isn't happening to us', tantamount to saying 'I'm alright Jack'. There is some evidence, however, that BROADHURST, for one, is experiencing this escape back into
reality. If she had wanted escapism in the most usual sense, she would have been attracted to 'these fantasy things on the telly', but she is quite specific that what she wants to see on the stage is a representation of some aspect of 'true life'. The way the play represents normality as comparatively appealing to escape back into, is indicated in her comment that plays which have a 'true story' element are satisfying, 'however fantastic' that story might be. In other words, however unlikely, the story needs to be identifiable as a representation of something which could possibly happen in real life. This has been noted as an important element of the attraction of disaster movies. Roddick describes the world as shown before the disaster as clearly and classically realist. He sees the disaster itself as ideologically standing for possible real disasters, such as nuclear war, ecological destruction. Recently, however, such disasters have been used literally, not symbolically, as in *The Day After* television programme.

BROADHURST can only successfully imagine herself in the position of some character drawn from life. Fantasy characters cannot elicit the investment of her emotions, whereas she can experience "how you would feel" with conviction knowing that "it does happen", that it could have happened to her. The image of the little girl of the mother's fantasy makes this possible (p229); it is a glamorised, rather sentimental dream picture of the perfect daughter, but at the same time, it is true to life because it is what any mother could be expected to dream of.

This aspect of identification could imply that BROADHURST's response to the play is a self-assertive one. Koestler has suggested a major difference between self-assertive and self-transcending responses [Koestler 1964 p275]. Although the terms are fairly self-explanatory, the former implies that the intensity of response and gratification relies upon the heightening of heroic or romantic status that the self can achieve through identification with a fictional character. The latter implies that the same kind of identification is not necessary for intensity of response based on a fortgetfulness of self which can come with involvement in drama. Seeing BROADHURST's responses as self-assertive would help to explain the kind of involvement she feels in the play. In order to achieve this sense of heightened status, something of the 'self' has to be put into the experience. It seems likely that the kind of identification which occurs in such a case comes from a deeper
emotional or personal level than the kind of sympathy which might make WALMSLEY able to see the point of view of both parties. There is a contrast between the importance of identification for BROADHURST and KNIGHT's more detached expectations of being entertained. Contrasting responses to the crucial scene where Bri tries to kill Joe shows that deeper emotional or personal involvement in the play may not necessarily always be 'better'.

The deadly serious subject of the value and quality of Joe's continued existence is presented amidst all the action of a typical farce, with Bri slamming in and out of doors as the characters just miss each other in close encounters heavily reminiscent of the 'close shaves' of bedroom farces. First of all, the use of what is in fact a very strict form of convention (most of the respondents actually did use the term farce, or farcical to describe this section) has an 'alienating' effect. Farce announces itself, as a deliberate form of action, and its intention, as an artefact to entertain the audience out there. It can have the effect of making the audience self-conscious, emphasising their role as watchers, rather than allowing them to 'lose themselves' in the drama, or making them 'feel a part' of what is going on.

Secondly, whilst Bri's actions seem to conform to the classic farce, the ambiguity of his acting-joking manner remains. In the resulting confusion, the audience become aware of their obligation to watch, to understand, to try to pick up clues in the snatches of conversation as to what is actually going on. Although KNIGHT said that she did find some of this interlude confusing - she recognised that "there was a serious thing underneath it that you were thinking about as well, you know - would he, won't he...". This 'confusion' in fact performs the specific function of allowing the respondent the necessary distance from the act of killing Joe. She is able to critically assess the different possible views and justifications of the action while its successful completion remains only a possibility.

Thirdly this device creates more time. The drawing out of the act of killing Joe, through a series of farcical exits and entrances, etc., allows for more objectivity than would be possible if the respondent were to be suddenly confronted with the fait accompli of her death. In that case the element of 'shock' would be more likely to provoke an
impulsive or habitual response, but as it is, even if respondents "didn't really want him to do it" (KNIGHT), most were able to understand his decision, sympathise to some extent and "see his point of view".

It is crucial to the success of this sequence that the audience encounters only the possibility of the accomplishment of the act (the actual outcome is kept completely separate; a whole change of scene and tone). The possibility nevertheless has to be a very real one, or the audience is excused the obligation to form, or reassess, a response to it. In this case I think there is a genuine suspense as to the outcome of the action. The 'confusion' experienced is one of uncertainty as to whether the attempt to kill Joe is real or apparent, as well as a general confusion over the action on the stage which threatens to prevent the other characters from realising what is going on and acting to save Joe (see p219 and KNIGHT, Appendix B). There has to be an attempt to work out exactly what is going on; whether Bri really is trying to kill her, whether he is going to be successful, or whether the other characters are going to be able to intervene in time. Simultaneously, the respondent has to try and work out attitudes which could inform her response to the different possible outcomes. In other words, there is this tension as the action blunders on, of knowing that a response will have to be ready when Joe is finally saved or dead - will it be relief, or regret?

The farcical presentation used to achieve this affect, of a 'testing out' of responses, is not appreciated by all respondents, some of whom want to retain the ability simply to apply their habitual responses without having them 'bluffed' in this way. BROADHURST's comment, "I didn't think it was necessary, all that", registers a distaste for this apparently tactless way of dealing with the situation. This episode clearly cannot fulfil the same function as that which she so applauded in the scene with the little girl skipping at the end of Act One. It is not so easy for the respondent to authenticate this part of the play for herself through the usual channels of the references to shared ideas of reality, because what is being explored here is the antithesis of the common view of reality. Brian has his nose pressed up so hard against the glass of 'normality' that his view of reality is distorted beyond the conventional, and perhaps in the case of this respondent, beyond recognition. Whereas the 'farcical' presentation of Bri's actions in
trying to 'stop them saving her again' retained the possibility for respondents to avoid a habitual response, and possibly achieve a more objective reassessment of attitudes to euthanasia (KNIGHT), it is also challenging in that it is too close to the surreal, or absurd to be 'true to life', and demands a different kind of 'authentication'.

There can be more than one kind of gratification involved in such responses, as respondents try to satisfy possible conflicting or competing needs through an encounter with a theatrical experience. This idea of putting more of the self into the experience, is compatible with a perception of theatre as a place of entertainment where you can 'let go'. It could be that these respondents see it as their role as audience to put their all into enjoying it in order to get as much as possible out of it - to get their money's worth, if you like. This 'value for money' attitude may seem somewhat inappropriate to an appreciation of the arts, but it is one way of arriving at a relationship between audience and stage where the audience recognises the importance of their own active input in completing theatrical artefact. This kind of discussion of responses shows that respondents are capable of interesting inputs, of a kind which a less qualitative, less in-depth study would not detect.

Discordant
(PAWLEYs)
The size of a group characterised by discordant responses is likely to be self-limiting. One would not expect to find large numbers of respondents in this category. To begin with, an important 'filtering out' process seems to occur in the respondents' selection of play. Most respondents thought that they could readily identify plays which would appeal to them, and were even more certain in their identification of plays which would not appeal. In a sense, people who have turned up to the theatre at all are 'accordant' on some level since they share with the producers the assumption of some kind of meaningfulness in the experience, some gratification to be gained. But this is a minimal compatibility in overlapping areas of accordance.

The area of overlap in the case of the PAWLEYs is sufficiently small to categorise their responses as discordant. They hold some fundamental points of view, about social behaviour, status and the role of theatre,
which make it difficult for them to enjoy the play wholeheartedly. They
did not feel they shared the same view of the world as the play, in the
same way that accordant respondents could be said to do. There was not
the acknowledgement that the play was based on principles with which
they agreed; about the right to life, the strong caring for the weak,
etc. It seemed to try to forge a role for itself about which they were
uncertain and rather wary - they wanted theatre which entertained, with
"no messages". They said they did not really understand what the
'message' of this play might be and seemed to find the principles behind
the play confusing, rather than affirmative. Understandably, they would
rather interpret the confusion as the play's failure, rather than one of
their own. They seemed to have an idea of theatre-going as a rather
'genteel' activity. Wishing to associate themselves with this perceived
gentility, they were concerned not to appear 'out of touch' since this
might imply they were unsophisticated theatre-goers. According a high
'cultural' status to the theatre, the PAWLEYs see it as something they
should support and be associated with, but are not really sure why. This
is because their assumptions are based on its social value, and not on
judgements regarding its content and other kinds of (possibly) intrinsic
value. Their consequent defensiveness lead to an exaggeration of their
opposition to the play's basic ideas.

Their 'cultural' expectations of theatre were at odds with this play.
The very subject was thought to be not quite suitable. The productions
listed as their favourites, and their comments about realism and plot
suggest that they enjoy theatre most for its light entertainment value.
In contrast to KNIGHT and BROADHURST, however, they have cultural
preconceptions which do not allow them to accept this play simply on
these terms. They perceive theatre as an important denominator of
membership of the right kind of cultivated middle class. The difference
between their responses and those of KNIGHT and BROADHURST, is that for
the PAWLEYs, the light entertainment is a mildly amusing adjunct to the
more important social satisfactions of theatre. Although KNIGHT and
BROADHURST see theatre as 'only' entertainment, they are able to become
involved in that entertainment for its own sake: for instance, for the
sake of enjoying a heightened emotional state. The PAWLEYs, on the other
hand, are self-conscious in their theatre-going. In fact they sound
positively uncomfortably aware of themselves within an audience.

Mr PAWLEY: Frankly I find it difficult to suspend my belief
altogether. I'm more comfortable with film and TV...The audience seem to take away the illusion.

Mrs PAWLEY: Mm, watching on your own TV - nobody laughing or talking or anything.

Mr PAWLEY: Being in a theatre audience doesn't make me enjoy it any more - not quite my bag.

Theatricality is almost incidental to such inhibition. The direct address of the audience, the 'ad-lib' sketches, etc. made no impression on Mr PAWLEY at all, neither heightening his difficulty or his involvement; he "didn't find it any different from any other play, to be quite honest". It seems that he wants to be able to 'lose himself' in the illusion of the play, in the same way he can with the television, but that theatre demands more than this from its audience, and this is what makes him feel 'uncomfortable'. He feels he can ignore these demands more successfully if the play has a less obvious relevance for him. Shakespeare is, "more real in a way than this sort of thing", by virtue of being "so entirely divorced from the present day by such a margin".

