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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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**The Notion of Distancing as Artistic Strategy
in Edward Bond's Political Drama**

Sharon A. Schwartz

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

February 1985

c Sharon A. Schwartz, 1985

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ABSTRACT

The Notion of Distancing as Artistic Strategy in Edward Bond's Political Drama

Sharon A. Schwartz

Edward Bond's drama embodies the search for a new dynamic political theatre which would combine emotional force and intellectual argument. In terming his theatre "The Rational Theatre," he shares Brecht's revolutionary principle that drama must galvanize the political conscience and consciousness towards radical social change. In practise, however, Bond employs extremely aggressive means in the attempt to disturb and demonstrate some of the more desperate truths about our world. Violent stage metaphors are literally enacted; grotesque elements intensify the horror. There is also the problem of avoiding the audience's over-identification with Bond's strong central characters. Distancing techniques become a critical factor if the audience is to have psychic space for analysis and judgement.

The opening chapter distinguishes between traditional aesthetic and Brechtian theories of distance. Bond's major works will then be examined in the light of his adaptation and development of Brechtian distancing. The plays will be grouped according to various styles: naturalism and popular theatre techniques (The Pope's Wedding and Saved); mixed modes (Early Morning); tragi-comic inversions (The Swing and The Sea); historical epics in Brecht's sense (Bingo and The Fool); counter-text distancing (Lear and Restoration); and a new notion of character (The Woman and Summer).

Over time Bond has developed a variety of distancing techniques and with each new play these techniques increase in number and become more complicated in their interaction. Varieties of comic distancing, epic narrative, structural design, inventive mix of styles, counter-text, and acting and director approaches are major distancing strategies.

This thesis will demonstrate the extent which Bond succeeds in finding the right means to synthesize subjective and objective involvement.

for my mother, elizabeth charlotte,
and my children, nadine, julian, and alexandra

("The real definition of loneliness is to
live without social responsibility."

"Where freedom is absent, politics is fate.")
Nadine Gordimer

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Prelude

Edward Bond was the forerunner of a new wave of aggressive political dramatists--Howard Brenton, David Edgar, John McGrath, Steven Berkoff (to name a few)--who emerged in Britain in the early seventies. Theatrically weaned by Britain's Royal Court ensemble in the mid-sixties, Bond took part in a writer's group concerned with the "idea of Direct Theatre - a theatre of action and images...."¹ Politically, the Court philosophy embraced a broad left-wing humanist outlook with the emphasis upon social realism. Bond now regards himself as Britain's resident Brechtian and sees his task to be the creation of a new Marxist theatre. Like Brecht, Bond argues against a cathartic, illusionist theatre. Theatre becomes a revolutionary tool--or weapon--to shock and disturb our quiescent consciousness, alert us to the dangers of a world hell bent towards destruction and have us recognize the urgent need for radical social change.

However, from the outset, Bond's artistic temperament and perception made him see the need to go beyond Brecht. Bond observed the audience response to Brecht in Germany: "I've seen good German audiences in the stalls chewing their chocolates in time with Brecht's music - and they were most certainly not seeing the world in a new way."² If the theatre is to be a potent force for change, it must revive the "life, guts and testicles"³ of the spectator, involving him on every level of his being--emotional and intellectual. In sharp contrast to Brecht, Bond admits the need for what he terms "aggro-effects":

I think it's necessary to disturb an audience emotionally, to involve them emotionally...so I've had to find ways of making

that 'aggro-effect' more complete, which is in a sense to surprise them....The shock is justified by the desperation of the situation or as a way of forcing the audience to search for reasons in the rest of the play.⁴

For Bond, the art of theatre is action:

to act means action, and it's an instinctive thing: one acts because there is a need for action. Theatre revives when society is questioning itself.⁵

When I write, the rhythm - the whole concentration of the writing - requires action. Finally, somebody has to get up and do something....⁶

Elsewhere he elaborates: "Language on the stage has to be physical.... Nothing can be judged simply by what is said but only by what is done, by what happens."⁷

Scenes of extreme violence occur in all Bond's plays. Central metaphors are transformed into direct action swiftly and unexpectedly. Graphic representations of child murder and cannibalism earned Bond such scathing epithets as "sick sensationalist" and "master of gore," and the dubious notoriety of 'l'enfant terrible' of British theatre in the late sixties. The kinetic and near-visceral impact of these effects are at times so horrific and nauseating that Bond risks alienating his audience from recognizing his serious intent.

In addition to certain physical excesses, Bond invites intense emotional engagement and imaginative surrender through the use of poetic visionary elements, grotesque mad imagery, touches of the surreal, bizarre and fantastical, and the telling of powerful tales with vivid central characters whose extreme psychic states drive them to madness, suicide, or acts of self-mutilation. This emphasis upon the irrational has led critics to compare Bond's drama with absurdist theatre or

Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Alternatively, it is seen as the expression of Bond's private anguish or obsession with cruelty rather than as the truthful reflection of a grotesque contemporary political realism, or, the general grim tone of his work is deemed too pessimistic to be politically effective.

The use of effective distancing techniques becomes as crucial, if not more so, for Bond as it was for Brecht in order that the audience be kept at one critical remove from the events on stage. The audience's emotional and intellectual energy must be directed towards the moral and political arguments which are proffered in order that it may carefully analyse these arguments. Thus it is that the antithetical concepts of physicality and rationality; the one with an appeal to the emotions, the other to the intellect, constitute key elements in Edward Bond's political drama.

Ideally, Bond would have the spectator assimilate the political metaphors presented in visual terms. Unless new conventions are understood by the audience, however, effective communication is blocked. The few articles and studies to date attest to a polarization of critical stances towards this central problem. Katherine Worth comments that Bond's work up to The Sea: "provides the most massive demonstration that a new theatre is forming round us, a theatre of acting out rather than analysis...."⁸ In sharp contrast, Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts's full study is essentially geared towards conveying to the reader the kind of complete social analysis that Bond intends.

Interviews often show Bond on the defensive: bizarre elements are explained as "social realism"; symbolic readings misconstrue the "strictly analytical" design. With regards to the use of specific

shock techniquisticism is even more divergent. Christopher Innes terms Bond's vic images "almost unprecedented in their visceral effect....[They] to produce a form of emotional overkill that makes consequential th almost impossible."⁹ Rather than attempting to analyse whether succeeds or not in controlling the horror by his avowed use of fand irony, Innes dismisses such claims on political grounds arguing in Bond, "objectivity is not impartiality but a particular politbias, and a 'rational' theatre is a theatre of political persuas"¹⁰ Thus, Bond's socialism would seem to exclude any such dramatur means as Brechtian "objectivity, distancing and rationality."¹¹ Coult, on the other hand, devotes a chapter to Bond's stagecraft singles out the humour in Bond as a principal diffusing elementthe horror whereby he achieves a "riveting tension" between theal experience and the desire to elicit the spectator's judgement. While we are caught up in the dreadful events on stage, we are at same time distanced and made critically aware of the factors that brought these events into being."¹²

This generalte of miscomprehension or critical ambivalence towards Bond's drc intent and political purpose may well, finally, have induced Bon write notes and lengthy accounts in which he expounds upon genproblems facing our modern world and, in particular, Western sociand in which he pleads for a rational, sane and humane approach than affairs, an approach which he hopes his drama embodies. In terhis theatre "The Rational Theatre," Bond intends not only the lanense of a return to reason and sanity in human conduct, but equthe political sense of the working out of just social relationsrds a classless society. In the testing-out of

this reality, the dramatic experience itself becomes part of the process--play and spectator alike participating in the causal analysis of contemporary social man.

On the subject of violence, Bond writes:

I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners. ~~Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence.~~¹³

In dramatic terms, however, the problem would appear to be compounded by Bond himself. He states, for example, that if a text "doesn't make your teeth grind and your mouth water," it's ineffective. "I'm not an objective writer," he explains. "I write from passionate convictions."¹⁴ But at the same time he gives evidence of the intellectual rigour behind his writing:

the way I write a script is an assurance to the audience about the way they should approach the whole play. So that they ought to feel that, for every part of the play, there is a certain purpose behind it, a certain control. That's very important. Especially if you write about sometimes unnerving or difficult things, then I feel it's very important the audience shouldn't feel this is just some sort of big emotional wallow in horror, that there is a certain discipline or control behind it.¹⁵

Bond's search for the right subject matter and theatrical means amounts to a collision course between inner and outer experience, the individual and society, extreme physical action and scrutiny. The constant experimentation with varied distancing techniques as a check to the horror, an aid to the clarity of the argument, a means of synthesis to reconcile the extremes of the theatrical experience becomes a vital element in the enjoyment and understanding of Bond's dramatic world.

With regards to the conscious design of his plays, he states:

I build a lot of my alienation into the play's structure. Two or more points of focus on the stage, manipulation of time to serve the argument and not the story, showing characters in their various social roles and in various social situations (and so achieving 'wholeness') rather than developing a character from its geist....¹⁶

At the same time Bond takes care to emphasize that "alienation isn't the removal of an emotion, it is the adding of a commentary."¹⁷ By way of further elaboration Bond has recently expressed this main concern:

We need a sort of positive V-effect, something less abstract than V-effect - if V-effect becomes merely the removing of emotional tension so that the object or situation being inspected just, as it were, floats loose. Scepticism is the preamble to truth but it is not itself knowledge.¹⁸

The next chapter will discuss certain aesthetic theories of distance, and their problematic aspects, together with Brechtian distancing as something distinct from the concept of aesthetic distance but essential to effective political drama. Subsequent chapters will discuss in detail the way in which, in Bond's major plays, radical distancing techniques contend with illusionist elements. Chapter Two will look at early "naturalistic" plays and popular theatre techniques. Chapter Three will focus on one play which is characterized by a disparate conjunction of poetic/ visionary theatre, the surreal and popular humour. Chapter Four will explore two plays that amount to inversions of tragi-comic conventions. Chapter Five will discuss Bond's use of historicization in a new approach to socialist epic theatre. Chapter Six will show a distinctive use in Bond of defamiliarizing known literary legends and conventions to open up a new perspective on the modern condition. Chapter Seven will consider the possibilities and problems of a new Marxist character drama.

Prelude Endnotes

- ¹ Tony Coult, The Plays of Edward Bond (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 12.
- ² Edward Bond, "On Brecht: A Letter to Peter Holland," Theatre Quarterly, 8 (Summer 1978), 34.
- ³ Interview with Bond, in Behind the Scenes: Theater and Film Interviews from the Transatlantic Review, ed. Joseph F. McCrindle (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 131.
- ⁴ Interview with Bond, Christopher Innes, "Edward Bond: From Rationalism to Rhapsody," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 23 (Summer 1979), 113.
- ⁵ Transcript of 'Theatres Outside London' Conference, Nottingham Playhouse, in Gambit, 17 (May 1970), 71.
- ⁶ Interview with Bond, "Drama and the Dialectics of Violence," Theatre Quarterly, 2 (Jan.-Mar. 1972), 12.
- ⁷ "Interviews with Edward Bond and Arnold Wesker," Karl-Heinz Stoll, Twentieth Century Literature, 22 (4 Dec. 1976), 413.
- ⁸ Katherine Worth, Revolutions in Modern English Drama (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1972), p. 168.
- ⁹ Christopher Innes, "The Political Spectrum of Edward Bond: From Rationalism to Rhapsody," Modern Drama, 25 (June 1982), 195-199.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 198.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 196.
- ¹² Coult, p. 81.
- ¹³ Edward Bond, "Author's Preface to Lear," Bond Plays Two: Lear, The Sea, Narrow Road to the Deep North, Black Mass, Passion (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 3.
- ¹⁴ Bond, quoted in Helen Dawson, "Full House for Bond's Bingo," The Observer Review (11 August 1974), p. 3.
- ¹⁵ Tony Coult, "Creating What is Normal," Plays and Players, 23 (December 1975), 12.
- ¹⁶ Bond, "On Brecht: A Letter to Peter Holland," p. 34.
- ¹⁷ Bond, quoted in Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, A Companion to the Plays (London: IQ Publications, 1978), p. 49.
- ¹⁸ Bond, "On Brecht: A Letter to Peter Holland," p. 35.

Chapter One:

Theories of Distance

Before examining Bond's plays, this chapter will consider varied approaches to the notion of distance. Daphna Ben Chaim's recent study, Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response, is the first extended treatment of its topic. Chaim discusses various theories of aesthetic distance and attempts to encompass within one arc such widely divergent dramatic and film theorists as Edward Bullough, Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerry Grotowski, Christian Metz and André Bazin. Chaim defines distance as "an awareness of fiction:" its chief components comprise "tacit knowing," "volition," and "perception as unreal."¹ It is the simultaneous perception in the imaginative act of consciousness of the real and the unreal which determines the spectator's response to the drama. At once the measure of her artistic appreciation and the source of her pleasure, it is also the guarantor of a certain "objectivity" towards the stage persons and events.

