

*The following is a very rough and ready background to contextualise some of the work and its chief concerns. It's incomplete and I hope to be adding to it in the future.*

## **YOUTH 1947-66**

*I was born in December, 1947. My father had been away without leave for six years in the Eight Army- the "desert rats" fighting at El Alemein and into Italy at the battle of Monte Casino before ending up in Naples and Rome as a military policeman. He had cut down the hanged mistresses of Mussolini. He'd left my mother and their baby daughter Brenda to survive the deprivations on the Home Front as best they could back in their two up two down in Nottingham. (and this became key background to my play- **TOUCHED**). His return was to the coldest winter in living memory and I was conceived out of this as one of the Baby boom.*

*My mother, MINNIE and indeed all the women in my family, worked in the Lace Market, and my father HARRY had been by trade a builder's labourer and steeple-jack. He'd also been a boxer and was one of the few survivors of ten children- seven of whom had died of tuberculosis.*

*His turn with the disease was to come. When I was three he was wiped out by T.B and Meningitis. My mother was told he would die overnight. It was 1950 and they asked if they could use him to test a new wonder drug- Streptomycin. Years later, researching George Orwell who was the first to try this drug in England the year before, I realise what an experiment this was. They had no idea what effect it would produce. My father instantly went totally blind and stone- deaf. Ironically, the meningitis was cured, the T.B. simply put on hold and he was to be in and out of sanatoriums for the next fifteen years. No-one knew what to expect. After six months his side returned, but he remained deaf, although for all anyone knew he would wake up and it would have returned. I prayed for this every night for years and would go in and whisper in his ear. My father's reaction was to refuse to lip-read, and to defiantly pretend he wasn't deaf. He worked as a warehouseman at Boots, drank, and I now realise suffered from deep, and dark depression. It was a Laurentian situation, and one I dramatised in the autobiographical play **MOVING PICTURES** based on my own teenage attempts to make a Laurentian "breakthrough" movie. An early piece commissioned by BBC-TV put never produced **SILENT NIGHT** was my first attempt to try to see "and hear" the world from his point of view.*

*Through my years at home neither of us saw the other's point of view. I'm a classic product of the baby boom. I managed to pass the eleventh plus, got beaten up by my old gang the first time I got off the bus in my posh school uniform, and desperately yearned- as my mother yearned for me- to escape this suffocating death of my world.*

*And theatre for me was it. I was an early reader, and encouraged at junior school to read Brer Rabbit Tales to the class, and from that I started to stage little pieces for school events- by seven I was playing the heroic El Cid (and I've written of this in the*

introduction to *Moving Pictures* and other plays). By ten I'd joined the youth group of the Coop Arts Theatre and my teens were spent obsessively there, sometimes I'd even sleep on the stage. I'd practise my own elocution listening to myself on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. At fifteen, I won the best actor in the East Midlands youth competition for my performance as Doctor Stockman in *The Enemy of the People*. By the time I went to university I'd done over 120 different shows, including everything from the school Shakespeare's walk-ons in Tennessee Williams and Orson Welle's version of *Moby Dick*, and "trial improvisations" for Mormon groups. My playwright heroes were already fixed, and have largely remained the same. Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller (especially the historical epic *The Crucible*) Checkov, Shakespeare, and Shaw. By sixteen, the young assistant director, Michael Redmond, at the new Nottingham Playhouse had introduced me to a new name- Bertolt Brech. I read everything, ploughing through the library drama section starting at A and working through (to be honest I don't recall arriving at Z) but one old family joke is I discovered what I thought was a great play but nobody seemed to have heard of the other. It was only when I was cast as Mephistopheles in a play called *Faust*, that someone else knew of this writer I had been calling Go-eth. I was as ignorant and as excited as *Aladdin* in the magic cave.

*I'd walk through any door to get out.*

*I was fascinated by religion, as well as theatre, and politics. Nottingham is the home town of Booth the founder of the Salvation Army and I used to love listening to their "confessions" on Sunday afternoon in Slab Square (and indeed, this fascination produced two plays- THE SALLY ANN HALLELUJAH BAND and the recent epic, CRUSADE) . As well as ploughing my way through Methodism and C. of E.. , by the time I was eighteen I had sat preliminary exams to become a Jew, attending Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Spiritualists, Christian Scientists – in fact, the madder the group was, the more I was likely to join in.*

### **BACK IN THE NINETEEN SIXTIES.**

*Which probably is a major reason why the next four years of my life at University were spent studying magick with a man claiming to be Aleister Crowley's son, and being his "control" in almost nightly deep-trance séances. (and much later this experience of the theatricality of the séance became the backbone of my play on the great magician, John Dee and his "medium" Edward Kelly in ALCHEMICAL WEDDING). At eighteen I read my first book on Buddhism and realised there were other religions/philosophies beyond the western monotheistic. It was the late sixties. Sit-ins, confused politics, meetings with the Living Theatre, Grotowski – rituals and romance. And of course it ended in 1969 at the Edinburgh Festival, performing four shows a day in a converted Masonic Temple and holding seances through the night, with a breakdown- haunted by the spirits, struggling with the demons.*

*I had a Master's year – the first six months lying catatonic in bed- and the second in the special reading room of the British Museum reading arcane dark works of Crowley and*

others for my dissertation on consciousness and the creativity. –The impact of the Golden Dawn on the Arts”.