The PAWLEYs' self-consciousness revealed itself in a concern to say the right things in their interview, hence the quasi-jargon terms; 'suspend belief', 'all a method of advancing the plot'. Their acute awareness of being in an audience with other people shows how important it is to them that their presence, their conversation about the play, gives the right impression to other people. Such an experience sounds less like one of relaxation or enjoyment than one of anxiety. KNIGHT and BROADHURST have a greater capacity to 'lose themselves' in the play because in their view that is what entertainment is for, not to further some other social aspiration. In this 'losing themselves', they may not be retaining the ability (so important in Brecht's drama, for instance) to coolly judge the moral issues and think about them rationally, but at least it is those issues which move them, rather than other issues of social nicety of their own invention. Koestler is unequivocal in his assessment of this kind of response as characteristic of the snob:

His emotions do not derive from the object, but from the extraneous sources associated with it [Koestler 1964 p413]. This, Koestler claims is the kind of man who is not moved by what he reads in Kierkegaard, merely by the idea of himself reading Kierkegaard.
The PAWLEYs' underestimation of the emotional element and consequent dissatisfaction with the evening must be related to their overall perception of the theatre as a respectable night out, a superficial distraction. Theirs is a latter-day bourgeois relationship with the theatre in so far as they covet what they have seen to be a characteristic of social elites. These pretensions (it is difficult to avoid the emotive word here) create problematic inconsistencies in their responses. The elites they are emulating can often be defined according to their educational background. Such elites are more likely to have been taught to appreciate the intellectual challenge of the oblique, the equivocal. But this is not something the PAWLEYs recognise as a part of their entertainment. The central ambiguity of Brian's stance, for example, is missed by the PAWLEYs completely. They seem to agree unequivocally with the idea of killing Joe. Their preconceptions about the role of theatre, however, do not allow them to accept the logical conclusions of their view of the handicapped girl when they see them acted out on stage. Rather than being able to see Bri's attempt at killing Joe as an endorsement of their own view, they were uneasy about this part of the play. It was most telling that Mrs PAWLEY, "Didn't think he was going to succeed, because I didn't think the censor would've let that happen...". One would have imagined that the PAWLEYs would be gratified to find that the play advocates, as they do, the removal of the opposition that the handicapped pose to the 'normal' life the rest of us lead. But Mrs PAWLEY's comments reveal her perception of the theatre as a restraint and control in society. The fact that she cannot imagine that there is no control over what is shown on the stage ("surely there's something - Nó censor at all?") implies a definite role for the theatre in marking publicly accepted standards.

It seems clear that the PAWLEYs' concern is with the very convention and propriety which it is the play's brief to undermine. Even though they unequivocally "agree with the father" in what they assume to be his unambiguous decision to kill Joe, the fact is, it is not the sort of thing they want to see condoned on the stage. This was quickly identified as a part of the play which they disliked. They felt uncomfortable, could not laugh at the humour, and wanted him to "get it over with". Their uneasiness about the correctness of their response and their dislike of the scene manifest itself in the defensive counter that: "most of the audience seemed to feel the same". This reflects the
discrepancy between their attitude to handicap, and the way the play itself treats it. With the unchecked ("No censor at all?") power of the theatre institution behind it, the play appears to be trying to incorporate handicap, through humour, into aspects of everyday life: entertainment, a night out. Something worried the PAWLEYs about this 'breaking out' of handicap from its pigeon-holed context. For the PAWLEYs, the theatre is a place for publicly accepted standards to be upheld, not private ones. The feeling is that it is not quite nice for the dark depths of what one really thinks to be dredged up onto the public place of the stage. There is, too, a certain nostalgia, a suggestion that perhaps the role of theatre has changed over the years, leaving the PAWLEYs with an inappropriate model of its function:

...what is shown on the stage these days, it's a little bit different from what it used to be certainly - there's not much that's beyond the pale...

Joe Egg questions the conventional 'sympathy' for the handicapped which shudders at the thought of doing away with them. It seeks to reveal the mechanism by which such sympathy avoids the real issues. But what response does it receive from those who, like the PAWLEYs, do not profess this initial sympathy? One danger is that the attack might come too close to the bone, causing the respondents to remove their collusion in making sense of the play at all. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Mr PAWLEY admits to finding it so difficult to "suspend my belief" (sic).

The contradictions of the PAWLEYs' position are evidence for the possibilities of deep dichotomy in the theatre. Their cultural background has lent a certain inflexibility to their ideas about what is correct. In this context, they have come to bestow value and status upon the theatre as an institution, because it is part of a correct mode of behaviour. Theirs may be a pronounced case, but it illustrates how cultural factors can place important limitations on response to theatre which it may be impossible for theatricality itself to counteract.
Commentary
Evidence for Joe Egg’s success in creating a positive dynamic between stage and audience has been considered. It has been shown that humour functions to allow respondents to confront attitudes which they recognised as being opposite to theirs and yet to consider them with equanimity. It was so successful in doing this because it was recognisable as a form of traditional popular entertainment: music hall banter, farce, sketches, TV popularised stereotypes, etc. These techniques can be identified with media (film, TV) which are more uncompromisingly part of the entertainment business than theatre. From the responses recorded in this study, it is clear that it is because the more dreadful aspects of severe handicap are screened behind this familiar, reassuring, and, recognisably entertaining form, that a play with such a potentially morbid subject becomes acceptable. This is most graphically illustrated by KNIGHT’s choice of ‘still’ (p246 and full text, Appendix B). The familiarity of the form prevented respondents (except the PAWLEYs) from becoming defensive about the possibility of being subjected to scathing satire. There was a kind of gentleness to the comedy, of a leg-pulling kind; it simply asked the audience to recognise the nature of their rather bigoted view of the world. The play’s commercial success is in having the serious subject of Joe, often literally in the background, while Sheila and Bri’s party pieces occupy the highlighted foreground, leaving the lolling figure in the wheelchair behind in acceptably soft focus. But the popular forms allow Joe Egg to succeed in other terms, as well.

The vehicles for the popularisation of the subject are the very means of authenticating the play. Bri’s clowning, whilst entertaining in itself, functions as a form of ‘epic’ theatre in creating ‘distance’—respondents have to reassess the level of illusion: is this part of the play script, or what? But it also has a crucial function in revealing, explaining, and authenticating the character and its situation. Bri’s jokes and sketches are not perceived by respondents as device. They can relate to his behaviour as genuine and realistic, even though it is overblown, in the same way as the mother’s dream of the skipping little girl is both a fantasy and a realistic representation of ‘how you would feel’ at the same time. The popular forms are inseparable from a realism in the play which respondents can recognise as worthy of their involvement and they respond warmly to this. It is such warmth of
response which allows the play to withstand potential criticism that it may 'sell out' to become nothing more than entertainment in adopting these popular forms.

Respondents were allowed a choice of interpretation, but a choice in which complacency was not the easy option. In this, the character of Bri was crucial. It is almost impossible to tell when he is being serious. Because of this constant ambiguity, the audience is required to supply the right 'face', the 'sense' of the character, in order to make sense of the play. This may be why respondents identified so readily with Bri, even when his outlook seemed to be contrary to theirs, because they can give him the 'face' they find most congenial. They are also therefore more aware of making an input to make sense of Bri, in a way they are perhaps not with Sheila, whose character does not tease them to input so consciously.

The play seems to have created some difficulty for all respondents in how to react to Bri's action in attempting to kill Joe. They could be subject to the criticism of hypocrisy if they condemn it, and of being uncaring if they don't. This leads to the evasions of "helping her out of it" (JENNINGS), and "without taking it one step further where the guilt would creep in" (WALMSLEY). Roddick claims that part of the popularity of disaster movies is that the problems faced by survivors are so great that the weak can be simply purged out of existence: Social darwinism reasserts itself after being thwarted by a century of improved living conditions and welfare [Roddick 1980 p260].

If we agree with his implication that audiences for popular entertainment harbour a latent desire to see the weak purged out of existence, is Bri's crisis extreme enough (in comparison to that of disaster movies) to legitimise Joe's death? Although I found it possible to see such extremity, respondents apparently do not see it, since they require recourse to further justification before they can find Bri's action acceptable. A more reliable social convention successfully asserts itself over the rather vexed and blurry issue of euthanasia, from which these respondents can extract more definite direction for their responses. An unquestioning commitment to the institution of marriage emerges as one of the most compelling preconceptions of respondents:
Well deep down, I was hoping that he would kill her because I saw how difficult the relationship between husband and wife had become (WALMSLEY).

Sheila's response to Bri's alleged suffocation of Joe is far more shocking and unnatural to WALMSLEY and JENNINGS than his actual attempt to hasten her demise:

WALMSLEY: But when he said to his wife, when he was joking about having killed her, 'Weren't you relieved, didn't you have a sense of overwhelming relief when I said she was dead?' — and she didn't!

JENNINGS: She said, 'Of course not, of course not!'.

WALMSLEY: Yes, none whatsoever.

The institution of marriage is more fundamental in informing the respondent about her own role in society here, than the illegality of euthanasia as an institution of society. The question of these kinds of priorities is addressed by Bri:

FREDDIE: "Thou shalt not kill."

BRI: Except when it shall come to pass that thy trade-routes shall be endangered... Then shalt thou slay as many as possible of the enemies of General Motors and I.C.I. [Nichols 1967 p77]

In this case, 'Thou shalt not kill unless it saves a marriage' might be more appropriate.

All respondents were drawn into identifying to some extent with Bri and Sheila because the theatricality made them their intimate. It was indicative of the play's capacity to break down the conventional nature and distance of the relationship between audience and stage that respondents could feel 'cheated' by Bri walking out on them. Sympathy and understanding had been sufficiently heightened for his excesses to be excused up to this point. Empathy for Bri in particular was necessary if respondents were to confront the issue of Joe's death as a debate or dilemma. This empathy was created successfully enough for accordant and neutral respondents to experience such debate, even if their views were not the same as Bri's. This contrasts with the critical response which might have resulted if respondents had taken an objective view of Bri's shortcomings. This is worth mentioning in view of the level of negative indications about his character which I found in the play, but which were not picked up by the respondents. Discordant
respondents PAWLEYs, however, despite the compatibility of their view with Bri's, failed to experience any genuine debate. There seemed to be little dynamic connection between the play and their views and they felt that "those sort of things are fairly well set anyway".