Bullough in "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," terms this psychic phenomenon a "sudden change of inward perspective." In his analogy of the shipboard fog, he describes how one's experience is enlarged in seeing the fog as other than its material substantiality. Similarly, the dramatic experience, if it is to be seen as art, has to lift from the real. Bullough is primarily concerned with the paradox that one relates strongly to the persons and events in the drama and yet knows they are fictive. It is by this sudden jolt in perception that the "actual men and things" seem

'unreal'.² Chaim interprets Bullough to mean that no matter how intense one's involvement may be, it is nonetheless a pseudo-vicarious projection onto the fictional characters.³ This fictional space filters one's personal sentiments and exonerates the viewer from any practical responses.

Chaim argues that Sartre takes this premise one step further. Aesthetic distance allows for maximum empathy since "the character's feelings...are literally 'owned' by the spectator."⁴ For both Bullough and Sartre, theatre is fundamentally an imaginative experience. It is through the subjective empathic response (the fusing with the hero) that one is led to a critical understanding of larger social and philosophical issues. In order to sustain the illusion, one must exert the will to overcome the literalness of the actor. Any means which intrude the "real" upon the "unreal" such as presentational devices, the blurring of the real and unreal, the theatre of happenings or direct assault, documentary facts or even a heightened sense of the reality of political events, effects a "crisis of the imaginary"⁵--a characteristic of "critical theatre" since the 50's.

In taking her cue from Bullough and Sartre, it would appear that Chaim is endorsing the yardstick of illusionist theatre. One knows one is in the theatre, but, to quote Chaim, there is equally the "willingness to suspend disbelief according to the rules, which is part of every theatrical convention."⁶ It is not surprising that she substantiates the thesis that aesthetic distance is fundamental to illusion, the metaphorical "seeing as" or, the attending to a fiction "as if it were reality,"⁷ with quotes from the older conventional dramatic theorists, Johnson ("[The drama] is credited...as a just picture

of a real original; as representing to the auditor what he himself would feel.") and Coleridge ("It is the representation of it, not the reality, that we require, the imitation, and not the thing itself.")⁸ Chaim's thesis almost reduces to a tautology. The drama, to be art, has to have distance from tangible reality. Since one is supposedly at some level always conscious of the unrealness of the theatrical experience, one is never "deluded" in the theatre. If one is, it ceases to be art.

Chaim's dismissal of Grotowski's experiments have a certain validity. By his own avowal, Grotowski seeks to establish direct involvement with a kind of communal experience akin to psycho-drama. And yet Artaud's theory, which intended a cathartic effect penetrating the depths of the psyche in the manner of ancient ritual, is interpreted as exhibiting a "radical reduction of distance"⁹ but still within the spectacle of the stage. That is to say it conforms to Bullough's criterion of the "least amount of distance without its disappearance."¹⁰ But it is difficult to imagine two more widely different concepts of theatre than Bullough's and Artaud's. The common denominator would seem to be the high degree of psychological identification, which might be seen as proof of Sartre's view that empathy is the necessary consequence of aesthetic distance.

The difficulty with the notion of cathartic drama is that it restricts the aesthetic response to the imaginative experience without sufficiently delineating the quality of the response. The basic premise of fourth wall illusionism, for example, is to present as complete an illusion of reality as possible, even to the extent of erasing momentarily that part of the imagination which may still register the fact of fictionalizing. Similarly, with realistic films, despite the

counter-arguments which Metz and Bezin give, the average film-goer is quite content to be drawn into the spurious illusion of the present through intense identification with the characters and events, and is uncaring of, if not oblivious to, the 'built-in fictionality' "inherent in the medium itself."¹¹

Chaim's position is finally that of Roger Scruton's expressed in Art and the Imagination: "as Scruton says, the intensity of our aesthetic emotion is not a function of 'its core of thought, but rather of the degree of 'imaginative involvement' that is experienced'.... We do not judge the literal truth of the events because our imaginative experience is divorced from belief.... [Our role is] to participate in the creation of a satisfying imaginative order."¹²

It is not surprising that Chaim's chapter on Brecht is disappointing and inadequate. Rather than see Brechtian distancing as a radical departure from traditional aesthetics, Chaim reduces Brechtian distancing to a rather simplistic equation. Brechtian distancing is "a heightened awareness of fiction."¹³ This in turn is intended to induce an intellectual and critical state of mind. But the autonomous devices that Brecht recommends in themselves fail to effect such a response. Brechtian distancing, therefore, fails Brecht's intent.

Chaim's "general theory" of distancing leads her to subsume Brechtian distancing under the overall concept of aesthetic distance thereby obscuring its essential character. Brechtian distancing or "estrangement" is best appreciated on its own terms. The concept of "distance" as essential to the political effectiveness of a dramatic experience originates with Brecht. Brechtian distancing, thereby, confounds and disassociates itself from the traditional idea of aesthetic

distance as something intrinsic to the creation and appreciation of any art object. The notion of distancing as an artistic strategy which would free the spectator's familiar psychological involvement in the dramatic process and ensure objective space for critical manoeuvre towards the argument was the organizing principle behind Brecht's epic theatre. Brecht was appalled by the spectacle of the theatre audience of his day:

Looking about us, we see somewhat motionless figures in a peculiar condition: they seem strenuously to be tensing all their muscles, except where these are flabby and exhausted. They scarcely communicate with each other; their relations are those of a lot of sleepers....True, their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look at the stage as if in a trance; an expression which comes from the Middle Ages, the days of witches and priests.¹⁴

Conventional drama was still iron-bound to the Aristotelian canons of a tightly-knit plot developing towards a climax, the expression of individual human passions seducing the spectator to identification and empathy, and the ultimate reward of catharsis. The audience remained cozily cushioned in its cocoon of darkness by the safety of the fourth wall behind which actors could pretend the audience was not there and play the illusion of life--the illusion that the world of appearance confirmed universal unchanging truths about man and his existence. The new, epic drama was to leave the narrow confines of an intimate room and its key-hole access to the voyeur-spectator and open out onto a world which is in constant flux, ever evolving and urgently needful of change.

Brecht had a healthy respect for the intelligence of actors and their audience. Playing for "high emotional suggestibility" had

frightening overtones of mob psychology. To lull or confirm audience expectations was to denigrate. A 'rational' theatre, on the other hand, regarded the audience as "capable of thinking and of reasoning, of making judgements even in the theatre...as individuals of mental and emotional maturity."¹⁵ With this new audience in mind, only the loose, episodic structure of the epic, which presents events in the cooler, more objective form of narrative, could encompass man and the complex web of social and historical forces which illuminate his behaviour. Underlying the radical shift from subjective, empathic response to the objective comprehension of social phenomenon was the philosophy of dialectical materialism and its inherent concept of change.

Brecht's disciple, Manfred Wekwerth, writes:

Defamiliarization...signifies a definite way of looking at the world....[It] is a method which searches for ways of destroying the habitual way of looking at a thing, in order to reveal the contradictions within it, so that its reality may be perceived.¹⁶

The seemingly commonplace and self-evident in man's dealing with man, once submitted to the distancing process, suddenly acquires a strange, new and startling look, activating the critical attitude.

Brecht describes the new consciousness as follows:

The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too - Just like me - It's only natural - It'll never change - The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable - That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world - I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it - That's not the way - That's extraordinary, hardly believable - It's got to stop - The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary - That's great art: nothing obvious in it - I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.¹⁷

There was a place for emotions, but emotion tempered with reason. It was precisely the involvement with the zig-zag of the dialectic, the perception of the remarkable in the ordinary, and the experience of contrary emotions, that constituted the process of pleasurable learning. Ultimately, a distanced dramaturgy would arouse new thoughts, feelings and passions desirous and capable of transforming the field of human relations itself.¹⁸

The principal ingredient of the distancing process was the "historicization" of characters and incidents. By means of this longer perspective, the spectator was less likely to identify and would instead perceive objectively the specifics of behaviour given the particular historical conditions and in turn, view the self as part of an evolving history. Mother Courage suffers the loss of her children; she is also a monster who learned nothing from her experience. But the audience might still learn that one cannot negotiate a humane contract with the war-machine. In The Good Person of Szechwan, the parable form, the quasi-historical, exotic framework, and the grotesque mask of Shui Ta, all serve to downplay empathy and stimulate our critical consideration of Shen Te's plight as a remedial social evil and not an eternally human problem. The play ends with an Epilogue in which the audience is asked to find its own solution to the problem of thwarted goodness in a corrupt, exploitative society. Thus, the dramatic experience becomes a matter of process, not product.

His self-conscious theatricality served to remind the audience that it was watching a play. Brecht, the philosopher-teacher, was also a great showman and clown. Beyond mere stage gimmicks, Brecht's theatricalization of the epic mode was deeply rooted in popular culture, thereby manifesting a new relation between stage and audience. The smoking

and drinking and yet concerned audience of the political cabaret; the robust and rowdy but critical spectators watching the absurdist stand-up comedian Kurt Valentin; even the sports enthusiasts eagerly following a boxing match seemed preferable to the "emotionally punch-drunk spectator"¹⁹ of the concert hall. A political theatre for the people must touch common ground again, infusing the performance with liveliness, vigour, and the virtuosity of skilled performers exercising their craft. In writing of the cabaret, Lisa Appignanesi alludes to Brecht:

Brecht's theory of Verfremdungseffekt or the alienation effect, grows as much out of the cabaret stage and setting as it does out of the boxing ring and the popular music hall. All these forms break down the fictional distance between player and spectator. The actors play directly to their audience, not primarily to each other, and any feedback from the audience is incorporated into a spectacle which includes them both. In the same way Brecht's alienation effect demands that both audience and player are distanced from their habitual roles so that both can see around these....Their insistence on the fact that they are merely playing a role...wakes the audience into an awareness of its own role as an audience.²⁰

This emphasis upon role-playing allows for the addition of a commentary, a resource, as Raymond Williams notes, not possible ~~within~~ within the confines of strict naturalism.²¹ Devices such as the chorus, direct address, narrator, raisonneur, asides could be used to political advantage, to get "truly outside"²² the safe parameters of the play-world. Thus, this dual seeing from an objective vantage point becomes a crucial factor in the spectator's simultaneous understanding of the particular and individual as well as the underlying social and political causes of behaviour.

Whether the Brechtian almost-bare stage, which further aided the breakdown of illusion, grew out of the "poor" cabaret stage

(Appignanesi's view)²³ or whether it was the natural artistic expression of his fundamental philosophy, is difficult to determine. Brecht's entire stage vocabulary was geared to simplicity, economy, functional precision, and beauty. The choice and placement of minimal stage objects designated a particular social signification. The careful attention to groupings of characters expressed a fundamental social attitude or 'Gestus'. Of prime concern was the concrete 'showing' of reality in order to de-mystify and de-romanticize characters and events. In exploiting the concreteness of the medium itself, contact with materiality is renewed. This investment of the play-world with 'reality' allows the action to be seen in complex ways as both concrete and metaphorical theatrically. Many of Brecht's anti-illusionist devices have lost their shock value--worn costumes; the gauze-like half-curtain; bright white lighting; exposed stage machinery; scene changes in full view of the audience; film projections and titles between scenes. Their usefulness remains, however, for the director who deliberately strives to achieve a distanced effect or maintain a tension between involvement and a holding back of emotional surrender, or between a clever didacticism and entertainment.

The most important and, paradoxically, the most vulnerable distancing technique remained the acting. Martin Esslin writes, "It is in the actor that the elements of reality and illusion meet...."²⁴ Brecht sought to achieve the greatest objectivity of portrayal in order to attain his political purpose. His gestural method of acting or 'gestic music',²⁵ as he called it, evolved in part from the demonstrative language of the cabaret singer. His bitter, sardonic songs which counterpointed the action forced the actor to play against the

emotional flow of the music. For example, the procurer/murderer MacHeath sang a 'nostalgic' duet with his prostitute-love concerning the virtues of their cozy love-nest, the brothel, and the happiness ensured them by the power of their economic status. As MacHeath becomes a 'muckraker', we the audience digest the similarity between bourgeois values and the criminal world.