### **THE GARRET (OR RATHER HOLLAND ROAD BASEMENT) LIFE.**

*And for the next decade was involved with an even more secret esoteric order centering around esoteric Christian and Sufi teachings.*

*For the first five years of the seventies, I moved to London, worked as barman, general labourer, clerical officer for DHSS, filing clerk for the ENT hospital Golden Square, free newspaper deliveries, head of advertising for employment agency, slave in Companies House, and was almost permanently deeply miserable. But I wrote on every opportunity and managed to attract the attention of Ann Jellicoe, then literary manager of the Royal Court, and she gave me a free pass and made me one of the readers. I watched endless nights of Edward Bond plays amidst others. In those years the only show I got on was a small show at a lunchtime theatre which was to become one of my favourites. CARDS, whilst a bizarre premise, was drawn directly from my own sex education, drawn literally from attempting to decode the innuendos of seaside postcards.*

### **FROM SHEPHERD TO SCARBOROUGH.**

*I left London and became a solitary shepherd living in a barn high up overlooking the witches hill of Pendle near Malham Tarn with electricity from an outboard motor that I could put on for a few hours a day to work my one luxury- an ancient original Underwood electric- indeed, the first model. I was a year there struggling with a couple of hundred sheep, rustlers, taciturn farmers and the freezing north wind before, with the help of the blessed Alf, Alan Ayckbourn offered to direct Cards if I wrote another play and I agreed if I could join the company. I started a week later as A.S.M. and wrote Stars. And, with the birth of my son, we lived in Scarborough where I worked as an actor in a fabulous company that included Stephen Mallatrat, Robin Herford, the adorable Diane Bull, Bob Eaton, Chris Godwin, Nigel Le Vaillant and Malcolm Hebden. It was an extraordinary time playing Freddy Eynesford Hill or Richard Rich in the evening, , as well as Dirty Dick on the beach at Filey, or directing my late-night piece inspired my Susan Brownmiller's Act of Rape- **SHOOTING FISHING AND RIDING**. I was not a particularly good actor. My youthful passion for it had passed. I had discovered that playing one part- and a part one normally had no power to pick- was limiting. Writing I could be anyone, I could be dozens of people in the same play. This discovery of, and need for, multiplicity within myself was to become a major theme in my work (specifically of course in **DEMON LOVERS**).*

*And, back in my home town, Richard Eyre directed TOUCHED. It won the George Devine Award, and was co-winner of the John Whiting. These were golden years for me, after so many in isolation to wander through such differing ensembles- Scarborough, Richard's strong group, Joint Stock's, and the return to the Royal Court itself. The theatre doors, and television with Richard's appointment as Head of BBC Drama, seemed to be open. And there were others to walk through.*

*A remote college in Devon had staged an a student production of Touched and had invited me down to talk to them at a time when Bill Gaskill and I were trying to find a common subject matter for a Joint Stock production. It turned out he was also heading down to Dartington to stay with the college principle. That weekend there we decided on the theme- a work derived from Tressell's classic novel R.T.P. that I had last read when I was fourteen and which had "converted" me to socialism. We also decided to do a "working" months' workshop and as the subject of the book was builders we undertook to help convert an old chapel into a theatre for Dartington's third year drama students. And I was seduced by the extraordinary charm of this Oxford college embedded in the beauty of the Devon countryside and its extraordinary history and philosophy. I stayed on as resident playwright for a year, and then became senior tutor in writing for performance for a further three years. And it was Dartington who partially funded my trip to Ladhakh ("Western Tibet") and the first production of **TIBETAN INROADS**.*

***RTP** to our surprise turned into a major success, and we were offered a theatre in London by the unions to play it for beyond our tour, but Bill wanted to take the entire company, including myself, to the National as a company within the company, but combined with backstage strikes the next new work was not forthcoming. Years later we workshopped together at the National on a play about Bulgakov .*

*Bill also staged a revival of **TOUCHED** at the Royal Court, and Annie Casteldine directed **MOVING PICTURES** there. A fourth play in the theatre upstairs- my peace comedy- **BODY AND SOUL** was staged later.*

*At Dartington my marriage finally fell apart, intensified by falling in love with the woman I have lived with for the last twenty five years. It was a wild time and a time when I felt most strongly the challenging questions of the women's movement, and in particular, Greenham Common and the peace campaign. Tanya indeed, whilst pregnant with our daughter Lily, lived at Greenham Common and in their London house.*