There are two findings here. Firstly, that the effects of a play's theatricality can be unalterably restricted by respondents' preconceptions. Secondly, or conversely, that the possibility of dynamic debate between audience and stage can only take place when there is sufficient compatibility between audience profile and the consensus of the play. Evidence for these findings is that only those respondents who share a consensus view of a liberal, caring attitude to handicap question their habitual responses. For example, Bri's attempt to kill Joe is an extreme in its taboo-breaking encounter with death. It may be expected to shock audiences into reassessing their ideas about a fundamental rule of society: Thou shalt not kill. But it can only be seen as an extreme, and only create any shock and reassessment in those who share the groundrules of the play. It is neither extreme or shocking, at least not in the way Nichols presumably intends, to the PAWLEYs. What is shocking to them, is that this should be dealt with in a place of entertainment. The very theatricality which succeeds in allowing other respondents to confront a virtually taboo subject without 'switching off', alienates already discordant respondents too much for them to join the debate.

Having said all this, the play evokes responses from the majority of interviewees with levels of sympathy and thoughtfulness suggesting that the play functions to inhibit habitual response and to promote if not radical re-appraisal, at least tolerance and open-mindedness in respondents. This is reflected in the general consensus that the play was about being able to see different points of view. The interest and satisfaction with the play seem to be importantly linked with an appreciation of these differing views, and their juxtaposition. It relies on the audience's capacity to remain fairly neutral about the viewpoints, not to ally themselves, especially either with Sheila or Bri, but to retain sympathy for both (ideally all) characters. Success in this, of course is determined by the ability to retain distance, autonomy, from the play (in which the alienating techniques of the theatricality will be instrumental), without losing sympathy for the
characters:

I didn't think I was particularly one character as opposed to another in the way they thought. I could very easily see the mother's point of view, and I could see the father's point of view in the sense that, you know, he couldn't really cope without joking about it. (BROADHURST)

It is worth referring again to specific examples to highlight the quality of response we are claiming for the play here. WALMSLEY's responses, for example, show the balance between involvement and objectivity in her vantage point. She accepted the invitation to 'try out' the feelings of the characters, but maintained enough distance from their emotional lives to be able to retain her own objectivity of judgement. She was able to think about the situation, rather than to merely feel the emotions and not explore their ramifications. As it is, she is able to form a measured evaluation and perhaps a modified perspective. WALMSLEY's responses show that she has been able to extend her thoughts about the subject to reality beyond the play:

Well they'd both got their different approaches, and I was putting myself very much in their position, what would I do if I had a handicapped child, as thinking that I've got two perfectly healthy children, and we don't know what people with handicapped children feel. As we see them in the street wherever they are, they seem to be coping but deep down, we never ever know.

It is perhaps possible to see here how a 'populist' technique, which furnishes the 'self-assertive' satisfactions of emotional involvement, can still produce a demanding perspective on the play, creating moments and insights which, in Koestler's sense, are more 'self-transcending'.

This 'seeing different points of view' was what was most clearly identified as a 'message' of the play. It is interesting to note that it is not referred to as a distinct part of the play which was 'serious'. It is an important element of respondents' enjoyment of the play, mentioned as one of the most entertaining aspects. This characterises the essential blending in the theatricality of the play between form and subject, means and end, vehicle and exposition, which is distinctive. This quality is obviously related to the quality of response.
The 'message' of the play, then, is not pursued by respondents beyond the level of this 'seeing different points of view'. It is because the message rests at the level which it does for respondents that one of its most significant effects was in dissipating guilt. Beyond that level a reappraisal of the kind of social values which only strive to cover up unpleasantries, rather than try to deal with them compassionately might have been an important response. As it was, the more important effect was for respondents to feel better because they had discharged a social obligation to feel sorry for the unfortunate. The obligation therefore no longer needed to be assimilated into their actual attitudes and actions. But responses were not devoid of an enhanced appreciation of the difficulties of living with handicap, and its relation to the rest of society (e.g. WALMSLEY, KNIGHT). In some cases, whilst the question of the hypocrisy of some societal values was not consciously addressed, respondents had obviously experienced a depth of feeling and sympathy which should not be unacknowledged in any evaluation of the production. Such qualities can be identified and acknowledged by this kind of study in a way in which perhaps they could not in purely quantitative research.
CHAPTER SEVEN : SOME GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

The research confirms the general expectation that certain predispositions which, for want of a better term, are usually called class prejudices, as well as values usually described as personal values, will influence any interpretation of a play. But its in-depth method is able to show how and with what complexity these values do become interwoven. In addition, it has been possible to show that there are times when this is not necessarily the case; when a person reveals a response which is 'out of character'.

What has been characterised as audience 'profile', is certainly shown to be crucial in delineating the functions which theatre might fulfil. In some cases the cultural influences determining outlooks apparently have such a preponderant effect, that whether the play chooses, for example, to portray a character (such as Shelley) sympathetically or not, may lose its significance. In such instances, the theatricality appears to function as a less powerful factor than the culturally determinate influences which are brought to it. The method of the thesis has also been able to suggest, however, that certain types of theatricality may expand the limits of such delineation more than others.

The research shows, for example, that theatricality which makes respondents feel they have an important creative role (e.g. authentication), and hence, one kind of greater involvement, is less limiting than that in which such input is not perceived to be required. This is not to suggest that the 'success' of the kinds of theatricality the thesis has been able to identify is unequivocal. The fact that elements could be compared with some identified as characteristic of 'soap operas', where audiences are "partners in the production process" [Buckman 1985 p186], might imply that there are trade-offs, for example.

Rather than producing the unqualified 'conclusions' about which kinds of theatricality are 'successful' that might have resulted from a less in-depth method, the thesis reveals that theatricality is subject to complex inter-relationships with a series of other factors. As some theoreticians have conjectured, so the evidence of some audience members themselves leads us to a greater conviction that:

Texts never come on to or are active on the stage of history
except as always-already inscribed within particular and changing frameworks of inter-textuality, particular and changing social and ideological relations of reading. A text, in short, is never 'there' except in forms in which it is also and always other than 'just itself', always-already humming with reading possibilities which derive from outside its covers [Bennett & Woollacott 1987 p90].

The nature, variety and inter-relationships of factors referred to here have proved problematic. The lack of definition in vocabulary available for making appropriate distinctions, and consequently in such concepts as 'personal' or 'cultural' factors, 'popular', 'mass' or 'high', as descriptive terms, has been noted. But within such limitations, the research hopefully makes a contribution towards understanding the relative importance of these different factors.

At a fundamental level, the structures of the society which form the context for theatre can be seen to interpose critical dimensions between the theatricality and the audience. The history of traditional theatrical significances cannot be disinvented, and is sometimes a vehicle for efficacy. But the dangers of 'communal images' and 'myths', are eschewed by companies involved in other types of theatre, like Welfare State. Some of the stereotypes Russell, for instance, uses, are very close to such communal images, and the audience responses show that there may be some grounds for some of the fears voiced here:

In modern technocratic states, at war within themselves, socially and morally, communal images and myths are highly likely to be empty relics of past organic culture, or state propaganda designed to subdue popular expression and action [Kershaw 1983 p12].

Commentators with other briefs also reveal this disillusionment about the way prevailing social conditions influence the possible functions of theatre, and all art. Eric Bentley asserts that the pressure of modern life (in capitalist or socialist forms), is towards the suppression of the very spirit of art, of the arts, and their replacement by, yes, propaganda, propaganda for whichever or whatever is the current way of life [Bentley 1985 p49].

To counteract these possibilities in a way which Russell cannot do, Welfare State have adopted a policy which advocates "creating new myths
and rituals for limited spans and specific spaces, rather than making products for all time or posterity. For them this is a commitment to raising back into their proper places in the public culture, "areas of experience that are under direct threat from the official culture - creativity, sensuality and communality" [ibid. p12]. Although as aims, these hail from a tradition outside the 'mainstream' theatre that has been studied here, they encapsulate much which would be sanctioned as a model role for any theatre. This thesis proposed to discover aspects of the relationship between theatre and audience which might promote such a positive role. It is worth noting that besides some possible 'affirmative' affects, Russell's use of 'communal images and myths' reveals some of his theatricality to be the antithesis of the 'making strange', which was posited as one of the principles of such relationships. The study has revealed, however that important limitations are often imposed by the very nature of the kind of theatre which has been studied, rather than by the particular play itself. This factor is manifest in the theatre almost physically - as a building, and as an institution - the "cultural and social ambience" which reinforces certain values [Kershaw 1983 p30].

The findings of the research offer insights into some important assumptions in the field of cultural studies. The implications for distinctions between 'high' and 'popular' culture are particularly interesting. As we have seen, these distinctions can be made according to whether a work requires a specific cultural competence to understand it, or whether it is accessible to everyone (e.g. Eco's distinction between 'sophisticated' and 'average' readers, referred to on p104). Bennett and Woolacott [1987 p250] propose the refinement that it is those works which are represented as needing such competence which can be characterised as 'high' culture. This removes the assumption that they actually need the competence in some intrinsic way.

The data collected in this research can be used to support this suggestion that it is the representation of some works as having 'higher' or 'greater' cultural value than others which is crucial. Analysis of responses shows that the way in which going to the theatre can help respondents project certain kinds of image is an important factor. The thesis gives us some grounds for suggesting that this is true of respondents with quite different cultural profiles (e.g.
HINCHCLIFFE, Mrs LANE) and also that it may have more particular significance for women. This tendency can be compared with what Bourdieu and Passeron [1979] have characterised this as a 'game of culture', which, they claim, legitimises class differences. It does this by representing such differences as the consequence of unequally distributed natural aptitudes. This process has been shown most clearly in the exclusivity which the LANEs sensed at Bloody Poetry. They revealed a consequent willingness to believe that they did not have a cultural competence which the play needed. Analysis showed that the representation of Bloody Poetry as 'high' culture had at least as important an effect on the LANEs' responses as the theatricality of the play. Consequently opportunities for reassessment of personal or social biases were somewhat restricted. An important advantage of the methodology of the thesis is that it does allow other important aspects of response to be identified, in addition to the underlying limitation. Interesting and encouraging qualities were uncovered in the LANEs' responses, for example, in spite of such limitations.