It is well known, however, that despite Brecht's repeated re-writings to de-fuse the emotional power inherent in the text of Mother Courage, spectators continued to feel sympathy for the grief-stricken Mother, or even admiration for her as a gutsy survivor in awful circumstances, rather than being jolted into consciously accepting or rejecting her actions within the particular causal framework and translating these insights into the contemporary political situation.

The question of emotional verisimilitude in the acting versus truthfulness of the play's political meaning is riddled with problems. Brecht's aversion to excessive emoting, be it gushy sentimentality or exalted histrionics, led him to the polar opposite of the actor/witness demonstrating a street accident or giving evidence in a trial. But he was equally attracted to the Oriental style of displaying or externalizing emotions--an art form which seemed to have a built-in distancing factor:

[Chinese actors] express their awareness of being watched.... [They] openly choose those positions which will best show them off to the audience, just as if they were acrobats....the artist observes himself.... [he] portrays incidents of utmost passion, but without his delivery becoming heated....he rejects complete conversion. He limits himself from the start to simply quoting the character played.²⁶

The sense of keeping oneself apart does not necessarily mean a hardened,

cold performance, although it could, with the result of boring the audience. Essentially, Brecht was arguing for greater emotional control, physical dexterity, and political understanding in the interpretation. His acting exercises, which consisted of relating the dialogue in the third person and transposing it into a narrative form, constituted a valid training ground for the actor to get out of his own emotional skin and to think beyond himself. But a great deal of knock-about improvisation and initial emotional feeling for the role was just as much part of rehearsals. The end product, however, was to serve the political drama where the "subtext is social" (Kenneth Tynan's apt phrase)²⁷ rather than psychological.

Brecht's theories of a rationally-oriented dramaturgy imply and demand a considerable degree of authorial control in the approach to acting and directing. Roland Barthes succinctly relates the concept of distancing to the director's responsibility:

to distance is to cut the circuit between the actor and his own pathos, but it is also, and essentially, to re-establish a new circuit between the role and the argument; it is for the actor to give meaning to the play, and no longer to himself in the play.... [Distancing] is the relationship of a form and a content.²⁸

A certain Brechtian influence was felt in the revolution of British dramaturgy in the late fifties and sixties. Under the aegis of Peter Hall and the new directorial team of the Royal Shakespeare Company (Peter Brook, John Barton, Michel St. Denis) Shakespeare was revitalized and made more accessible to the modern consciousness. In staging the early histories and The War of the Roses trilogy, Peter Hall remarked:

These history plays with their bloody heads, brutal carnage, and sense of fate were not appreciated by the nineteenth

century. This is not surprising; it was hoped then that such horrors were past. We know now that this optimism was premature. We live among war, race riots, revolutions, assassinations...and the imminent threat of extinction. The theatre is, therefore, examining fundamentals.²⁹

John Elsom termed Hall's approach a movement towards informality, austerity, and functionalism and away from "pictorial" Shakespeare and "heroic," or "heavily stylised emotional acting" in order to lay stress on social and political complexities.³⁰ Inspired by the example of the Berliner Ensemble, Hall formed a 'permanent company' equally skilled in bringing a freshness to Shakespeare as well as tackling the work of moderns at an experimental theatre, the Aldwych. (It was here, in 1962, that William Gaskill, considered by many critics to be the most consistent Brechtian director, mounted Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle.)³¹

Peter Brook's impressive production of King Lear was evidence of a new eclecticism. Brechtian distancing effects in stage-craft (a plain, cold set enhanced by "giant white flats opening on to a blank cyclorama")³² and Scofield's "drained, unsentimental reading of the lines about 'unaccommodated man'"³³ combined to create a modern, existential waste-land.³⁴ Brook aimed for the theatrical response and regarded distancing as its essential mode:

Alienation can work through antithesis: parody, imitation, criticism....It is the purely theatrical method of dialectical exchange.... [It] is the language open to us today that is as rich in potentiality as verse: it is the possible device of a dynamic theatre in a changing world....³⁵

For Brook, it is the director's responsibility to achieve the desired alienation effect.

Before tackling Peter Weiss' Marat/Sade, (a play, Brook felt, which

"could not have existed before Brecht"),³⁶ Brook had been involved in the Theatre of Cruelty season with Charles Marowitz, exploring problems of acting and stagecraft in the light of Artaud's theories.³⁷ Marat/Sade represented to him a search for a 'total theatre' which would marry Brecht and Artaud. Brook eschewed the notion that they were irreconcilable opposites:

theatre, like life, is made up of the unbroken conflict between impressions and judgments--illusion and disillusion cohabit painfully and are inseparable....Starting with its title, everything about this play is designed to crack the spectator on the jaw, then douse him with ice-cold water, then force him to assess intelligently what has happened to him, then give him a kick in the balls, then bring him back to his senses again.³⁸

Brook argued that Weiss' play incorporates certain distancing devices in its structure: the play-within-the-play; a tri-part time-shift between events of 1780, 1808 and the present; the action of the French Revolution played by madmen; songs which interrupt the action and appeals to the audience through an M.C.³⁹ Further, the essential conflict centers on the dialectic of two opposing ideologies--individualism versus the collective for revolutionary change.

Brook added his own chilling touches towards audience manipulation and control. Ronald Hayman noted the unsettling clash of styles between "realism and stylisation":

The imitation of schizoid and erotomaniac behaviour was realistic, unlike the chalky make-up with blood-red lipstick and exaggerated lines around the mouth. The guillotine was frightening; the buckets of red, white and aristocratically blue blood were comically reassuring.⁴⁰

The use of the comic grotesque as a distancing mode to deal with the frighteningly 'real' is a significant feature of contemporary drama.

Brook remarked of Marat/Sade, "We were continually moving into burlesque and farce as being perhaps the only way that one can deal with extreme horror."⁴¹ Jan Kott describes the scene in King Lear between Gloucester and Mad Tom as a pantomime:

Gloster has reached the depths of human misery; so has Edgar, who pretends to be Mad Tom... But the pantomime performed by actors on the stage is grotesque, and has something of a circus about it. The blind Gloster who has climbed a non-existent height and fallen over on flat boards, is a clown; A philosophical buffoonery has been performed....⁴²

The broad type of vaudeville farce, burlesque, pantomime, the grotesque and guignol belong to the tradition of vulgar comedy. Anthony Caputi in his book Buffo: The Genius of Vulgar Comedy traces the buffo convention from antiquity, through the commedia dell'arte, the carnival-esque grotesque, the English pantomime, the harlequinade, the clown Grock, and the Pierrot tradition to the farcical antics of Laurel and Hardy. Caputi attributes the power (or 'gestalt') of the buffo to its distancing effect:

Invariably, [the spectator] sees and experiences a vulgar comedy as if at a considerable distance, a distance which prevents him from seeing very much of the human detail, from seeing anything but a bold, general image.... [The characters] are not without human interest.... But these traits are typically simplified and exaggerated so that we see virtually nothing of the complexity which usually accompanies them in human beings. The characters always retain a strange abstractness, "strange" because, though they move in a concrete, commonplace world and reflect commonplace needs, they are always notably reduced as human figures. This prompts the beholder to view the total image as if at a distance, prompts him to adjust to the whole, as he has focused the characters.⁴³

This convention is abetted by songs and asides to the audience. Terrifying masks or whitened faces and grotesque physical deformities had predominated in the ancient buffo before it was tamed to a softer hue

after the Renaissance.⁴⁴ The perilous world of the buffo with its frequent beatings and transformations suggests paradoxically both man's destructiveness and potential creativity.⁴⁵ Caputi compares the Laurel and Hardy sketch "Big Business" (1929) to a medieval farce, the essential difference being that 'things', rather than 'The Old Man', (or the stock authority figure), are now demolished.⁴⁶ One might add that a Laurel and Hardy sketch which consists of ingenious variations on the same theme of "reciprocal destruction"⁴⁷ is a form of distancing in itself. Further, the crude violence of knockabout, slapstick comedy is rendered less offensive partly because of the frenzied tempo and partly due to the fact that these zany, somersaulting combatants remain unperturbed in defeat and disaster. The 'little guys' of the silent screen, including Buster Keaton and the Keystone Cops chasers, all manage their come-uppance against authority and emerge somehow unscathed.

Eric Bentley describes the farceur as showing "man in the mass, in the rough, in the raw, in anything but fine individual flower."⁴⁸ Farce embodies its own dialectical exchange between "aggression" and "flippancy."⁴⁹ It is the most direct and physical of comic forms, and yet it, by its nature, keeps the audience at bay. To quote Maurice Charney:

Farce may be the purest, quintessential comedy, since it so rigorously excludes any sentiment at all, especially feelings of sympathy, compassion, or empathy for the characters. It is also unintellectual, unpsychological and uncomplex.⁵⁰

The laughter remains broad and uncomplicated and affords immediate comic release.

If, however, the emphasis turns upon the grotesque rather than pure comic business, the response is more complex. Philip Thomson terms the

'conflict-character' of the grotesque as an alienating device--"Something which is familiar and trusted is suddenly made strange and disturbing"--and points out that,

laughter at the grotesque is not 'free', that the horrifying or disgusting aspect cuts across our amusement: the guffaw becomes a grimace. But one can also describe this the other way round and say that our response to the horrifying is undercut by our appreciation of the comic side of the grotesque.⁵¹

The comic response is also subject, however, to the changing attitudes and times of the viewer. Baudelaire found in the chilling cruelty of the English pantomime with its Grand Guignol guillotine scene the intoxication of the "absolute comic."⁵² Ionesco recalls how as a child, the guignol fascinated but failed to amuse; its grotesque caricature revealed, rather, the brutal truth of the world. In his own work, Ionesco sought to express the "unendurable. Everything raised to paroxysm....A theatre of violence: violently comic, violently dramatic."⁵³ Dürrenmatt echoes this prospectus:

Comedy alone is suitable for us. Our world has led to the grotesque as well as to the atom bomb, and so it is a world like that of Hieronymus Bosch whose apocalyptic paintings are also grotesque. But the grotesque is only a way of expressing in a tangible manner, of making us perceive physically the paradoxical, the form of the unformed, the face of a world without a face....⁵⁴

For dramatists of the absurd, grotesque farce signals a vision of the world. The comic response is an act of defiance or the only means of survival in an unhospitable world devoid of ultimate meaning and purpose.

Thus, certain contemporary dramatists and directors have recognized that older theatrical forms are one means to control the horror

and to achieve a wider perspective from the subjective and individualistic premises of traditional drama. Ultimately, however, the distanced perspective of absurdist theatre is cosmic rather than political.

Susan Sontag attested to the 'artistic' success of Brook's Marat/Sade, arguing that Weiss's ideas, if not resolved intellectually in a Brechtian sense, nonetheless worked effectively because (my italics) they touched, primarily, the senses. If such a Brechtian/Artaudian synthesis was successful, it would seem to argue for a new audience sensibility, a "new perception," and "new standards."⁵⁵

The play had, however, several very different productions. In East Germany, the emphasis was clearly towards a Marxist interpretation. Rather than a madhouse atmosphere, "the inmates were more sort of prisoners in a sort of concentration camp...."⁵⁶ Weiss added an epilogue which came out strongly on the side of Marat's position. When asked in an interview which production he favoured, Weiss diplomatically replied:

For a director in Western society--in which, on the whole, the concept of class struggle is viewed as no longer having any bearing on reality, and in which, in all artistic endeavour, the belief flourishes that our problems are insoluble anyway and that everything is basically absurd and mad--it will be almost natural to let the madhouse atmosphere in Marat/Sade predominate.