### **The eighties.**

*I left Dartington and went to Riverside Studios- as resident playwright, where David Leveux directed **SEA CHANGE** a play written in anger and during Thatcher's Falklands War and based on my own journey in the previous year down the Aegean in a "ship of fools". Riverside, under the leadership of David Gottart, was vibrant, and a key meeting place for artists like Hanif Kureishi, Kathy Acker, young directors like Simon Usher, Tony Clark, writers, musicians – Michael Nyman who worked on composing music for a student production that eventually became a BBC-TV futuristic play- **SHADES**. Together with Northern Playwrights leader, Norman Leach, we set up a major Theatre Peace Festival focused on Riverside, but also nationally, and a register of hundreds of peace plays past and present. I edited two volumes of **Peace Plays**- the first, British plays including a piece written and performed at Greenham, and the second, American and Russia, which necessitated visits to Moscow. This trip to Eastern Europe was to start a major area of exploration for me in the eighties and early nineties.*

## A DETOUR INTO EASTERN EUROPE.

*I'm not the greatest traveller in the world, but the difficulties of Moscow, and the building of bridges with artists there struck me as of major importance. Often in the company of Professor Malcolm Griffith, a man with overwhelming knowledge and passion for the people of the East, I visited Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, St. Petersburg, Berlin and Eastern Germany and attempted to set up various projects, the main one being a massive research investigation into the life and death of Georgi Markov- still to this day a delicate subject and one which the BBC-TV initially supported and then, as increasingly, we came to answers they were less keen with, the project faded up. Most of my projects at that time, including attempts to create joint East-west companies, came to nought, and to make other TV pieces with a strong bias in this direction, but I learned more from so many of those remarkable people than I have done elsewhere. And it still stays as a constant challenge in my work and was influencing in bringing into Meeting Ground the Polish theatricality of the director Zofia Kalinska, at one time Kantor's leading actress, and now a major director in her own right. The works she created with Tanya and actresses from across Europe- DEMONIC WOMEN and PLAISIR D'AMOUR are two of Meeting Ground's most successful shows. They came out of meetings of the extraordinary women's Magdalene theatre festivals.*

*As Riverside also "fell apart" in 1984, I resolved to move away from the exclusive, oppressive London theatre scene, and form an experimental company based in my home town called*

## **MEETING GROUND THEATRE.**

*A small group including Tanya, myself, Bush Hartshorn and Steve Mapp, lived for a year in a sort of ill-fitting commune as we began to explore what I called – **the politics of the imagination**. It was difficult. Initially the plays were written and directed by myself- **STRIVE** a peace play on the return of the soldiers from the Falklands **DESIRE**, a strange piece set at the end of the first world war, and eventually the massive **LUDDITE** project culminating in my musical, with the composer David Wilson, of **PARADISE** at the Nottingham Playhouse.*

## Film, TV.

*In order to finance Meeting Ground which, like most small scale companies, staggered from pillar to post with occasional underfunding from regional arts boards, I went to work writing soaps for Granada TV.. I became notorious for writing the "last episode" of so many- including **Albion Market**, **Families**, a strange late night cult piece called **Revelations**. Fortunately, one of them that I wrote almost a hundred episodes for is still running- **Coronation Street**. I enjoyed all these, working with a team of writers, improvising story-lines out together, and I consider it my good fortune to have been offered such an experience in the late twentieth century's most popular form of dramatic storytelling. I also enjoyed taking on the challenge of the detective genre, with **DALZIEL AND PASCOE** and the history criminal re-examination of **IN SUSPICIOUS***

**CIRCUMSTANCES.** *In difficult times, and there have been plenty, I've also written for bizarre sci-fi channels.*

**The nineties.**

*My old agent, Margaret Ramsay, once said to me- Give television and film your best, but don't give them your heart. And time has shown this to be true. My heart most strongly beats in theatre, but as well as speculative film writing, I have greatly enjoyed writing TV. including my earliest works **Cries From a watchtower**, and the experimental comedy **Kisses on the Bottom**.*

*Whilst my work is the most central aspect of my life, and most consistent feature, I have never felt happy enmeshed in its world. For a writer it is imperative to build those bridges out to the world beyond. The return to the world of my upbringing and family was part of that. (So much of my work is involved with the history of my city for example, including the obviously biographic, but also **Paradise/ Sally Ann/ Crusade / Ice Dance/ Flea Bite** and so on... Nottingham and its history is a central aspect of my work on both film and TV.. The director Alan Dossor and I worked on two contemporary pieces about kids in the city for BBC TV- **Ice Dance** with Warren Clark about the ambitions of two kids to rival the dreams of their Nottingham heroes, Torville and Dean, and **Fleabites**, with Nigel Hawthorne, on how a mixed race boy attempts to restage a Flea circus at the legendary Goose Fair.*

**T.B.C..**