It is clear both from the LANEs' reaction and other responses to Bloody Poetry, that this play fulfilled an important function in providing reassurance about the coherence and conservation of social groups. For respondents other than the LANEs, it provided confirmation of the importance of a social group with which they could identify, based on an assumption of certain shared values. This kind of function emerges as fundamental throughout the interviews, providing support for Goodlad's [1971] thesis that popular drama is the 'drama of reassurance'. It is one of the gains of the methodology that it also allows us to question the assumption that relations between theatre and audience which produce this kind of affirmative experience must necessarily be 'negative' (i.e. affirming existing unsatisfactory class system, e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer [1973], Bürger [1984]). Whilst such an effect can be seen at work in some responses, others are found to be more equivocal. This suggests the need for alternative evaluative approaches.

One helpful suggestion has proved to be that explicit popular culture references can equally imply and produce a 'culturally knowing' reader who thus, albeit 'down-market', also experiences the 'pleasures of culture and knowledge' [Bennett and Woolacott 1987 p79].
Findings of this research support the idea to some extent, that such reading should not be conceived as being "socially and culturally unorganised" [ibid.]. It has been shown that some responses challenge the tendency to conceive the 'average' response, "as a mere lack, characterised by the absence of determinations which mould sophisticated reading". To support the idea of a "most influential grid of intelligibility" through which a novel is read, Bennett and Woolacott cite the contribution boys comics make to the reading formation of male adolescents into the postwar period. These, they claim, give rise to the imperialist spy-thriller tradition that James Bond is read through [ibid. p83]. There are not always such clear popular traditions behind the reading of plays here by 'average' respondents. In fact, the importance of the 'plotted pleasures' looms large in Blood Brothers. The story line therefore proved more important to most respondents than the significance of popular motifs through which they could experience the 'pleasures of culture and knowledge' (e.g. Marilyn Monroe, [Russell 1985 p1, etc.]). Joe Egg, perhaps, provides some exemplification of 'culturally knowing' responses. The pleasure derived from the comedy 'sketches': the mad doctor, eager newshound and music-hall comedian personae suggests that these came from a context of 'cultural knowing' in which our 'average' respondents could enjoy an ability to detect 'signifying frills' in a way similar way 'sophisticated readers' of Bloody Poetry with knowledge of Byron and Shelley's life and works.

These kind of insights imply a need for more comprehensive approaches than those which assume responses to 'popular' theatre will not be characterised by any of the complexity associated with responses to 'high brow' theatre. Evidence from the interviews suggests, for example, that the 'attractions of the normal' do not necessarily evoke exclusively 'disabling' responses [Sharratt 1980 p280]. Some responses to 'the normal' can be seen as affirmative in the sense that they make respondents feel better about themselves and their lives, without necessarily suggesting complacency. Sharratt's unsupported assumption that "endorsement of 'normality' is at the root of conformism, of acquiescence, of ideology" [ibid.p280] can be questioned. There are more signs of 'aquiescence, of ideology' in some of the LANEs' responses to Bloody Poetry, which is not a representation of 'normality' for them, than in responses to Blood Brothers, which strongly endorses 'normality' for most respondents. The research can tentatively suggest that some
affirmation may reduce respondents' feelings of impotence (eg. MINLAW, Mr LANE). One way it can do this is to affirm that what respondents have achieved, which habitually may not seem much to them, does have a value.

Problematic aspects of the kind of qualitative methodology used in the thesis are, by their nature, difficult to resolve, but the method has proved to have advantages. Some useful 'rules of thumb' have provided helpful guidelines as a partial check on the methodology (see p67). One implication of the thesis is that such guidelines might be further developed so as not to exclude the possibility that it is a quality of some responses to this kind of theatre that they may be characterised as 'positive' in some respects, as well as 'negative' in others. It has been shown, for example, that some responses which are characterised by preconceptions of entertainment (such as KNIGHT'S), are not completely understandable only in those terms.

A major gain of the thesis is that the qualitative method has been able to uncover evidence, of a kind which quantitative surveys could not, to show that audiences for popular theatre do not have to be seen as essentially dominated by ideology. In this light, untested stereotyped views of widescale 'philistinism' in audiences for this kind of theatre are brought into question. Only two or three interviews out of almost forty which were conducted might be considered to support this kind of assumption.

Certainly Blood Brothers (especially in view of its subsequent West End success), and also Joe Egg to a certain extent, could be said to have attracted a 'mass' audience. The plays are nevertheless, more problematical than many musical comedies or farces, for example. It is perhaps an unexpected, but encouraging finding, then, that this thesis has uncovered so much evidence for coherent, understandable and occasionally surprising responses from members of their audiences.

The findings of the thesis introduce the possibility of redefining models of the way in which a play works for an audience. Acknowledging the audience neither simply as punter, consumer, nor dupe of ideology, but rediscovering the importance of audience as critic, the research reveals an emphasis on the autonomy of the audience which raises what are hoped to be constructive questions about the function and aspirations of certain types of theatre.
APPENDIX A. Information about Respondents

Respondents for JOE EGG
22 respondents, 8 interviews, 7 transcripts.
WALMSLEY: Female, 43, married, teacher, graduate.
JENNINGS: Female, 45, married, teacher, graduate.
Mr PAWLEY: Male, 57, married, clerical work, secondary education.
Mrs PAWLEY: Female, 56, married, housewife, secondary education.
KNIGHT: Female, 32, married, nurse, secondary education, A levels.
BROADHURST: Female, 35, married, shop assistant, secondary education.
WINTERS: Female, 30, married, teacher, graduate.
DARKING: Female, 20, single, A levels, occupational therapy student (father merchant banker).
LAFTOE: Female, 23, single, graduate, occupational therapy student (father sales manager).
STANTON: Female, 20, single, A levels, occupational therapy student (father production manager).
MANNING: Male, 23, single, technical college, occupational therapy student (father fisherman).
DRYDEN: Female, 18, single, sixth form college, occupational therapy student (father telecom engineer).
PARKES: Female, 19, single, A levels, occupational therapy student (father sales rep.).
6 Sixth Form College students: 4 female, 2 male, 17.
Mrs DOWNS: 41, married, housewife, secondary education, and Miss DOWNS: 18, single, student (tape recorder failure - no transcript).

Respondents for BLOODY POETRY
13 respondents, 6 interviews, 6 transcripts.
HINCHCLIFFE: Male, 44, single, librarian, further education.
Mr REEKIE: Male, 25, married, physicist, A levels, technical college.
Mrs REEEKIE: Female, 26, married, librarian, graduate.
Mr LANE: Male, 31, married, draughtsman, A levels, technical college.
Mrs LANE: Female, 29, married, secretary, secondary education.
WALDEN: Male, 33, single, lab.technician, graduate.
PETERS: Male, 31, married, lab.technician, graduate.
FARRAH: Female, 20, single, student (Business Admin.).
5 Adult education class, VAUGHAN COLLEGE:
ABLE, BAKER, CHARLES, EALING, Females aged 50-70. DENNIS, Male, 56.
Respondents for BLOOD BROTHERS
9 respondents, 5 interviews, 4 transcripts.
FARMER: Female, 34, teacher, divorced, graduate.
COOK: Female, 32, teacher, married, graduate.
Mr JENISON: Male, 39, teacher, married, graduate.
Mrs JENISON: Female, 37, teacher, married, graduate.
MINLAW: Female, 64, widowed, housewife, secondary education.
GEORGE: Male, 29, single, graphic designer (and chairman of local SDP), secondary education, polytechnic.
CRAWFORD: Male, 28, single, newspaper editor, secondary education, A levels.
PONNER: Female, 51, married, housewife, secondary education.
DEVINE: Female, 23, single, unemployed, secondary education, technical college (tape recorder failure - no transcript).

In addition, the following respondents were interviewed about plays which could not be included for discussion in this thesis due to constraints of space:

OUR DAY OUT - 7 respondents, 6 interviews, 6 transcripts.
PALMER: 26, single, junior management, graduate.
Mr HAYES: 47, married, fireman, secondary education.
Mrs HAYES: 44, married, teacher, further education.
WALKER: 23, secretary, single, secondary education, technical college.
HIGGS: 35, married, teacher, graduate.
WAY: 48, company director, married, further education.
PENDLETON: 30, engaged, newspaper advertising sales, secondary education.

Preliminary studies:

MARAT SADE - 15 respondents, 15 questionnaires.
8 Cleaning staff
7 Secretarial staff
EDUCATING RITA - 5 respondents, 1 group discussion, paraphrased notes.
GRAHAM: Male, 24, single, mechanic, secondary education.
YOUNG: Male, 34, single, personnel manager, graduate.
JACKS: Female, 39, single, clerk, secondary education.
ANDREWS: Male, 27, production manager, graduate.
JOHNSON: Male, 36, university lecturer, postgraduate.

TOP GIRLS - 6 respondents, 6 interviews, 6 transcripts.
CLEMERSON: Female, 52, married, clerical work, secondary education.
CHADWICK: Female, 61, married, clerical work, secondary education.
UNSWORTH: Female, 63, married, clerical work, secondary education.
SCRIVINS: Female, 42, married (to management executive), housewife, secondary education, technical college.
WILSON: Female, 41, divorced, teacher, graduate.
ENGLISH: Male, 63, married, college lecturer, postgraduate.

MEDIEVAL PLAYERS - 6 respondents, 6 interviews, 6 transcripts.
KELLY: Male, 35, single, computer programmer, graduate.
PROBERT: Male, 19, single, undergraduate (Creative Design).
WOOD: Male, 21, single, undergraduate (Creative Design).
DILLING: Female, 40, married, secretary, secondary education, A levels.
CLIFFORD: Female, 57, married, housewife, further education.
WISEALL: Male, 26, single, engineer, graduate.

In total, 83 respondents were interviewed, 37 interviews, 15 questionnaires and one group discussion conducted, and 35 transcripts produced.