However, if a director believes that Marxism has not lost its efficacy and that the central points in the arguments proffered by Marat (which, of course, in many instances prefigured Marx's theses) are still pertinent, he will emphasize these statements in the play and he will use them to allude to the present.⁵⁷

The success or failure or degree of the distanced rational objective begs the question as to what extent the entire ensemble of writers, actors, directors, designers, and audience share an ideological commit-

ment. When these variables are more homogeneous, the theatre pays tribute to the "untragic wise man as hero" (to quote Walter Benjamin), the theatre becomes a "dais," and a "political will has prevailed."⁵⁸

If Brook proceeded to move towards more ritualistic theatre, Weiss moved in the other direction with the epic/documentary play, The Investigation. Only this extreme form of objective drama seemed appropriate to deal with the horrors of Auschwitz. Weiss defends the artistry of theatre as a political forum by the shape it assumes, its selection of detail, its emphasis upon contradiction within society, and its confrontation with the forces of law and order:

Only when it has transmuted the reality it has laid bare by its own probing and criticizing into an artistic form can it achieve true validity in dealing with that reality.⁵⁹

Postwar British drama ushered in a "new line of freewheeling epic/documentary" theatre. Brecht's epic drama was 'in the air' but, the new dramatists turned equally to their own popular theatrical tradition as a means, paradoxically, of objectifying the stage reality and engaging the collective response to the social dialectic. Katherine Worth includes Joan Littlewood and John Arden in her chapter "New Forms of Melodrama and Epic Theatre" with this comment:

The use of techniques from music-hall and melodrama for handling daunting historical material has been one of the great triumphant discoveries of the postwar English theatre. A new line of freewheeling epic/documentary has been struck out, running from melodramas like Serjeant Musgrave's Dance to such recent plays as Charles Wood's 'H'. The writers in this mode aim at the long perspective that becomes possible only when realism is abandoned and a 'superview' printed over the limited view open to characters struggling in the thick of the historical events.⁶⁰

Joan Littlewood's epic/documentary musical Oh What A Lovely War

(1963) was a culmination of years of largely unnoticed effort towards creating a genuine 'people's theatre' in the manner of Brecht and Piscator but equally with a specific British flavour. In the late thirties, she had produced a new 'genre', the "pantomime with a political point," The Babes in the Wood.⁶¹ Oh What A Lovely War draws from a panalogy of theatrical gesture in the familiar music-hall tradition in order to make its social point. Interestingly, Littlewood takes the Pierrot convention and turns it in on itself. The seaside Pierrot troupe, often an all-male cast decked out in frilly, decorous garb, was a great morale booster in pre-war days; its repertoire included well-known nostalgic and patriotic songs, the usual gags and light song-and-dance routines. In Littlewood's production, the clowns-turned-soldiers sang to the tune 'They wouldn't believe me' their own hymn to the war naively posed against the backdrop of blown-up film projections showing the grim casualty statistics. Within the framework of music-hall 'turns', with an M.C. announcing acts in the style of the old music-hall compère, naturalistic scenes of life in the trenches clashed with biting parodic skits of the top brass who made the decisions. Humorous sketches shifted suddenly from the satirical and absurdly ironic to a gallows humour.⁶²

Charles Marowitz had termed the juxtaposition of often "antithetical" styles in Littlewood's production "the multi-dimensionalism of true Epic Theatre."⁶³ The crash through the fourth wall was equally a challenge to a mode of perception, a consciousness, an aesthetic response which no longer sufficed to reflect urgent political and social realities. Brecht planted the seeds of a revolutionary critical theatre; his own experimentation with varied distancing techniques

coalesced into a mode which reached beyond the tragic awareness of traditional character drama to a profound view of man embedded in a 'total reality' of social and historical processes. The more aggressive contemporary British dramatists, and Bond in particular, continue to mine from Brecht, exploring yet new ways to integrate Brechtian objectivity into the dramatic experience.

Chapter One Endnotes

¹ Daphna Ben Chaim, Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 73.

² Bullough, quoted in Chaim, p. 10.

³ Chaim, p. 7.

⁴ Chaim, p. 22.

⁵ Sartre, quoted in Chaim, p. 20.

⁶ Chaim, p. 57.

⁷ Chaim, pp. 50; 74-75.

⁸ Chaim, p. 73.

⁹ Chaim, p. 49.

¹⁰ Bullough, quoted in Chaim, p. 49.

¹¹ Chaim, p. 64. Chaim discusses several articles by Metz and Bazin. Metz, in "The Imaginary Signifier," contends that one sees only a "reflection" of the 'real' (Chaim, p. 53). Bazin, in "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism," acknowledges film as an artificial construct, but one which can give a more faithful photographic reproduction of reality (Chaim, pp. 56-57). Thus, the 'distanced' factor in the medium of film is always present. Nonetheless, it can be significantly reduced, thereby allowing for a greater impression of reality, and hence a more intense involvement in the film experience.

¹² Chaim, pp. 75-76.

¹³ Chaim, pp. 25-38.

¹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, ed. & trans. John Willett (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), p. 187.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁶ Manfred Wekwerth, "Brecht Today," The Drama Review, 12, (Fall 1967), 119.

¹⁷ Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, p. 71.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

20 Lisa Appignanesi, The Cabaret (London & New York: Studio Vista, 1975), p. 130.

21 Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 318.

22 Ibid., p. 394.

23 The Cabaret, pp. 130-1.

24 Martin Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), p. 89.

25 Brecht on Theatre, pp. 87 & 86.

26 Ibid., pp. 92-94.

27 Kenneth Tynan, quoted in Charles Marowitz, "Talk with Kenneth Tynan," The Encore Reader (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 284.

28 Roland Barthes, "Seven Photo Models of Mother Courage," The Drama Review, 12 (Fall 1967), 44-45.

29 Peter Hall, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company 1960-1963, ed. John Goodwin (London: Max Reinhardt, 1964), p. 47.

30 John Elsom, Post-War British Theatre (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 124-5.

31 William Gaskill had conducted classes in comic work and improvisation in the manner of English music-hall before his work with Brechtian acting exercises. See Terry W. Browne, Playwrights' Theatre (London: Pitman, 1975), p. 47, and Theatre at Work, eds. Charles Marowitz and Simon Trussler (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), pp. 123-132.

32 Charles Marowitz quoted in J.L. Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 219.

33 Tynan, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company, p. 187.

34 In his reading of the play, Brook was influenced by Jan Kott's Shakespeare Our Contemporary (1964) to strive towards projecting a bleak, hostile and cruel world.

35 Peter Brook, The Empty Space (New York: Penguin, 1968), p. 82.

36 Ibid., p. 83.

37 Marowitz, "Lear Log" in Theatre at Work, pp. 133-47.

38 Peter Weiss, The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade, trans. Geoffrey Skelton with Introduction by Peter Brook (London: Calder & Boyars, 1965), p. 11.

- 39 Brook, The Empty Space, pp. 83-4.
- 40 Ronald Hayman, Theatre and Anti-Theatre (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979), p. 204.
- 41 Brook, quoted in Theatre and Anti-Theatre, p. 205.
- 42 Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 118-119.
- 43 Anthony Caputi, Buffo: The Genius of Vulgar Comedy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), pp. 176-177.
- 44 Ibid., p. 221.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 196-205.
- 46 Ibid., p. 228.
- 47 John McCabe, The Comedy World of Stan Laurel (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 64.
- 48 Eric Bentley, "Farce" in Comedy Meaning and Form, ed. Robert Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), p. 299.
- 49 Ibid., p. 295.
- 50 Maurice Charney, Comedy High and Low (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 97.
- 51 Philip Thomson, The Grotesque (London, Methuen, 1972), p. 59.
- 52 Charles Baudelaire, "On The Essence of Laughter" in Comedy Meaning and Form, pp. 460-462.
- 53 Eugene Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp. 20 & 26.
- 54 Friedrich Dürrenmatt quoted in Comedy High and Low, p. 107.
- 55 Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York: Dell, 1961), p. 178.
- 56 Interview with Peter Weiss in The Playwrights Speak, ed. Walter Wager (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967), p. 211.
- 57 Interview with Peter Weiss in Partisan Review, 32 (Spring 1965), 231.
- 58 Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, ed. with Introduction by Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 148-154.

59 Peter Weiss, "The Material and the Models," Theatre Quarterly, 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1971), 42.

60 Katherine Worth, Revolutions in Modern English Drama (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1972), p. 121.

61 David Bradby and John McCormick, People's Theatre (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 100.

62 Working the same vein of comic horror, Jurgen Holtz, a comic actor working in East Berlin today, describes the clown as the one who "always walks the tightrope between horror and humour. But if the rope breaks, the clown can become a murderer." Sue-Ellen Case and Helen Fehervary, "Jurgen Holtz: Self-Portrait of an East German Actor," Performing Arts Journal, 13 (Spring - Summer 1980), 33.

63 Charles Marowitz, Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 66.

Chapter Two:
Naturalism and Popular Theatre Techniques
in The Pope's Wedding and Saved

In Bond's dramatic world the sense of shock at the painful waste and dangerous misdirection of human energy comes across in the force of his 'aggro-effects'. Charles Marowitz once asked Bond if anything in the theatre shocked him and Bond replied, "No." When asked about life, Bond replied, "Oh, yes, most of it." In Marowitz's view, it is this sense of shock, or rather, "controlled outrage, that informs all his work."¹ The profoundly radical spirit behind Bond's dramaturgy aims at nothing less than a sweeping transformation of the general consciousness of a public which, in Bond's view, is blind and numb to the realities of contemporary existence. In Eric Bentley's words, "gigantic outrages against mankind are constantly being committed and, ...mankind is not outraged by them."²

Bond's vision of the world and the forms his drama takes reach back to early childhood and his working-class roots. He recalls how, as a small child, he and his young sister were placed with a foster family in Cornwall (an alien environment where people spoke a strange dialect) away from the immediate dangers of war. One intense experience stays in his mind:

I was walking along a road and there was suddenly this enormous sort of bang which one can't describe, you know, because it's so...a noise almost inside you. I went along to the park and saw all the trees stripped bare, and picked up this little bird with its head blown off. I would think, very much, that was one of the reasons why I wrote that scene [the baby being stoned to death] in Saved.³

He lived the fear that either he or his family might be killed. He and his young sister would lie in bed at night and make up stories with fairy-tale endings to keep the real phantoms at bay. Bond returned to war-blitzed London and a schooling which streamed the majority of working-class children out of the opportunity of higher education and into deadening work in factories. During this period, Bond served a brief stint in compulsory military service. In particular, drill exercises, where one had to imitate screams of attack, left their mark.

Two significant but disparate theatrical experiences stand out--a performance of Macbeth and nights backstage in a music-hall watching his sister being sawn in half by a magician. Macbeth was Bond's first serious drama and the effect it had on Bond as a boy of twelve was shattering:

for the very first time in my life...I met somebody who was actually talking about my problems, about the life I'd been living, the political society around me. Nobody else had said anything about my life to me at all, ever....there was just this feeling of total recognition. I knew all these people, they were just in the street or in the newspapers - this in fact was my world....after seeing that play I could say, well, yes, now I know what I have to do, what it means to be alive....I got from that play a sense of human dignity - of the value of human beings. Also a certain feeling, afterwards, of real surprise - that other people had seen this, so how was it that their lives could just go on in the same way.⁴

On the one hand, the world of Macbeth spoke in terms of urgent contemporary moral and political problems whereas, on the other, the popular tradition of music-hall presented a familiar framework within which to control the intensity of the dramatic experience.

Bond has described the music-hall as a wonderful place to learn about the theatre, especially about 'timing and control'. And certain

general features of Bond's distinctive style would appear to bear out the influence of his music-hall background. The succession of brief episodes with a surprise at every 'turn' upsets audience expectations and alerts it to change. Sudden mood shifts ready the spectators to switch gear mentally and emotionally, and allow them to vary their reactions from sympathy to anger and fear. Characters make do with few props on an almost bare stage, and what they do with these objects takes on special significance. The key player is often the comedian who knows how to relax the audience, take it with him and then be outrageous. Bond cites the technique of Frankie Howerd:

the extraordinary thing was, one realised in a sense one was performing a dance with him. You weren't sitting there listening, he was reacting to you all the time. You knew what the climax was, he knew what the climax was, but you worked together for it.⁵

Bond's 'dance' observes the rhythms of our life, our world. Its pace can be leisurely, deathly quiet or suddenly frantic. Its mood weaves from the darkly sombre to the absurd and ludicrous, from the puzzling to the profoundly disquieting. Brief snatches of warmth and intimacy clash with chilling brutality. At times it seems manipulative, measured and controlled, at times savage, its form inhuman and irreconcilable.

The two early plays, The Pope's Wedding (1962), and Saved (1965) are generally seen as naturalistic. They authentically capture the gritty reality of rural and urban working-class life. What has been glossed over, however, is the way Bond deliberately mixes estrangement devices with the mode of near-realism in order to confront the spectator with disturbing questions which extend beyond a mere slice-of-life

reproduction of reality.

The Pope's Wedding alternates between village life centered around farm labouring, the local pub, the annual cricket match against the big boss, and one character, Scopey, who becomes increasingly involved in the mysterious world of an old hermit living on the town's edge, whom he finally murders. This bizarre murder happens off-stage. We are confronted with the grotesque tableau of Scopey who has taken on the persona of the man he murdered.