In order to give some impression of the make-up of theatre audiences in general and of how they relate to the population at large, the following information is included from some of the largest scale theatre audience surveys which are available [Mann 1967].
Theatre audiences for productions of *Uncle Vanya* and *Rodney Stone* at Sheffield Playhouse, April 1965:

**Sex**
Male - 35%, Female - 65%.

**Age**
Ages were not thought to be representative because of high percentage of student support (19-24). A 'missing' generation of ages 24-44 was noted, a phenomenon claimed to manifest itself also in other organisations. The highest proportion of regular theatre-goers were 55-64.

**Social class**
Determined by occupation of male head of household. Distribution in audiences first figure, national distribution second figure:
A: Higher executive, professional (20%, 3%)
B: Middle management, lesser professions (30%, 9%)
C1: Lower management, semi-prof, technicians, office workers (36%, 17%)
C2: supervisory and skilled manual (11%, 38%)
D: unskilled workers (3%, 28%)
E: casual or very unskilled workers (0, 5%).

**Education**
Over 20% Grammar school
Average 30-40% Higher Education
10-12% Public school
It was noted that theatre audiences had a very high standard of education compared to the general population.
APPENDIX B. Excerpts from Transcripts

Bloody Poetry - Adult Education Class
I was invited to join an adult education class discussion about Bloody Poetry after meeting the teacher of the class, RICHARD, at the production. Once again, there could be a tendency to devalue these responses because they are not 'representative'. These people might be considered to have registered a special interest in theatre by enrolling for this adult education class. However, as has already been pointed out, it would probably be possible to reject all potential respondents as 'unrepresentative' (especially for Bloody Poetry) on similar grounds since many of them were academics, students, etc. In a sense, responses from this group were more authentic as they were used to talking about theatre with each other in this context and soon forgot about the presence of myself and the tape recorder. Under the circumstances, the oppositions within the group provoked more revealing responses than any 'formal' interview I could have conducted would have done.

The group were asked to debate the issue of Bloody Poetry's relevance and appropriateness for Leicester audiences. This discussion was structured so importantly around the actual social relations of the group and the conflict between people of different profiles in it, that extracting responses individually to assign them as accordant/discordant would seem inopportune. In this case, the importance of the theatre as a focus for certain kinds of cultural claims is most clearly shown by allowing the material to speak for itself in the following abridged [in brackets] version.

RICHARD - male teacher in late 30s. ABLE, CHARLES - retired ladies in their 60s. BAKER - retired elderly lady (70s). DENNIS - unemployed man in his 50s. EALING - single lady about 40.

RICHARD: Any sense of the repertoire at the Haymarket being tailored to the community is, is is is discountenanced...the repertory ideal is lost isn't it.
ABLE: It would be awful to think we only got plays that were considered suitable for us though.
(sounds of resounding agreement from others)
CHARLES: I'd like to have everything, whether it's suitable or not, let
them like it or lump it.
ABLE: You're suggesting everything should come down to the lowest common
denominator....
RICHARD: Surely if you think of the ideas of repertory theatre...
essentially that the theatre relates to the community...plays which you
feel are appropriate to Leicester.
ABLE: Do you think the Haymarket should do that. I don't think they
should.
RICHARD: You don't!? 
CHARLES: One could say heaven help us!
ABLE: Yes. No, I don't think so, no. I just want them to be - no I don't
agree with that.
DENNIS: Yes. I'm amazed that you say that, erm, er, the box office is
not er, a, a gauge of the appropriateness to Leicester, cos if you don't
say the box office - what else is? ....the biggest thing that tells you
whether it's appropriate or not is whether people actually went to see
it, surely. ..this might've been very appropriate to the Guardian
readers of Leicester, but as far as the people of Leicester was
concerned, they gave it the thumbs down, didn't they.
EALING: [suggests that it would have been more appropriate to put Bloody
Poetry on in the studio].
ABLE: I still think they've got to experiment in the Haymarket not just
perform plays that appeal to, you know - a lot of people...
DENNIS: You've got the studio for that to have the way out things in
ABLE: As long as you throw few musicals in now and again to get a lot of
money out to them, then they can put the others in in-between I
should've thought.
[People seemed to have a clear cut idea in their minds of two different
types of play, one which would bring in large audiences and one which
would not. I asked if any of them could say what makes a play either one
thing or the other. Familiarity with the "subject matter" seemed to be
the most important element. A play which was "too intellectual" or for
which you need "a background of knowledge" would not appeal to wide
audiences. Strangely, however, ABLE professed she couldn't believe
anyone could not know about Byron and Shelley. The group then discussed
their familiarity with the subject. Books and radio programmes about
this period of Byron and Shelley's lives were referred to. DENNIS was
the only member of the group who said he had had no prior knowledge of
the subject. RICHARD summed up the discussion as giving the impression
that the play "is going to have a minority appeal for Leicester".

CHARLES: It would be too high brow for most of them

ABLE: Are you talking as rate payers that want the theatre to make money or something...

DENNIS: It's not just a question of money, it's a question of bringing, raising the sort of the cultural level of the maximum number of people (general agreement). Or satisfying the cultural expectations of the maximum number of people. The money's only a measure of the fact that it either does it or doesn't do it.

EALING: Yes but it's not very nice going to the theatre and there only being a sort of a small concentration downstairs, you know you like it if it's, you know a full theatre.

BAKER: It's a question of whether it appeals to the popular taste and it surely doesn't. The word Poetry for instance ...they just don't, they're not interested

ABLE: That would be it ...it would put Leicester people off.

RICHARD: It is a matter wider than this single play, isn't it. On Saturday I attended a conference of the National Federation of Playgoers Associations ...there was a man from the Arts Council and directors of various theatres there, and the point they were reiterating time and time again is they want to have new work and they want a higher level of subsidy. I can see that they don't want only to be able to put on plays that, are, er, you, you, you know, rather predictable. On the other hand I can't say I'm sympathetic towards a policy which is, er .. a licence for empty seats. As far as I'm concerned my primary objective is to get as many people into the theatre as possible, er, obviously I would prefer they saw some things rather than others. But if it's a choice between 25% for X and 87% for Y, then I need an awful lot of persuading that the 27% for X is better.

EALING: Perhaps what the subsidy you need then, is sort of to educate people, er to go to er, be more regular in their theatre-going, rather than just pick on these light comedies or musicals.

RICHARD: Yes, yes.

BAKER: Don't you think the majority of people in this city, they want to look at something where they don't have to think.

EALING: That's right

ABLE: Actually, I'm quite shocked, to hear you say that, Richard. I think the empty seats it's not important, on those, erm.. (general hubbub amongst which it is only possible to discern "I feel a bit like
that..") ..you've got the give the thinkers, hopefully [indistinct], but the thinkers and the, hope - give them a chance to, see and follow their star, follow their instincts

BAKER: I think so too...

[It is suggested that "the thinkers" could have seen Bloody Poetry at the studio, and ABLE does concede this.]

DENNIS: It's always been a source of surprise to me that we who go to the theatre think that our particular interest ought to be subsidised by everyone else. We're not prepared to pay for it, er but we expect everybody else to pay and a chap that does racing pigeons or something like that doesn't expect the rest of us to, pay for it does he, you know (there is some murmured agreement).

ABLE: Are you suggesting that we should pay more for our seats, we chosen few?

DENNIS: Yes. Then you'd really find out whether we really wanted to go or not.

[RICHARD indicates that seat prices might be expected to be 3 times more expensive without subsidy]

ABLE: I don't think that's entirely true cos some people it would be absolutely out of bounds for some people if it was like that

EALING: Yes it would yes.

ABLE: It wouldn't be a question of not wanting to see it, probably just wouldn't be able to go, and see it

DENNIS: Yes. But there shouldn't be people so poverty stricken really should there.

ABLE: O0oo, well, its a matter of you know, what's got to be got, of what is a luxury and what's not a luxury.

DENNIS: ...I have never seen why any theatre should be subsidised cos if it had to stand up on its own we'd get some really good theatre then. We really would, instead of this insipid business, we go to the theatre, a lot of people go to the theatre because its rather a nice middle class thing to do, and ho, ho, ho, you know ....if we had to pay the full price we'd get some real theatre.

(Silence)

RICHARD: I wouldn't go that far, but I certainly think that you cannot divorce your critical appreciation from the amount you pay, er, in other words, er, I think that if you pay for something then you are more demanding than if its given to you for nothing.

(Silence)
BAKER: I can't see your point of view, I'm sorry Dennis.
DENNIS: No I'm sure you can't.
BAKER: But I just can't. No I don't think that has any bearing on it at all.
DENNIS: If the people who decided what plays we were going to have, knew that if people didn't come, there was no ratepayers to just step in and pay the bill, they'd be a lot more careful about what they put on. (Silence)
ABLE: Then you'd only pass things, you know, which appealed to the public.
BAKER: The taste of the theatre would go down...
[I asked those respondents who thought empty seats were not important, whether it was nevertheless important to have both of the 'types' of theatre they had been talking about.]
ABLE: As I said before - its a horrible word - the chosen few - those who want to see the intellectual, or cultural or whatever, well, then the popular ones should balance it out.
[BAKER suggests that choice of plays could be based on percentages of attendance the year before...]
ABLE: Then we should go without, Lucy, shouldn't we, because there wouldn't be any poetry.
BAKER: People like us wouldn't go very often, would we?
EALING: Oh I don't know, I'd go to the other things I think.
ABLE: Well I know, but you'd be, you'd miss it.
Q: What do you mean by "the other things"...
[Several responses at once, from which "musicals were clearly mentioned and...]
BAKER: I wouldn't want to see Stags and Hens. That blessed thing made me want to vomit. They were going to the lavatory every few minutes and pulling the chain. I hate that kind of thing. It's quite unnecessary.
EALING: It's bawdy, bawdy.
Q: Would you like to see your kind of play popular with a lot of people? [Again, there were several responses at once, the consensus (or possibly, simply the loudest) seemed to be "not particularly", "everyone's got their own taste", "we don't want to push it, we just want the chance to see it"].(.
Bloody Poetry - Interview with Mr and Mrs LANE

Q: I'd really just like to know what you thought of the play. Er, did you know anything about Howard Brenton before you went to see it?
MR LANE: No.
Q: You hadn't seen any other of his things, or read about him, or anything?
MR LANE: No, no.
Q: So it wasn't that made you go and see it, cos it was something by him?
MR LANE: No, no.
Q: Why did you choose to go and see this play then?
MR LANE: We bought a series of four tickets, under the, erm, is it the Haycarte, erm, which covered the next four performances, of which that was one of them. And that was number two.
Q: I see, so you'd decided in advance that you wanted to see...?
MR LANE: We'd decided in advance that we'd like to go to the Haymarket a bit more often, and decided that if we bought tickets in a group like that, we'd probably make the effort and go, rather than booking when they came along. So we looked at the four things that were on and said yes, we'd go, we'd buy the four, cos you don't get a choice on that do you, its for a block of the next four performances, whatever they were.
Q: That's right yes.
MR LANE: Probably to be quite honest that was the one that we'd probably least've gone to, if we, if we'd chosen them.
Q: Yes. What did you think of it when you actually got there then, did you feel that you'd been conned into going to see something you didn't really want to see, or were you quite...
MR LANE: Erm, no, not really, erm, I enjoyed it more than my wife did I think. The, quality of it was up to standard, but I found it was a little bit off beat, probably that's the best way of describing it, probably not the sort of thing I'd normally go and watch.
Q: You mean the quality of the, the, production, the staging, / and the acting and so on?
MR LANE: /I thought the quality was good, yes, yes, a good production, er, but the script probably was a little bit - er, don't know, er, a bit off beat, yes.
Q: Yes. Not what you expected, then?
MR LANE: I didn't know what to expect really, erm, probably not, no. What I'd call more of a modern play than a traditional type of play.
Q: Mm. Did you know anything, or much about Shelley and Byron before you went?
MR LANE: No. Er, only that they had, erm, odd relationships, like that, but didn't know, didn't know the details or anything like that, no, no.
Q: So what sort of characters did they come across as in the play?
MR LANE: Erm.....I suppose likeable in a funny sort of way, but er, erm, strange - (sniggers) private lives.
Q: Would you say that they seemed rebellious?
MR LANE: Yes, yes.
Q: And what did they seem to be rebelling against?
MR LANE: Society, and standards which you would normally expect to find in society. Because of the - they just didn't see any reason for, er, having to conform. Just purely because it was expected of them I suppose, which they, they didn't like that side of it. Yeah, - it came across when they were talking about things like getting married just because, you know, it was the expected thing, rather than because they really wanted to, and that was a way out.
Q: Did the attitude that they had seem to be put across as a valid way of looking at things in the play?
MR LANE: What do you mean a valid way of looking at things?
Q: Well, did it make you think, well, they really had some quite good ideas, you know, that they were right to criticise the things they did?
MR LANE: Yes, it perhaps brought home some of the things that we normally expect, erm, like of society, and perhaps just because we've been conditioned to expect it rather than any real reason for it, like the marrying institution, mnm.
Q: What effect did it have on their personal lives, I mean did they seem to be, happy, successful, or failures, miserable?
Pause
MR LANE: Erm, I wouldn't say failures, I would say a little bit discontent probably, with life, yea.

        .........
Q: Were there any particular parts of the play that really stood out, that really took your interest, you know that you remember?
MR LANE: Anything that stands out, that you remember, er, I don't know.
Q: You know, parts that you found particularly / enjoyable.
MR LANE: Yes, I suppose the bit that I remember best is the...where they were going through that erm, poem, was it - Wordsworth's...was it, er -
MRS LANE: Oh it really must've stood out! (laughs)
MR LANE: Yeah, the bit where they erm, re-enacted it, and the shadows.
MRS LANE: Oh I liked the shadows.
Q: You liked it as well, the shadows?
MRS LANE: I just like that sort of thing, though, (laughs) I like playing, and doing making shadows.
MR LANE: Yes, and the prisoner, where they sort of tied that chap up as the prisoner, where all he could see was the shadows, and then, what his reaction would’ve been if it was, when he saw the reality of it rather than his own, impression of it. Yeah that bit stood out, I remember that bit quite well. I can’t remember which poem or work it was that they were quoting.
Q: It was that Plato - Plato’s Cave or something.
MR LANE: Pl - That’s right, yes, yes, that was it, yes. Yep.
MRS LANE: We’re not English Lit scholars are we.
MR LANE: So, that stood out. Er, anything else ? (to wife) Anything that stood out for you?
Q: You know, any particular aspects of it that you enjoyed like particular characters that you found entertaining, or particular scenes or anything ... (pause) ... or were there any bits that you thought were boring, where you lost interest.
MRS LANE: Well not being very interested in poetry I got a bit fed up with when they kept reciting it.
Q: You thought there was too much of it.
MRS LANE: Yes, really, for me anyway.
MR LANE: I quite liked the scenes where they were portraying the summer, you know, I quite liked the whole of that part, I thought that was quite good.
Q: The atmosphere of it ...
MR LANE: Mmn, it came over quite well, well presumably it came over quite well, that was my impression of it, you know.
Q: These parts where they were speaking the poetry, do you think it was, the presentation that was wrong or was it just, wrong to include so much?
MRS LANE: No I don’t think you can comment on the presentation, because on the whole, the presentation was good. It was just me, I got bored. Er, a little, I mean, I don’t mind a little bit, but I do get a bit fed up after a while, with poetry.
MR LANE: Yea, I quite, I quite liked some of that poetry, but you see I can’t remember now what it was they quoted. So it can’t have had any
real lasting effect.
MRS LANE: (laughs) That’s about typical.
MR LANE: No, I mean I probably wouldn’t remember anyway, but.
Q: And what about the ending, did you think it was a good ending?
MR LANE: You know, I can’t remember how it ended.
MRS LANE: Oh dear! (laughs).
Q: Well, fair enough, I mean.
MRS LANE: It wasn’t a good ending in your book then.
MR LANE: How did it end?
Q: The storm, the body on the beach.
MR LANE: Oh that’s right yes. Quite a dramatic ending (laughs), you see
I’d just forgotten it (laughs). Yes. Yes, I suppose it was quite a good
ending in a way. I was going to say it had quite an impact.
(Laughter)
MRS LANE: It had such an impact, you can’t remember it!
Q: Did it leave it on a sort of tragic note, or what?
MR LANE: Yes, I suppose it did. But perhaps that was the right way to
leave it because you got the feeling about his life being somewhat
tragic in a way. Erm, Mmn, Yes, I mean it wasn’t really a tragic type
of existence, Erm, you quite wondered what he’d achieved in his life,
apart from his poetry, his own life, perhaps it was a bit tragic.
...........
Q: Would you say that it was quite a good play, then, that it made a
good night out, you know, value for your block booking?
MR LANE: Mmn. It wasn’t our sort of play really, I suppose, I mean we, I
don’t know whether I’d recommend anyone to go and see it.
MRS LANE: Well I didn’t this afternoon (laughs).
MR LANE: You didn’t recommend someone to go and see it?
Q: Did you not like it at all?
MRS LANE: No I just told her it wasn’t my cup of tea. I mean, I know she
can’t go and see it anyway, but I said it wasn’t my cup of tea when we
were talking about it. Mm and the comment was, well, if it isn’t yours,
I don’t suppose I’d like it either.
Q: Was that because it was so much about poetry, and there was so much
poetry in it, or, can you say, why...
MRS LANE: Mn, I’m not very good at expressing things like that.
MR LANE: You like a three act play, (laughs) where -
MRS LANE: That’s right, yes (laughing).
MR LANE: You get a good plot, and a -
MRS LANE: Something happening all the way along. Although I read a lot of biographies, I'm not into biographies to go to the theatre to see, I like something more entertaining.

MR LANE: Yea, I mean normally if we go and see a play, its normally a light hearted comedy I suppose in a way, isn't it, erm, now, this was more - of a history lesson, I suppose.

MRS LANE: Mm, it was deeper, it made you think more, I suppose, or it was meant to make you think more.

MR LANE: Mmn, perhaps it did.

Q: But you didn't really, enjoy, the, the sort of -

MR LANE: I learnt something from it.

MRS LANE: I mean I didn't sort of give up half way through, and say, Oh I've had enough of this and walk out.

MR LANE: Yea, we perhaps, we perhaps missed some of the finer points of what was coming over, yea.

MRS LANE: Because we're not avid theatre-goers and we don't usually follow that sort of thing.

Bloody Poetry - Interview with Mr and Mrs REEKIE

Q: So, er, did you go to see this play because it was by Howard Brenton, or had you never heard of him before?

MRS REEKIE: Oh, yes, we'd heard of him.

MR REEKIE: Well we go to most things at the Haymarket, really - well, assuming they're not anything, ridiculously outrageous or anything, but er, erm, we know of Howard Brenton, and we've seen - have we seen ? - actually I don't think we have seen anything by him before, but we know of him, and sort of people of his type and that, but er - it was a bit refreshing to see that they were putting on something a bit different actually.

MRS REEKIE: Yes, we thought they were quite adventurous.

Q: Mmn.

MR REEKIE: For the Haymarket.

MRS REEKIE: Which was nice, you know, nice to see a new play.

Q: So thats the sort of thing that you look for particularly, that you think you'd enjoy is it?

MR REEKIE: Yes, we like, a fair mixture, really, don't we, but it's nice to see something a bit more adventurous and demanding occasionally, considering the old standards they tend to put on there.

MRS REEKIE: Yes, they seem to sort of plump for safe plays I think, they
do seem to anyway I think at the moment, like they’ve got *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, things like that (laughs)

Q: So were you expecting anything in particular then, when you went, if you knew of his work, or of what kind of work he did?

MR REEKIE: Well, we knew, what sort of - it wasn’t going to be a sort of straightforward autobiographical account of, Byron and Shelley, erm - I cheated, I went to, they had a forum about it the week before.

Q: Yes, yes.

MR REEKIE: I went to that before I went to the play -

Q: Oh I see.

MR REEKIE: - so I knew, did know what it was going to be like, so that may’ve, er, sort of coloured my opinions a bit, but Carol, you didn’t did you?

MRS REEKIE: No. Two of my friends had seen it, and they weren’t very impressed, they didn’t like it very much.