Martin Esslin characterizes the shock therapy of certain dramatists of the Absurd as an alienation device which inhibits character identification in confronting the audience with a "grotesquely heightened and distorted picture of a world gone mad." Intrinsically, it is anathema to Brecht:

by its very nature, it cannot provoke the thoughtful attitude of detached social criticism that was Brecht's objective. It does not present its audience with sets of social facts and examples of political behaviour.⁶

Bond's world, as this thesis will demonstrate, is intended to encompass both realities. The use of the fantastic grotesque precludes strict identification and cuts down undue sympathy for the central character. At the same time, it allows for an exploration at a deeper level of the malaise of an insecure existence and the impossibility of any meaningful communication beyond the bare bones of subsistence living. Bond risks with this mode, however, the audience's immediate surrender to the dark of the inner world, or their interpretation of the action in strictly symbolic terms.

In order to prevent the blurring of fantasy and reality, Bond structures the play carefully, utilizing the distancing strategy of parallel

movements to trace the action of Scopey's violent search for meaning, and the progressive souring of outer reality until the two worlds merge dangerously.

Initially, careful social and economic details conveyed through rough physical language, sick jokes and ominous action, sketch the symptoms of a society in which violence could suddenly erupt. Bill has been clowning about with his scythe, barely missing Lorry's head and making Lorry and Scopey jump while he jokes:

BILL. Up! (He swings his scythe in a circle. LORRY and SCOPEY have to jump.)

Yoo ent got a leg to stand on as the copper said when the burglar came round on the operatin' table. (Sc. 2, p. 239)

Bill is the best cricketer and the only one who can tend sick animals. When he learns the Boss intends him to stay back from the game and work, he begins twisting his scythe and imagining compensatory violent fantasies:

BILL. Bastard.

JOE. Say no.

BILL. With that spiteful owd sod?

SCOPEY. Why not?

BILL. There's plenty waitin' for my job, boy.

JOE. Well that's us finished.

BILL. The sod. (Twists his scythe.) I'd like t' 'ave 'is owd 'ead stuck on this. [...] I'll poison 'is bloody cow. I'll bloody well lay 'is missis for a start. I'll grind 'er, for one. 'E can stick 'is bloody plack but I'll bloody well thread 'is missis. (Sc. 2, p. 243)

The action takes place on a bare stage with a minimum of props--an apple, a scythe. Stage directions read: "The objects are very real,

but there must be no attempt to create the illusion of a 'real scene' (p. 227). The inter-action between character and object defines the socio-economic background and replaces character motivation.

Bond further employs the technique of mime in order to defuse the usual dramatic conflict, and throw in sharper visual relief the two worlds. One highly effective illustration of parallelism is the sequence of mimed scenes. The healthy energy of the cricket match, for example, is dramatized by the white of the uniformed players illuminated in full stage light. Bond skillfully juxtaposes this mimed action with the excited voices of the crowd off-stage, showing Scopey in his brief moment of glory and togetherness without excessive emotionalism. This scene contrasts sharply with the mimed sequence of Old Alen who performs in the semi-darkness of his hut his enigmatic ritual with newspapers (reading one from the enormous stack piled against one wall, putting it down, picking it up, standing on said pile to listen against the wall, picking up another) which in turn embodies the dark, inward state of withdrawal. By means of the visual, we are invited to make connections between the two worlds which, at this point, seem to offer illusions of hope: Scopey wins his girl Pat; Alen's world seems to proffer profounder truths.

The subsequent disintegration of Pat and Scopey's domestic dream, aggravated by the realities of scant funds, dingy digs and loveless sex, repeats itself in the progressive de-mystification of the inner landscape. Scopey's need is for the father he never knew, the male principle which establishes the guide-lines for sane passage into mature identity. Scopey takes on a nurturing role, sweeping out, preparing dinner, breaking the initial ice of distrust. For a moment, it

appears as though some attempt at the honest communication of feelings is possible as Scopey's questions revive some of Alen's memories, but the questioning gives way to an urgent deeper probing. Stacked newspapers promise 'truth'; an egg-shaped photograph browned with age provides a clue to the ancient past; an army greatcoat with pockets tightly sewn shut represent the forbidding world of power and authority. The second Scopey dons the coat, reality impinges in the form of Pat who, unaware of Scopey's presence, talks of his lies--"E say 'e get a lot a overtime, late work. [..] 'E ent suited a marriage" (Sc. 12, p. 291). Scopey in turn is betrayed when he learns that the old guy uses the newspapers to stand on and peer out of chinks in the wall hoping Pat will come because "he likes galls," or because he fears a gang attack, or the police who round up gypsies. The tension mounts and the atmosphere takes on a Pinteresque mood of menace and terror. Enraged, Scopey screams, "Yoo owd fake!" (Sc. 12, p. 294) and is held back from lashing out physically by Alen's promise to sing a hymn:

ALEN. (he starts to sing. At first he wavers, but the rhythm controls his terror).

Little babe nailed to the tree
Wash our souls in thy pure blood
Cleanse each sin and let us be
Baptized in the purple flood (Sc. 12, p. 295)

The hymn is bloodied and Alen's 'truth' is "I never stopped gooin' after people. They stopped gooin after me." The pockets of the greatcoat are empty and Scopey stares down at the "hole in the bed" (Sc. 12, p. 296) that he had made when he put his foot through it.

Bond has declared he wished in part to "humanize"⁸ the image of the metaphysical tramp which features in much of absurdist theatre.

His own explanation of his intriguing title is that "the pope's wedding is an impossible ceremony - Scopey's asking for an invitation for something that isn't going to happen, that can't happen."⁹ By means of the concrete showing of events (the emptiness of the pockets, the rent in the bed covering), Bond places the emphasis upon the reality that the old man has no higher wisdom to reveal beyond the basic needs for human contact, warmth and security. He too is a victim of a sordid environment: "Dirty owd diddies scratchin' be me door, no decent vittels, no milk, an' all me own cookin' a cope with an' I 'ont 'ardly got the grip in me 'ands a gimp howd on a knife count a me cripplin'" (Sc. 6, p. 259). At a deeper level, the symbolic allusion to 'emptiness' would seem to infer the fruitlessness of cosmic questions in the search for ultimate purpose or guidance as an alternative solution to the hopeless social reality.

Scopey's failure to understand and accept the reality of his situation results in the final tragic action. We next see Scopey wearing the greatcoat and silently enacting in part Alen's early ritual and in part his own newly-acquired role. The cycle repeats itself and at the same time all is changed: "Down left there is a bundle on the floor" (Sc. 14, p. 299). The horror we begin to imagine is at once checked and heightened by the aggressive antics of the gang outside the hut. The sequence of screams, laughs, banging of tins and the pelting of stones is contained within a knockabout routine of drunken songs and crude patter:

VOICES (off).

While shepherds watch their flocks by night
A whore lay in the grass
The angel of the Lord came down
And stuck it up her pass the mustard share the salt.

The Lord above is kind
And if yoo thought of something else
You've got a dirty arse.

BYO (off). Put your boy scout 'at on an' come an' save 'er.

RON (off). She's bein' raped.

BYO (off). Don't shove till yoor 'ead a the queue.

JUNE (off). Next please. (Sc. 14, pp. 300-301)

Bond regards the use of multi-focusing ("two or more points of focus on the stage")¹⁰ as one of the most important things a dramatist can do.

Since it is a key means of contributing to the distancing process, the fact that Bond uses not only this but a mimed sequence and broad, physical humour suggests that he is concerned with guarding a certain objective response at the same time the shock registers. Further, he shifts the action quickly to Scopey and Pat's flat. Bill is fetching both of them to the pub, but Scopey is frozen in the same mimed gestures he performed in the hut. His alienation is complete.

The bizarre finale finds Scopey enveloped in his greatcoat/shroud, surrounded by "five hundred tins of food on the table and floor. [...] Only five of the tins have been opened," (Sc. 16, p. 307) and a month-old, rotting corpse on the floor. The tableau-like pantomime briefly freezes the action, projecting in the image of decay Bond's vision of a dead world presided over by a mock king whose empty hope gives the lie to the "impossible ceremony" of the spirit made flesh. As Pat rushes in, Scopey can only describe how he killed, not why:

SCOPEY. I 'oisted the flap a month back. 'Is 'ead's like a fish. [...] All silver scales. [...] I took one 'and on 'is throat an one 'eld 'im up be the 'air. (Sc. 16, p. 307)

Scopey's parodic revelation de-mystifies the cult of the absurdist

'hero'. There is no cathartic release. Scopey's violent search is self-condemning. Ironically, in the act of literally murdering the illusion, he assumes man's identity as both victim and aggressor and points the finger of guilt at man. The grotesque becomes aligned with the tragic conditions of society, not as a given of the human condition. Thus, the dim possibility of a moral universe is left open.

In Saved, the central savage act happens in full view early on in the play with such force and immediacy the impact is staggering. Bond intends the metaphor of the stoning of the baby as an indictment of a brutally aggressive society which denies love and security to the child and which perpetuates this violence on a larger scale:

Clearly the stoning to death of a baby in a London park is a typical English understatement. Compared to the 'strategic' bombing of German towns it is a negligible atrocity, compared to the cultural and emotional deprivation of most of our children its consequences are insignificant (Author's Note, pp. 310-311).

If the political metaphor is to work, the dramatic mode must not be altogether naturalistic.

By setting the play in the South London factory district (a 'desert of red bricks'), Bond achieves some distancing from the North London environment of his childhood. Further, the language is in lower-class dialect. Yet on the surface, Saved seems a grimy Zolaesque drama of social deprivation. One encounters a loveless household in which the parents have not spoken for years; the daughter brings home strange men and drugs an unwanted baby with aspirin in a desperate attempt to have a quiet bed for an erstwhile lover who wants nothing to do with her; an uninvited boarder stays because there's nowhere better to go; a gang of street toughs escape from hateful work and amuse themselves with

thoughts of cheap sex and violent fantasies which culminate in the sickening scenario of stoning a baby to death.

Before considering William Gaskill's production for the Royal Court Theatre in 1965 which aimed for a 'near-realistic' approach, it is interesting to note two opposite approaches. Richard Prowse's set for his production at the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow, 1972, looked like a futuristic super-market or laundromat, a set 'absolutely alien to human beings' (see Plate 1) which reinforced Prowse's anti-naturalistic stance that "emotive demands for sympathy...can only muddle the issue....make excuses for that sort of behaviour...condone it."¹¹ Ronald Bryden reported on Peter Zadek's production at the Freie Volksbühne, Berlin, 1968, which "distanced the play's violence by many of the same Noh-ish devices Bond uses in Narrow Road:"¹²

The cast sit ringing the stage throughout the evening, coming forward in twos and threes to play the precise vignettes of working-class deprivation. The famous baby is played by a doll presiding pinkly in their midst....the play emerges with even more delicate savagery than it did in London.¹³ (See Plate 2.)

There is a chilling quality to Bond's work which lends itself to an abstract approach. Characters do not express their feelings directly. We never learn what happens between scenes. Bond elaborates upon the significance of this episodic treatment of character:

given this character, what situations can I choose that will bring out what is significant and important about those characters. The idea that a character produces himself [is] the Shakesperian idea [and] I don't think it's true....

What one sees is not a character going from a to b to c, but a character whom we see from point a, then from point b.¹⁴

This emphasis upon context rather than upon traditional character build-

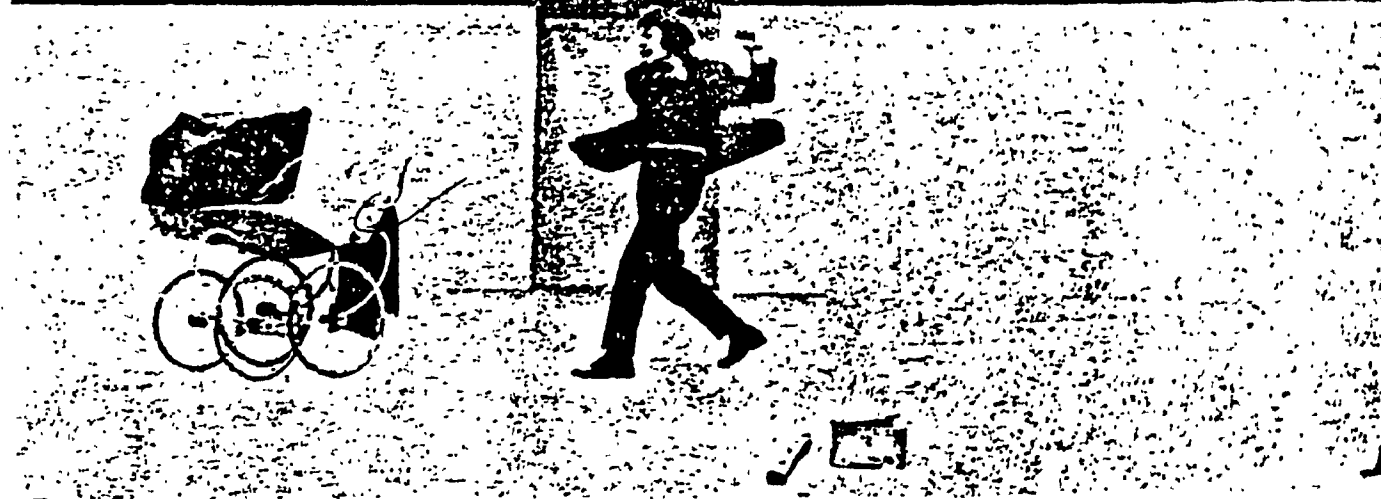


Plate 1



Plate 2

up demands a similar shift on the part of the actor towards, in Gaskill's words, a playing of "the psychology of the moment."¹⁵ The new acting approach becomes crucial to the distancing process. The audience is required to think in terms of relating the character to "point a," then "point b," or, to quote actress and director Jane Howell, to "put the string through the beads."¹⁶ A further aid to distancing is the blocking of the play. Bond attaches great importance to the 'sculptural placing' of his characters, and, given a wide enough stage, there is the overall impression of the terrible separatedness of people as though one were viewing from outer space strange, alien creatures perversely communicating through an abrasive bodily language but without really touching ground at all excepting in moments of severe violence. The danger with a too stylized approach, however, is that theatre becomes overly ritualistic and loses its dynamic immediate connection with reality. Bond sees the essential function of the theatre as its social aspect; characters and audience share in the mutual responsibility of what it is to be human.