Q: And they put you off?

MRS REEKIE: No, oh no,no, we like to make up our own minds (laughs).

MR REEKIE: Yes, I mean also we read reviews in papers and that before we went, we usually do, but er, I don’t think it matters necessarily if you go and see a play that’s not very good, as long as it’s interesting, it’s, if you go everytime to see something that you know is a sort of well loved hit and everything, its not going to stretch you, your imagination at all, so its nice to see something different even if its bad, its nice to see something different. We go to theatre quite a lot actually, we have done for some years now.

Q: So did you think it was a good play, or it was interesting despite the fact that it wasn’t very good, or what, and did you actually enjoy/

MRS REEKIE: Yes/

Q: /it sort of as an entertaining evening out.

MRS REEKIE: Ah, well.

MR REEKIE: Ah (laughs).

MRS REEKIE: No, we enjoyed it, but we thought it was the sort of play that you tend to sort of reflect upon, rather than it sort of being a lot of visual entertainment, it was a play that you would think about, and sort of learn from, and the more you thought about it, the more we realised how good it was, the way he’d written it, and the things he’d you know, he’d done

MR REEKIE: Yeah, I think it was a play more to reflect on than to sort of instantly enjoy as you’re there, erm, I enjoyed it, I mean I wouldn’t
say it was a trial to sit through or anything, it was, enjoyable er, some of the things that he was trying to say I don't think came over very well, but er, I thought it was good, yea, I enjoyed it.

MRS REEKIE: Yes, I did, enjoyed it.

Q: Were there any particular parts of it that really stick in your mind as really grabbing your attention, you know, any particular scenes, or particular aspects of it, characters?

MRS REEKIE: I was quite interested when they were discussing their poetry and, and Wordsworth's poetry cos I always thought that Wordsworth was quite well liked by everyone.

MR REEKIE: Yes (laughs).

MRS REEKIE: I was quite surprised that he was disliked by them and I found that interesting.

MR REEKIE: Yea, their attitude to the sort of Wordsworth's sexist [indistinct]...

MRS REEKIE: Yes, yes, that was interesting wasn't it.

Q: Quite amusing even I suppose.

MR REEKIE: Yes.

MRS REEKIE: Yes. Yes you sort of see that sort of poetry in a different light, you tend to think they were all Romantic poets.

MR REEKIE: Yes because you always think of Wordsworth as being sort of - I suppose you think of them in the same light as you say, yes. I don't think anything really sticks, in mind, er particularly.

Q: What did you think of the shadow scene when they were doing - when Polidori was pretending to be the prisoner in the cave, and they were doing the silhouettes.

MR REEKIE: Oh, yes.

Q: I mean did that make any sense, did it seem to be relevant, or was it just pleasant to watch?

MR REEKIE: It didn’t - I don’t think it was as dramatic, the effect of it wasn’t as er ... well haunting as it should’ve been, yes.

MRS REEKIE: I think it was supposed to be more dramatic than it came across, yes, I think , because he has a fit doesn’t he so I think it must’ve been pretty s-, sort of scary.

MR REEKIE: It doesn’t, it doesn’t seem to have any sort of, effect like that.

MRS REEKIE: You could see what they were getting at.
MR REEKIE: I mean Polidori is quite sort of, perturbed by it isn't he, but it doesn't, its difficult to see why from the way it was done.
Q: What about the presence of the ghost, what sort of effect did you find that had, I mean was it, erm, sort of distracting, or was it a comment on what was going on that was quite effective, or could you not see why the ghost was there?
MRS REEKIE: Yes, yes, I could see why she was there, what I couldn't understand why there was that bit of singing at the front, the girl singing (she sings), I'm sure it must have some significance.
MR REEKIE: Suppose it was supposed to be sort of haunting/
MRS REEKIE: /Yes, I suppose I wasn't, I didn't quite/
MR REEKIE: /melody of some sort but she wasn't very ghostly I didn't think.
MRS REEKIE: No I found that a bit distracting at first, but, the ghost, I could see why she was there.
MR REEKIE: Yes it sort of fitted in to the... but perhaps be a bit more ghostly.
MRS REEKIE: It would be difficult on the stage.
MR REEKIE: Mmn.
Q: How did you like the ending of it? Would you have preferred a different ending?
MRS REEKIE: I don't think you could change the ending (laughs).
MR REEKIE: I'm trying to think what it was.
MRS REEKIE: Him on the boat, and then Lord Byron/
MR REEKIE: /Oh yes, that's right.
MRS REEKIE: /burns the body.
MR REEKIE: Can't - no I don't think you could alter it really could you.
MRS REEKIE: No, no I mean it sort of finishes quite abruptly but that's how it was wasn't it. All this sort of pent up emotion and then (snaps fingers) it was gone once he was dead.
MR REEKIE: I think I've lost, I can't think what it was now, I know, he was on a boat trip wasn't he, that's right yes.
MRS REEKIE: That's right he went on a boat on his own, recites that long speech.
MR REEKIE: Yes it's gone from my mind.

Joe Egg - Interview with OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS.
Q: Would you say that the comedy stuck with you more than that then, because you said you thought that was important in bringing the
attitudes across?
DRYDEN: I think the way the comedy was used, I think they had to use comedy, it's like as Paul said, some of the attitudes were shocking, but they weren't shocking in the respect that they were true, but I think the way that the comedy was used it brought them over as being, I don't...erm-
Q: Was it actually the comedy that was shocking?
DRYDEN: No, not the comedy, it was the actual attitude that was sh - it wasn - it was shocking when you first thought about it, but then the way the comedy brought it out, it wasn't shocking because it's a true attitude, but I think if it hadn't been comedy, if it'd just stated that attitude, I wouldn't've enjoyed the play at all, I would've thought it was just too - stating the obvious, stating the facts, and I don't think anybody likes to really think that they know those facts.
DARKING: It's too frightening.
MANNING: I don't think they'd've got away with that either, I think you needed comedy to put it across.
Q: Was there any bits that were funny, or supposed to be funny, that people didn't like particularly? ...(no response)...Well, were there any parts of the play that particularly stood out as being, really interesting, that seemed very central to you, or that you felt more involved in?
DARKING: I didn't like the bit at the end where, erm, the mother was rushing round looking for her daughter, after he'd taken her out into the snow. I can't even remember if it was supposed to be funny or not, but I just remember not liking it particularly.
Q: What did anybody else think of that bit, when he was rushing in and out of doors and things?
LAFTOE: Erm, I don't think that would - I mean, its realistic in the sense that, just going out in the cold could've killed her, but it wasn't realistic in the way they were dashing in and out of the house and kept just managing to miss each other, erm, that annoyed me a little/
MANNING: /Mmmn.
LAFTOE: /to be quite honest, but I mean I don't know how else they would've done it anyway, so I didn't see, an alternative to that, erm, I don't know if they could've finished it slightly different, just by, - I don't know, some way of, perhaps dealing with the thought of death, rather than actually going through with actually trying to kill her.
Q: When all that was going on, and it seemed that he was actually trying to kill her off with this medicine, and everything, how many of you felt, erm, were starting to get anxious, and wanting somebody to actually stop him doing it, and how many just wanted him to get it done, get it overed with.

DARKING: I wanted him to stop, to stop him doing it, I think. (pause). You know, I had a mentally, well a mentally handicapped brother, who is in fact, dead now, and I just, just hated the thought, thought of anybody killing anybody, just because they were handicapped.

MANNING: I seem to think in that point in the play, it was trying to make, it was coming down to making the point, the serious point, to me, and the rest of it before, yes, funny in its own right, but that was but a, a mode of transport to get to the point of the play, and that at that point of the rushing in and out, was erm, the sort of transition between it being a comedy and making the point, and it was a bit clumsy, really, I felt where they were running in and out, OK, that was funny, it was pure slapstick comedy of missing one another running in and out of the room with a body over your shoulder, funny ha-ha, but in the end, but that was the, it was leading up to, the point which had to be made, and I think that bit was, was a little bit, a bit clumsy, perhaps a bit awkward.

Q: Are you meaning that the point to be made was to face you with this question of whether, of what you would've done, of whether you agreed with him trying to kill her or not.

MANNING: Well some - well, OK, building up to a climax then, I think the climax of the play was at the end where, erm, the husband/

PARKES: /It was her idea versus his wasn't it/

MANNING: /Mmn.

PARKES: /hers to keep the child alive, and his to, cos she was sort of totally useless, to get rid of her.

MANNING: Yes, the sort of sheer realism of it, I mean, the character was a really sort of down to earth bloke, who, OK, happened to be in a fortunate position of being quite witty, and the only reason he'd lasted that long was because he did manage between them to build up this rapport of, of fantasy, erm.

Q: How important to you do you think the actual handicapped child was in the play, or do you think you were more involved in the parents reaction, to the child, and in their relationship. I mean did you actually feel anything for the character that was being portrayed, of
the handicapped child?
DRYDEN: I thought, I don't think the child was portrayed in a way that
you could feel for it, well, for me anyway, I thought it was just a tool
really to see everybody else's reactions more than anything else. I
mean, er, towards the end, I didn't really mind what happened to the
child as long as you could see each person's attitude towards it at the
end.
Q: What about the actual ending of it, did you like the end, or would
you have done it differently, would you've preferred a different ending?
MANNING: What, as a play, or in real life?
Q: As a play.
MANNING: Well, they all live happily ever after in a play, yes, erm..
(A little laughter).
Q: I mean, do you like happy ever after endings to plays?
(Quite a long pause).
LAFTOE: Not necessarily.
STANTON: It wasn’t happy cos he left her in the end didn’t he.
MANNING: No. That's what I'm saying, it wasn’t, I didn't think it was
happy ever after, and, and why should it be - /it wouldn't necessarily,
it might've
STANTON: /It's more realistic as it was/
MANNING: fitted in with the play, sometimes it is happy ever after,
sometimes it's not, often.
Q: But it wouldn't've made it a better play for you if it'd been a happy
ending
MANNING: No. But I don't expect to see/
LAFTOE: /No. It wouldn't. It would've taken away from it I think, if it
had.
MANNING: I think realism is far more important than happy.
Q: You know the bit where they were doing these sketches about what
happened when they took the baby to the doctor and everything, did you
like those bits, were they central to the play, or were they just an
amusing interlude?
LAFTOE: I think they were important because they got over so many
different attitudes, I mean like a disabled child, it's not just born to
you and you put it away in a box and forget about it, it's ten year's
hard work, hard, hard trouble sort of keeping relationships together,
and it involves a lot of people, erm, a lot of people who are kept in
the dark about things as well, erm, and I think that was good, how they
got it - I mean it fascinated me how they did it, because I wasn’t quite sure how they were going to manage with just the two characters that we’d seen so far, how they’d get it across, and I thought it was very good, how they managed it, and it was nice how they sort of kept coming back to their, their little sort of husband and wife relationship, you know, sort of thing, well that wasn’t in it before, or (laughs)...