Since Gaskill worked closely with Bond on Saved, we may assume that his more naturalistic approach is closer to Bond's intent. In early interviews, Bond admitted he strove for verisimilitude and although emotional involvement was not the important thing, it was an essential prelude to accurate judgement. Thus, the interminable-crying of the baby while everyone else remains locked in his or her miserable orbit in the scene prior to the stoning is meant to be intolerable. For Bond, there is an emotional 'seeing' as well as an intellectual one. At the same time as the scene grates on one's nerves, he would have us understand how people whose emotional lives are so dessicated because

their existence is meaningless and empty beyond a brute survival level, can reduce an infant to an object whose cries are no more than the sounds of "a cat stuck up a chimney." The tragic irony then is the killing of a baby which in their minds is little more than an object. And it is easier to kill if the enemy is seen as dehumanized.

At the same time that Bond invites a measure of emotional involvement, he attempts to incorporate non-realistic devices. The scenes building up to the stoning ask to be taken as grim play-lets in the manner of music-hall 'turns'. In Scene One, Pam is intent on seducing Len who fidgets and fusses and finds all manner of excuses because Pam's father, who momentarily pokes his head in, is thought to be behind the door. The abortive preamble to sex is punctuated with vicious jokes taunting the old man as though he were having his jollies vicariously:

LEN calls:

'ave a toffee!

PAM. Oo-oo 'ave a toffee!

LEN. Tried that mint with the 'ole in it?

PAM. 'Ave a toffee.

LEN. What about the ol' dolly mixture? - Will 'e give yer a ruckin'?

PAM. Ain' got the nerve.

LEN (calls). Nosey ol' gander.

They laugh. (Sc. 1, p. 28)

The brief lyric duet which Len and Pam enact in a large rowing boat on a bare stage is broadly played out to the audience, interspersed with a corny song and Len's clowning about with the boatman Fred who

wants to charge extra for their "bashing" in his boat.

We are introduced to the gang's behaviour in the manner of a running series of rough, crude jokes, each member trying to outdo the other. Life is one big, ugly, violent joke. Pete was involved in running a young boy down and embellishes the incident to impress his mates:

PETE. What a carry on! 'E come runnin' round be'ind the bus. Only a nipper. Like a flash I thought right yer nasty bastard. Only ten or twelve. I jumps right down on me revver an' bang I got 'im on me off-side an' e shoots right out under this lorry comin' straight on.

MIKE. Crunch.

COLIN. Blood all over the shop.

MIKE. The Fall a the Roman Empire.

.....

COLIN., What a giggle, though. (Sc. 3, p. 38)

Barry has one better:

BARRY. I done blokes in. [] More'n you 'ad 'ot dinners. In the jungle. Shootin' up the yeller-niggers. An' cut 'em up after with the ol' pig-sticker. Yeh, (Sc. 3, p. 39)

Or they improvise other charades:

COLIN. It was in the park, yer 'onour!

MIKE. This girl come up t'me.

COLIN. An' drags me in the bushes.

BARRY. Yer 'onour.

He laughs.

COLIN. I knew she was thirteen.

MIKE. But she twisted me arm.

COLIN. An' 'er ol' dad'd bin bashin' it off for years. (Sc. 3, p. 41)

Paradoxically, this style of coarse physical humour requires some form of role-distancing on the part of the actors if the humour is to get through and yet it is the most aggressively provocative way to establish direct, vital contact with the audience, uncomfortably implicating the spectators in the stage events. The comedian can manipulate his audience, rocking it back and forth as though it were on a frantic see-saw. If the distancing succeeds, the violence will come as a surprise as much to the characters as to the audience.

The stoning scene begins in a quietly deceptive manner. Len and Fred are fishing in a pond in the park. The traditional associations with natural tranquility, contentment, innocence and security establish an idyllic framework heightened by the everyday occurrence of a mother taking her baby out for an evening stroll. Ominous notes subtly cast their darkening shadows. Bond's irony is lethal. Len really wants to know the secret of Fred's sexual prowess; Pam now desperately wants Fred at any price and abandons the pram in a fit of despair. The hour is already late and past the infant's bedtime. The park is about to close - a typical British park hemmed in by tall gates with warning bells to announce the hour of closure.

The pram becomes inadvertently the object of mindless horsing about:

MIKE. Don't stick your ugly mug in its face!

PETE. It'll crap itself t' death.

.....

BARRY. [.] I'm like a bloody uncle t' the kids round our way.

(He pushes the pram.) Doo-dee-doo-dee-doo-dee. (Sc. 6, p. 72)

Up to a certain point, Bond maintains a taut control balancing the aggressive play with a second point of focus as Mike and Fred are placed

down left, and "heard talking in their corner" about housewives in laundromats as the night's sexual possibility; Pete and Colin are "right" while Barry sings a perverse lullaby swinging the pram back and forth (see Plate 3):

BARRY.

Rock a bye baby on a tree top. [.]
And down will come baby and cradle and tree
an' bash its little brains out an' dad'll scoop
'em up and use 'em for bait. (Sc. 6, p. 73)

Ironically, the action turns vicious when Pete "touches" Barry, as if he were making a pass at him. The violent dance exercises its own precise rhythm, with the rise and fall of each punch and stab, hitting and pulling the baby's hair, throwing its diaper into the air to the accompaniment of the gang's groans, grungy jokes and wild laughter. But the humour suddenly turns grotesque as they realize the baby is blinded by its own excrement which they had jokingly smeared over its face. There is a momentary eerie silence and the tone shifts to a murderous quiet:

BARRY. Might as well enjoy ourselves.

PETE (quietly). Yer don't get a chance like this everyday.
(Sc. 6, p. 79)

As sickening as the action of stoning the baby is, Bond still attempts to guard a certain objectivity at the same time intending the violence to hurt. While Colin and Mike are frantically running around looking for more stones, Mike and Pete liken themselves to participants in a game of fun and chance:

MIKE. Stick it up the fair!

PETE. Liven 'Ampstead 'eath! Three throws a quid! Make a packet.

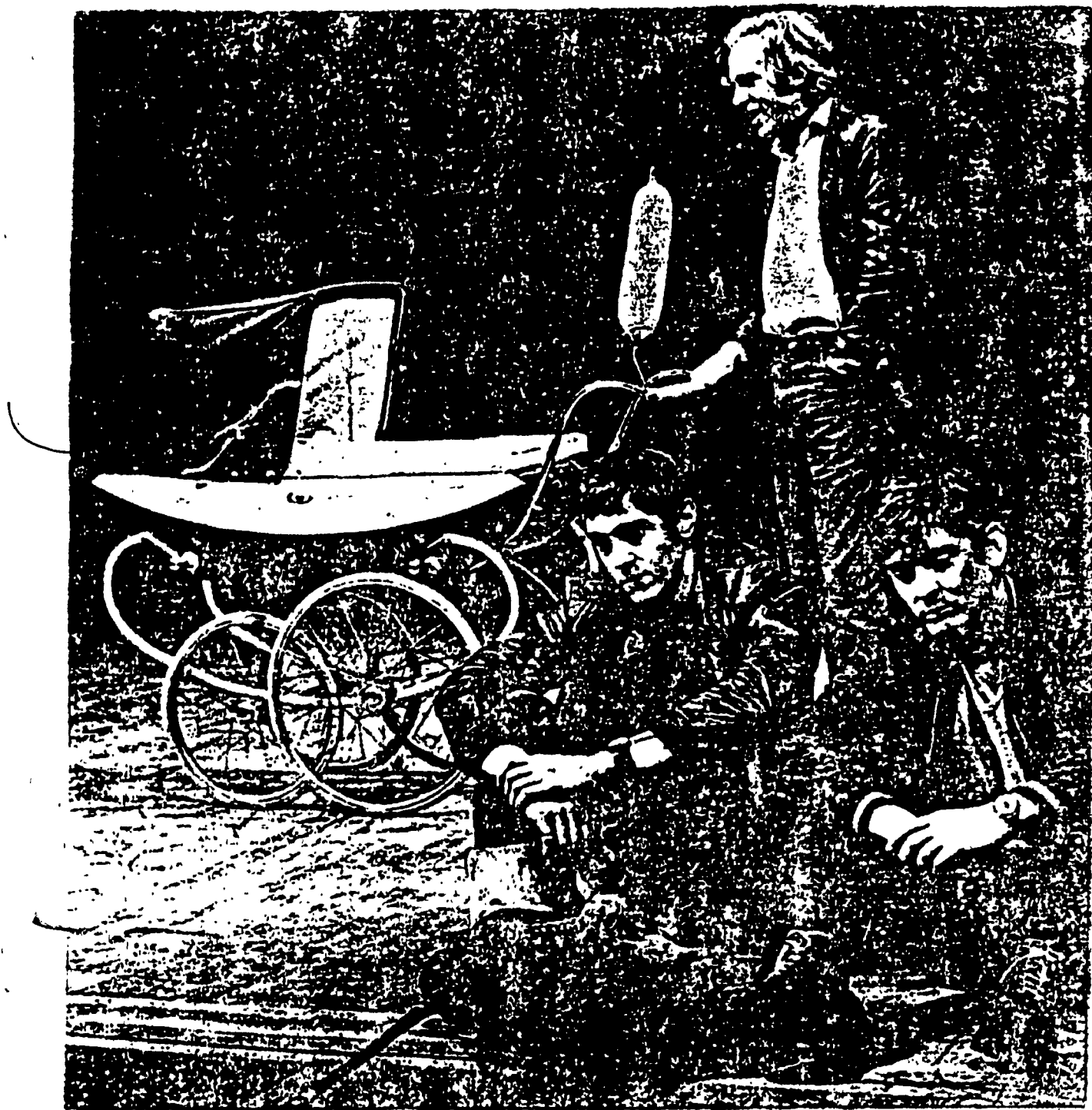


Plate 3

MIKE. (throws a stone). Ouch! (Sc. 6, p. 80)

But the 'game' gets out of control and something else takes over. A curious 'buzzing' sound mixes with the clang of the park bells as the gang scrambles to get out but not before Barry manages one more stone, one "piss," one final "hack" at the pram. Even more disturbing is the return of Pam who croons to the dead baby in a pathetic child-like sing-song without even looking in the pram. Bond returns us to 'normal' living with terribly cruel dramatic irony.