Q: You liked those bits did you?

(Three or four people all make a comment at once, result is unintelligible, there is laughter).

LAFTOE: I couldn’t make it out actually.

DRYDEN: (laughs) There were a couple of bits...

LAFTOE: I couldn’t decide whether it was written in ad lib or whether it was really like that.

Q: Why did you like that particular bit, can you say? Was it to do with the fact that they were sort of directly addressing the audience?

LAFTOE: Yes, Yes.

PARKES: Mmn, mm.

Q: Did that make you feel more involved?

LAFTOE: You certainly became involved in the family, erm, you know, you sort of realised how they worked as a unit, and that it wasn’t just one person, it was a family that was the idea that was coming across in the play, and I think that helped.

Q: It didn’t make you too aware that they were just merely actors on a stage, just pretending, when they kept referring to the audience?

PARKES: I think it would’ve done if they’d carried - done, done it too often, I think just once or twice, it did help to forge a link with the audience and the actors.

Q: Did the beginning help to get you in that sort of mood, to get involved in it?

STANTON: I think it went on a bit too long.

PARKES: Yes I agree.

STANTON: I was probably dead bored/

LAFTOE: /I was beginning to/

STANTON: /by the end of that session.

PARKES: Yes.

LAFTOE: I was beginning to wonder (laughing) whether I really ought to stand on my chair with my hands on my head (laughs) (Others laugh too) and shut up, I wasn’t quite sure.

Q: So, was that a bit sort of off-putting then, like, well what’s going
on, why don’t they get on with it?
STANTON: It was quite amusing when he/
LAFTOE: /It was amusing/
STANTON: /first started off, but then when he carried on I thought, Oh
God, just get home and, do something else, I was a bit fed up with it by
the time he’d finished.
(General agreement).

Joe Egg - Interview with KNIGHT
Q: And what did you think about the ending, did you like the ending, or
would you have preferred it to have been different?
KNIGHT: Yes, er, I felt a bit sort of, oh, Yes, I, I, didn’t, I don’t
think I particularly liked the ending, no, I felt a bit sort of done in
a way, that he was going after all that he’d been through.
Q: You would’ve preferred it if he’d stayed?
KNIGHT: Yes, I would myself, but I could see why he was leaving.
Q: It left you a bit deflated then, did it, the ending?
KNIGHT: Yes it did a little bit, but not as deflated as you thought, it
sort of preoccupied your mind over the rest of the play. In fact,
thinking about it now, you see, I was having to think as to what was the
actual last step of it.
Q: Yes, yes. So it wasn’t so much that aspect of it that stayed in the
mind. What did sort of stay with you, particularly, afterwards?
KNIGHT: I think, the way they sort of joked and nattered between
themselves, when Joe was there and when she wasn’t there. That I think –
you know, if I had to pick a still out of the whole of the play, it’d be
when the two of them were on stage, and Joe was at the back, and they
were nattering sort of in front of her, and she was just sort of in the
background.
Q: And the other two characters, what did you think of them?
KNIGHT: In a way I felt they were sort of caricatures of real people.
Q: So you didn’t get involved/
KNIGHT: /She irritated me.
Q: /with them in the same way you did with the others?
KNIGHT: Not so much, they weren’t as real as the other two, but, er, you
could see that they’d got different views from the other two anyway, and
it was, it was nice just to see, sort of four views of it. I mean, she
irritated me to death, but she was funny, but she irritated me, to think
that people can be so – unfeeling, about a person like Joe.
Q: The other couple the, the parents, never seemed like that to you?
KNIGHT: No, although they joked, I didn't feel that they were unfeeling at all, no, and I felt that the friend's husband, that he had, that he meant well, but I don't suppose that he could actually get anything done at all constructive.
Q: Mmn. Sort of a do-gooder, who didn't really know what was going on?
KNIGHT: Mmn, that's it. Meant, well, but I don't think he'd actually get anything constructive done.
Q: What did you feel about the actual child herself, her character?
KNIGHT: I think she played her superbly, it must've been very difficult for her. But she came over as very convincing.
Q: Did you find that you were actually thinking about her very much, you know, I mean were you concerned about her as a person as it were?
KNIGHT: Erm, in the sense that I was wondering how much she could really understand, and how much she could hear, and whether she could comprehend anything that was going on around her. I mean they obviously thought she couldn't do, but it did cross my mind, I wonder if she can really, and I wonder how does she really feel if she does.
Q: Did it make you think more about her when they showed the bit where the mother was imagining, what she'd be like, you know when she came to the front of the stage skipping, dressed like a schoolgirl, did it make her seem more real, or was it just a fantasy thing that was a bit daft really?
KNIGHT: Well Joe in the wheelchair felt very real anyway to me, but, I did like it when she did come in, because I would imagine any normal ordinary mother would have thoughts like that anyway, they're bound to do, and you sort of felt a bit, aw, it's a bit sad really to think that, er, I mean every woman that wants children, wants their child to be perfect in the sense of they've got all their faculties, and you could very much feel for her, to think that she hadn't, she hadn't got a child like she would really like.

Blood Brothers - Interview with Mrs POWNER
Q: Can you remember what you especially enjoyed about it, any particular parts...?
POWNER: Very down to earth and very true.
Q: You thought it was realistic, did you?
POWNER: Mmmn.
Q: What, the characters, or the plot...?
POWNER: Not particularly the plot, though I suppose it does happen, but the characters, and the children. Er, I did find it difficult at first to get into adults playing children's parts, I think that seemed, for a few minutes, that seemed a bit silly, but then, erm, I think we've always found that to go to the theatre, you've got to get away from the television, where you see all the rooms, and all the different outsides, and they haven't got them there, and you've got to use you're imagination, but I think once you get into that, it's enjoyable.

Q: Did they seem as if they were like real people, then?
POWNER: Mm, very much so.

Q: Which characters did you like the best?
POWNER: The lady who played the mother of the er, the Liverpool family, the big family, I thought she was excellent.

Q: What did you like about her particularly?
POWNER: She seemed to me to be very much like some mothers I can remember, where they (laughing) come out on the street and shout, it is I suppose, it's sort of remembering back, and I thought she was good.

Q: True to life?
POWNER: Yes, and played the part to the children, I think the sort of relationship you get between a mother and children when there's no father there, which tends, to me, it tends to be more of a friendly relationship than parent.

Q: Could you identify with the women in the play, perhaps being a mother yourself. Did you identify with one of them more than the other?
POWNER: Well, I suppose, to look at the way they brought out of them, and the way we lived...?

Q: Yes, and the way they felt about their children...
POWNER: Yes, we wanted ours to do well, not run the streets, and we wanted our children to get on in life, and we could see things that we wanted them to do that we should have done, like go to university. And we succeeded with one, and not with the other. Well we think we succeeded, we don't know whether he thinks so. That's how I would identify anyway.

Q: With Mrs Lyons?
POWNER: Mmmm.

Q: What about the two sons, did you like one of them more than the other?
POWNER: Not particularly, no.

Q: But you liked the younger son better of the Liverpudlian family?
POWNER: Yes.
Q: What did you think of the older one?
POWNER: Oh, well, he was a right tearaway wasn't he, he was destined to get into trouble, I know it's all in a play, but I think very true to life as well, mmn, these days anyway.
Q: You didn't feel that about Mickey, when he started becoming involved?
POWNER: No because I felt he was led into it, by his older brother. By the place he lived too, but by the older one. If things had've sort of gone on in a different way, he would've righted him self.
Q: What about when he came out of prison again?
POWNER: Well I think then, he would've been alright, had he not been told about his wife and the other brother. I think he would've come off his tablets eventually, and lived a normal life, or normal for those, sort of people.
Q: Do you think theirs wasn't such a normal sort of life as the other family's?
POWNER: Oh, No. Well, not normal to me, cos I've not lived that sort of life.
Q: Do you think there are such big differences between families like Mickey's and Eddie's, or did it show that maybe they're not that different after all?
POWNER: Well I don't think that they are different. I think its just that people like to think they are, I mean to me they're no different, but I think that's a sort of personal question.
Q: But you didn't think it was the superstition, or the class, particularly? You just thought it was the circumstances...
POWNER: Mmm just circumstances. I mean, they say that the poorer classes and these out of work turn to crime, but so do the others, you don't see that reported so much. I mean that showed the classes as two distinct classes, which I don't think we've got quite so much of that now. Or perhaps we just don't see it, er, you read in the papers of people living in appalling conditions, but I've not seen them so I can't - I can't say that they do or they don't.
Q: Did it make you think - you know, they had this terribly unruly life with the policeman always coming round, and taking their furniture away, and getting into debt and everything, I mean did it make you think, Oh, they're useless, why can't they sort themselves out?
POWNER: Mmn, yes. Yes, its difficult to think well, why can't they, why
do they spend money when they haven't got it, and know they can't pay them, why do they do that? Is it just their easy-going way, and it doesn't matter, and mmn, yes, that always does seem wrong, and I know people do that. We all had a discussion the other day, er, with a friend, as to whether its schooling, or just general society. But, people are that way, they don't mind being out of work, and don't mind paying for things on the never-never.

Q: Did they seem to be trying, the characters in the play, to get over that sort of thing?

POWER: No I think they were quite happy. Quite happy as they were. Because the children would grow up thinking that was the way you lived. They did seem, when they came back on, for the second half, and they were older, they'd smartened themselves, obviously, I don't know whether that was supposed to be the move of house, or what it was, but they were smarter and they weren't dirty.
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