It is not difficult to understand the charges of gratuitous sensationalism brought against Bond. The violence is unmotivated and the killers seem to get a vicarious thrill out of it. This, of course, is precisely the problem Bond wishes to pose to the audience. In juxtaposing a distanced mode with graphic violence in minute, grisly detail, Bond intended perhaps a neutralizing effect. Apparently, he was unprepared for the force of his aggro-effect to eclipse the total meaning of the play, let alone for it to alienate his audience to the extent that it might lose all interest in trying to understand the metaphor. What hurt most was the accusation that he took relish in his own violence. His own moral integrity was at stake--a supreme irony since Bond is a moralist above everything else. He admitted to Tony Coult that he felt as though "he had been kicked to death"¹⁷ which, again with cruel irony, was precisely how many in his audience felt. This scene in Saved has been, in many ways, Bond's Achilles' heel, continuing to plague him with questions as to his intent, the meaning of the play, and his craft. In 1976 he maintained:

No.... [It] shouldn't be too realistic. That's bad. No, the play should open out all the while, so one has a feeling of

the society outside.... [The play] shouldn't be shut up in a room on stage.¹⁸

Of his aggro-effect, he has said:

[It is necessary to show] it in all its horrible detail, so that the audience can't apply their immediate response to it.... [maybe] a much more violent response to it, but then you can analyse it out.¹⁹

If I write a play and some people are very upset and rush out screaming, that is their right. Perhaps six months later they will have changed their view about the play. I've tried to tell...the truth....And that--the truth--presumably has some moral value in this society. If it doesn't, then...the theatre of rationalism has no meaning.²⁰

Unfortunately, when an audience feels its senses are being assailed and its deepest sensibilities attacked, it either recoils in horror or reels in disgust. Bond was pleased when a few critics viewed the effect of the mob as a 'chorus effect', and Gaskill took great pains, apparently, to maintain the necessary control:

I have seen the scene in rehearsal and performance get out of hand, actors become possessed, become genuinely sadistic; rehearsed control has to be so rigid....I always work for the thing to be as clinically accurate as possible. I suppose that is partly a legacy from the influence of Brecht. When you have a thing...which is extremely accurately written, the text has to be extremely precisely played, even in the moments of extreme violence. And the orchestration has to be exactly right. And in working like that, what comes out is bound to be very controlled.²¹

At the same time, he was especially concerned that the killing be believable. At a teach-in on Saved, Gaskill explained how, paradoxically, a "greater effect" could be achieved by incredible restraint in the acting (rather than an emotive method-acting) for the violent scene. But I think Ronald Bryden correctly assessed the true response:

I would have said that this scene was offered...as spectacle for an audience to...think about...[but] audiences became involved instead of thinking.... [This] scene unintentionally became a ritual....²²

Artaud wanted to return theatre to its ritualistic origins by way of a connection between spectacle and cruelty:

The theater is the only place in the world, the last general means we still possess of directly affecting the organism and, in periods of neurosis and petty sensuality like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking this sensuality by physical means it cannot withstandAt first by crude means which will gradually be refined....Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible....It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theater must be rebuilt.²³

Artaud looked to the stylized movements of the Oriental theatre as the means by which to enact this form of ritual. Ultimately, the audience was to feel purged in a way similar to modern psycho-drama. Bond, however, wants none of this. In courting violent ritual within a quasi-naturalistic drama, he risks involving the audience in a psychopathological way rather than in terms of deep incisive social awareness.

The key scenes which follow the stoning trace the consequences of the murder within a series of rooms--Fred's prison cell, the desultory flat, a cheap cafe. The interest is largely psychological. Len visits Fred in prison and admits to having watched the stoning and either was unwilling or incapable of stopping it. Fred is ready to lie his way out of the whole thing and is incensed at the angry mob outside the prison who spat on him as he entered. Len almost becomes involved in a seduction scene with Pam's mother Mary as he tries to mend her stocking. This in turn acts as a catalyst to an ugly row between Mary and her husband Harry, ironically their first words in twenty years. And this

incident is violent in its own right as Mary, with the full force of years of pent-up frustrations and rage, brandishes a tea-pot at him. Pam's despair is hysterical and although Bond intends us to see all her actions as monstrous, there is something pathetic about this empty, needy child-woman. Len is involved in the row and narrowly resists taking the butcher-knife to the old man. Out of all this squalor, however, Harry begins to talk to Len and persuades him to stay. The final mimed action of Len mending the chair is for Bond "an act of moral integrity."²⁴ Given the situation, it takes more courage to stay and try to salvage something of value rather than run away.

/ If the "Oedipus, atavistic fury fully unleashed" (Appendix, p. 310) personified by the stoning is symptomatic of a diseased society, the explosion of inner frustrations within the domestic scene presumably mirrors the personal cost. (Eventually, Bond will want us to recognize the "causes" of the disease). With this early play, however, the domestic conflict seems to erupt and give some kind of release, whether it could be labelled 'cathartic' or not. Bond's exploration of the Oedipus theme is intended, however, to have more radical ramifications. Oedipus Rex, for Bond, "isn't a play about family trouble but about the disorder in society."²⁵ Thus, Len's gestures would constitute an antidote to the traditional tragic Oedipal pattern (Len's sexual malaise, desire to help the mother, and final rapprochement with the father). This thematic consideration would justify Bond's optimistic designation of the play as "an Oedipus comedy" (Appendix, p. 311). (Perhaps Bond also intended Saved to be a positive rejoinder to The Pope's Wedding where the Oedipus theme also arises, albeit more obliquely--the hint that Alen could be Pat's father (Sc. 10, p. 279); the sense of competition

over Pat; Scopey's nurturing role and failure to resolve his identity crisis; his murder of the 'father figure'.) True, Len's restraint prevents an Oedipal conflict from utterly destroying what meagre remnants of family life remain, and this action together with his final constructive act are saving graces. But there are uneasy overtones which seem to fatally mark this family as one that is slated to perpetuate life's bottom line. Rather than signify the need and possibility of change, Len's final act seems merely to redeem man's capacity to endure.

✱ Ultimately, however, the stoning as political metaphor fails to achieve the wider resonance Bond intends, partly because the social comment is too oblique, its causal links too fragile, but principally because the distancing devices of humour, split-focus, attempted 'choric effect', music-hall 'turns' or vignettes, fail to counteract the nauseating impact of such excessive violence. Rather than see the mob as typical of what some people do when they act without restraint as Bond would have us do, we tend to dismiss them as a particular gang of street toughs; we know they exist, but we do not think of them as touching our own lives, nor do we consider that anything can be done about street violence.

Chapter Two Endnotes

- ¹ Bond, quoted in Charles Marowitz, "If a House Is on Fire and I Cry 'Fire' . . .," New York Times, 2 Jan. 1972, Sec. II, p. 1, cols. 3-4; p. 5, cols. 1-7.
- ² Eric Bentley, The Theatre of Commitment (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 215.
- ³ Bond, interviewed by the editors, "Drama and the Dialectics of Violence," Theatre Quarterly, 2 (Jan.-Mar. 1972), 5.
- ⁴ Ibid., pp. 5-6.
- ⁵ Tony Coult, The Plays of Edward Bond (London: Methuen, 1977) p. 73.
- ⁶ Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 360-361.
- ⁷ All parenthetical, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, Plays: One Saved, Early Morning, The Pope's Wedding (London: Methuen, 1977).
- ⁸ Coult, p. 13.
- ⁹ Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Bond: A Study of his Plays (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 23.
- ¹⁰ Edward Bond, "On Brecht: A Letter to Peter Holland," Theatre Quarterly, 8 (Summer 1978), 34.
- ¹¹ Prowse, quoted in Hay and Roberts, p. 62.
- ¹² Narrow Road to the Deep North tells of the poet Basho who abandons a child by a river-bank and journeys north for enlightenment. His search ends in failure; he becomes progressively embroiled in the political struggle of Western Christian forces to overthrow the peasant dictator. He finally becomes responsible, indirectly and directly, for the atrocities at the play's end; the slaughter of innocent children, the suicide of a disciple, and the grotesque "crucifixion" of the peasant leader. Bond utilizes Orientalism in the manner of Brecht as a major distancing strategy. The scene of the massacre of children is presented in a highly stylized way. Five huge stuffed dolls, identically dressed, are taken out by soldiers to be killed; their bodies are subsequently thrown in a heap on the floor.
- ¹³ Ronald Bryden, The Observer Review (28 July 1968), p. 21.
- ¹⁴ Bond, quoted in Hay and Roberts, pp. 61 & 60.

- 15 Gaskill, quoted in Hay and Roberts, p. 61.
- 16 Howell, quoted in Hay and Roberts, p. 61.
- 17 Coult, p. 14.
- 18 Interview with Bond in Glenn Loney, "The First Cycle," Performing Arts Journal, 1 (Fall 1976), 44.
- 19 Bond, quoted in Hay and Roberts, p. 52.
- 20 Interview with Bond in Christopher Innes, "Edward Bond: From Rationalism to Rhapsody," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 23 (Summer 1979), 113.
- 21 Interview with Gaskill in Irving Wardle, "Interview with William Gaskill," Gambit, 17 (October 1970), 41.
- 22 Ronald Bryden, "Thoughts on Contemporary Theatre," New Theatre Magazine, 7 (1967), 8.
- 23 Antonin Artaud, The Theater and its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 81; 99 & 85.
- 24 Bond, quoted in Hay and Roberts, p. 55.
- 25 Ibid., p. 54.

Chapter Three:

The Mixed Mode of Early Morning

Bond would not return to the contemporary scene until The Worlds (1979), a Hitchcock-type thriller about urban terrorism, strikers and corporate life. In his next eight full-length plays he would manipulate time and space with various distancing guises--allegory, legend, "Edwardian" comedy, historical epic, Brechtian "Lehrstücke"--in order to theatricalize his political metaphors and moral dilemmas.

The first of these, Early Morning (1968), deserves a chapter in itself since it is unusual in Bond's canon. The audience gradually realizes that Arthur is the central character and everything is seen from his point of view and experience.¹ The action takes on a grotesquely bizarre and savage nightmarish quality as though it were an early morning dream from which one has to awaken because the imaginings are too horrific.² Bond apparently intends some kind of synthesis between the visionary realm and the socio/political world of experience. But the subjective element finally overwhelms any political objective.

The play opens in the dank, murky corridors of Windsor Castle where plots of treason and schemes to liquidate the unruly populace are hatched according to whim but with a shrewd eye to maintaining the facade of legality and decorum:

DISRAELI. [.] I've decided on hanging - that will emphasize our respectability. I'll keep the numbers down.

ALBERT. How many?

DISRAELI. We don't know all our enemies till we start. So far, eight hundred and thirteen.

ALBERT. Make it fourteen. People are superstitious. (Sc. 1, p. 139)³

Thus begins Bond's black charade of power politics amongst the highly-born. The leaders of the Victorian establishment dutifully appear correctly garbed with the utmost propriety--the Queen in starched frock and lace collar and the gents in morning coats. Bond proceeds to rip off their masks of civilized veneer and expose the murderous intent of the gangrenous society which they have created. During a garden party, Queen Victoria is not content to poison her husband and see him writhe in agony but strangles him with her sash. "She makes yer piss run cold," one soldier later remarks. Her lust for power is matched only by her sexual greed as she rapes Florence Nightingale after betrothing her to her Siamese twin-son George. The Royal Mafia is opposed by the people's Gladstone whose tactics include teaching with deft, ministerial aplomb the most efficient methods of butchery: "The secret is: move from the thigh an' let the weight a the tool do the work" (Sc. 8, p. 172).

As the political farce darkens, the play's central theme of twinship develops in the person of Prince Arthur, the Siamese half with the heart. George is accidentally shot and a reign of terror begins enveloped in an eerie, other-worldliness as Arthur drags first the skeleton and then the skull of his brother through the war-torn landscape. Arthur goes mad, joins Victoria's camp and plans a strategy of mass extermination. The corpses, plebian and royal, are revived in a cannibalistic "heaven" where they mutually celebrate a gruesome feast off one another's limbs. What is left of Arthur rebels in the form of a laughing head (the rest of him has been eaten), but he finally arises majestically from his coffin, mysteriously whole.

The statement, "The events of this play are true" (p. 136), prefaces the work. (One might add the events and characters are "true" in

the special sense that they function as analogs to contemporary attitudes, values and social problems.) For those who took Bond literally, however, and were shocked by his horrific attack on venerable institutions and conventional morality, it hit too close to the bone and incurred the wrath of the censors. At the same time, the savage, fantastic incidents, which occur in a pervasive, dream-turned-nightmare atmosphere, invite the surreal tag rendering them politically harmless. At least that was the opinion of Martin Esslin who reviewed the first semi-clandestine performance, directed by William Gaskill at the Royal Court:

written almost as free association, it lies half-way between dream and daydream. It is, therefore, positively inviting psychoanalysis....Nothing that is stated in the vein of fantasy can possibly threaten the foundations of real institutions....As a political pamphlet Bond's play is non-existent.⁴

Esslin recanted somewhat after a second viewing, saying " the events are true insofar as they mirror establishment politics and history as they might appear to a child...."⁵ Esslin had in mind the working-class child who could dimly fathom the language of battles and wars taught in the usual history class. Esslin stayed with his initial Freudian interpretation of the central metaphor of cannibalism as attributable to oral eroticism in the first stage of infant sexuality.

Ronald Bryden quarrelled with William Gaskill's spare Brechtian approach which is more apt for a play "making a logical statement than one trying, as this does, to impose a vision." Bryden would have preferred "more visual fantasy, and more farcical elaboration."⁶

Katherine Worth coined the term "surrealistic pantomime" to account

for the nature of the play. Thinking particularly of the "angry gleeful ghosts" of Bond's "heaven," she finds such an approach "appropriate to express a vision with so much child's directness in it"--a kind of cross between William Blake and Lewis Carroll.⁷

As varied as these responses are, they nonetheless attest to the play's theatricality. Bond is offering his spectacle, no matter how grisly, as "entertainment." But all the critics stressed the play's fantastical element, its unreality.

Bond, however, would have us understand that the conflicts and violent action unfold according to a dialectical process concerned with the freeing of Arthur in both personal and political terms,⁸ and not according to random wild images thrown up from the subconscious relating only to the intangible realm of dream and fantasy. (The play comprises twenty-one scenes. Bond suggests playing it in three or four parts, with intervals after Scenes Five, (Ten), and Fifteen. In subsequent discussions of the play, Bond distinguishes three acts: Act One (Scenes 1-5) sets forth the problems which Arthur faces; Act Two (Scenes 6-15) shows the pressures which drive him mad; Act Three (Scenes 16-21) reveals Arthur's new understanding.⁹ In my discussion of the play, I shall observe Bond's "Act" divisions.) The grotesque image of the Siamese twins is emblematic of man imprisoned personally by the false social self and by the walls of the mind closed to reality, and ~~man~~ trapped in a hollow, vicious society which perverts human potential and paralyses the will. The violent physical imagery of cannibalism is intended to function as a metaphor of man's dealings with man in a society which is slowly eating away the last shreds of human decency and churning it up into a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and ex-

plotation. Bond exclaimed in an interview: "We say 'Cannibals? God that's a primitive state,' but not at all; cannibals are much more civilised than we are, because if you eat somebody, it's some sort of magical nonsense, but it makes some sort of sense, more sense than the slaughtering holocaust that for instance I have lived through, which made no sense at all."¹⁰

In formal terms, Bond argues that "the play works not by falling under a weight of symbolism and psychology, but by telling the theatrical story of the play in terms of theatre - and then the audience will learn from it...." The director should emphasize this "theatrical learning" and not just the "theatrical experience...."¹¹

The movement towards "theatrical" learning led Bond to experiment with a much more complex and wider range of distancing techniques than the confines of naturalism allowed. After the scathing attack on Saved which seemed too "real," it is not surprising that Bond chose to work with eminently theatrical techniques in Early Morning. He wanted to be taken seriously as a dramatist and not a sensationalist nor a writer of one-level plays, and the demonstration of the techniques of his craft was one way. Stylistically, the choice of a "panto format" allowed Bond to encompass the extremely alienated mode of the comic grotesque and its compatibles--macabre humour and the vulgar comic--and at the same time to overlay it all with the patina of a nightmarish fairy-tale sprinkled with ghosts and the supernatural in order to deal with the extreme states of psychological and sociological alienation. ("Panto" also has wider socio-political implications.)¹² It also meant the appeal to a wider audience, or a newer audience comprised of the young and of the working class. And it allowed freer expression of the nausea

and contempt Bond felt for the social iniquities of the present system. It appealed, no doubt, to Bond's sense of the comic to revive something of the medieval zest of the pantomime and incorporate it into the present safe, conventional panto format in order to challenge the status quo, and profoundly question traditional morality. In general, the radical use of such popular theatre techniques in a deeply serious, committed work upends all aesthetic categories.

Further distancing techniques which are intended to reinforce the play's dualism include the use of allegory framed by parody and irony; the use of historical figures set in a quasi-mythical time which upsets initial expectations of a tidy historical farce; the use of abrupt anachronisms which frequently splice the dream world; and the "surreal" split-character device.

In adopting what he termed a "surrealist style," William Gaskill claims that

one of the essences [of surrealism] is that you use realism quite consciously. It's the juxtaposition of elements in it which is startling....If you do it realistically, then it has the quality of a dream, because things happen in a rather matter of fact way....¹³

This strange conjunction of the real and unreal is intended to serve as a convention of estrangement, or a means of confronting the audience with a startling new perspective. The incredible "fact" is refracted in the light of the phantasmagoria and terror of childhood. Time (and identity) remain fluid, open to the impossible and the marvellous, thereby enhancing the thematic purpose of the play's movement towards insight, growth and change. More subtly, the enactment of the impossible becomes the supreme theatrical gesture which serves a subversive

philosophy geared towards revolutionizing human consciousness. The problem, however, is that the emphasis is upon the intuitive grasp of reality with a concomitantly strong appeal to the emotions and imagination. It is thus a more appropriate means to convey the character's inner state than a mode which expands outwards to an objective, critical, rational understanding of the intended socio-political allegory and the underlying causes of deviant behaviour.

Bond's biting social comment is initially contained within the mood of straight farce. Albert visits Arthur in his bedchamber to persuade him to secretly join in a coup to first oust his mother and then Disraeli in a counter-revolution:

[Your Mother] should have been a prison governess. She's afraid of people. She thinks they're evil. She doesn't understand their energy. She suppresses it.... You must accept responsibility.... I'm not doing this because I hate your Mother. Hate destroys, I want to build. People are strong. They want to be used - to build empires and railways and factories, to trade and convert and establish law and order. I can't do this alone. That would be tragic. (Sc. 2, pp. 140-141)

This false rhetoric which seeks to justify coercion and exploitation in society at large is echoed in the private sphere. Bond delays the visual shock of the Siamese twins until Scene Three when the Queen delivers the royal pronouncement of the forthcoming wedding of George and Flo in order to bind the country as securely as the impregnable line of royal succession which began at Stonehenge (Sc. 3, p. 144). "Of course this will call for some slight personal adjustment. But the country must come first" (Sc. 3, p. 145), she proclaims to Arthur. Bond's mordant wit gives a satiric edge to the freakish image of grotesque coupling. This leitmotif of sexual exploitation hints at the wider public corruption and waste of human energies.

Up to this point in the play, Bond maintains a lightness of touch with the panto circus quality of broad physical effects and ludicrous grotesque. One twin wants to sit while the other insists on standing. Arthur insists that George temper his ardour for Flo: "Don't get too excited. It's bad for my heart" (Sc. 3 p. 146). The effect is bizarre enough to provide intrigue and yet funny too. The sense of George as the "socialized version" (Bond's term) of Arthur is, however, really too oblique. (One detail, for example, is that George is the one who is in secret league with his mother receiving little notes about state matters, and who dutifully complies with whatever role is assigned him.) On a more profound level, the unnatural symbiosis of the twin-children hints at a connection with the bicameral mind theory and its implications in terms of the evolving consciousness.¹⁴ Not until Arthur assumes center stage in Act Two, however, does the full import of the divided self come through.

The fantastic macabre adventure which follows, thematically linking the schizoid split of competing selves with the perversely competitive spirit amongst men, and prefiguring the giant metaphor of the last act, is presented as a gross buffonade. Queen Victoria in black hanging cap is presiding over the trial of Len and Joyce who killed and ate a man shoving ahead of them in a movie queue. Comic music-hall notes transform the macabre into the farcical. In the manner of a hen-pecked husband and wife act, Len and Joyce argue over the correct evidence:

JOYCE. [.] Well, next thing this fella's pushed up in front.
'E weren't there when we looked before, was 'e?

LEN. Never looked.

JOYCE. Don' I always tell yer count the queue in front? That
could 'ang yer.

LEN. 'E -

JOYCE. 'E crep' in with 'is 'ead in 'is paper. (Sc. 4, p. 149)

A lurid mini-melodrama ensues as the Lord Chamberlain produces a blood-stained newspaper and Joyce, after disputing the correct edition, sniffs and recognizes the dead man's blood. Finally, Len has the floor and delivers this lively gruesome monologue:

Look, we're stood outside the State for 'Buried Alive' on 'Ampstead 'Eath - right? - me gut rumbles and there's this sly bleeder stood up front with 'is 'ead in 'is paper - right? - so I grabs 'is ears, jerks 'im back by the 'ead, she karate-chops 'im cross the front of 'is throat with the use of 'er 'andbag, and down 'e goes like a sack with a 'ole both ends - right? - and she starts stabbin' im with 'er stilletes, in twist out, like they show yer in the army, an then 'e don't say no more, juss bubbles like a nipper, and I take this 'andy man-'ole cover out the gutter an drops it on 'is 'ead - right? - an the queue moves up one. (Sc. 4, p. 150)

The handling of hideous physical details by means of macabre humour played out in a broad vaudeville style sets up interesting tensions. We are invited to participate imaginatively in the horrific event as though it were happening now and yet the comic distancing strives for a certain spectator objectivity and acts as a buffer against the stark horror of cold-blooded killing or blatant sensationalism. One production noted by Katherine Worth played Len and Joyce in drag.¹⁵ Playing the comic distortion to the hilt would keep it well within the panto mode. And stylistically, (although there is no textual basis for it) this play would forge the link with the rape of Flo and the shifting of sexual identities as she subsequently appears as the Queen's "principal boy." And yet, if the incident is taken merely as outrageous farce, it acquires the element of escapism. Bond attempts to offset the imbalance of the unreal overtaking the real in various ways. The anachronism of

the reference to a modern violent movie (and other anachronisms throughout the play) are, for Bond, "like desperate facts."¹⁶ It is the "ordinariness" of the action in the eyes of the characters which affects an uneasy laughter mixed with astonishment and horror, and it is this disturbing response which should shock the viewer out of a numb response toward violence in a society where passionless crimes are as ordinary as lining up for a bus and going to a movie. The suggested social causes are harder to credit. (Katherine Worth points out that the irritations and frustrations of overcrowding in modern urban living is a particular phobia of Bond's.¹⁷) The supposed notes of "social realism" injected through the absurdly comic are hilarious in a preposterous way, but are too absurd to be believed. For example, Joyce tells her side:

I know I stripped him. I kep' 'is knickers on. I don't 'old with this rudery yer get. [.] Still, it makes a change. Yer don't know what t' get in for a bit of variety. I suppose you don't 'ave 'ouse-keepin problems. (Sc. 4, p. 150)

The intended confusion of moral sympathies is presumably compounded by the sudden serious turn. In a scuffle to separate Len and Joyce who bravely sing a moritat duet, Arthur sees they are handcuffed, a mirror to his own state of being. This dim recognition prompts him to badger Len as to why he killed. Len furiously kicks the dead man's clothes onto Arthur shouting, "I got a right a be guilty same as you." The draping of the clothes over Arthur serves, Bond claims, to implicate him (and us, the audience) in the larger social problem. Bond offers this explanation:

Arthur is legally involved in the court that tries Len. The Len who appears in Early Morning is of course the Len from Saved, and the trial...is in fact a trial of the whole play Saved, seen from Arthur's point of view, which is morally and emotionally more developed than it was when he was called Len

(in Saved)! So I meant this scene to be a deliberate looking back at the earlier play. Len - Early Morning stresses the identity between himself and Len-Arthur by kicking the dead man's clothes over Len-Arthur - trying to 'clothe' him in the murder scene off-stage - and also pointing out that most of my aggressors are also victims. So that it's appropriate they should wear the dead man's clothes.¹⁸

It is questionable whether the reader can forge these subtle links without Bond's help! But the important notion of responsibility necessarily bound up with freedom does come through. The scene closes on the chilling note of Arthur's feeling he has eaten too much and Flo's scream off stage. The image of cannibalism carries through to the sexual metaphor of a lesbian rape.

The final scene of Act One opens with the aristos' picnic, perversely appropriate after the macabre fun of "noshin it around." The prelude to the afternoon's entertainment is Flo's distraught appearance announcing dead-pan to the audience:

I'm changed. Queen Victoria raped me. I never dreamed that would happen. George will know. I'll disgust him...I've started to have evil thoughts. Her legs are covered in shiny black hairs. (Sc. 5, p. 155)

The complex responses which the satiric grotesque arouses work to wonderful effect here. It is a funnily shocking moment because of the grotesque combination of a violent, sexually charged action presented in farcical terms. The flatly written lines defuse easy psychological emotionalism and as we gasp with laughter, we feel simultaneously the horror and cruelty of Flo's predicament. The gross coherence of the images of severed limbs hacked to pieces and the devouring of human flesh and the tearing of flesh by rape (and the particular connotations of a lesbian rape) perversely enhances the theme of human beings reduced

to objects to consume at will. Flo becomes a playful pawn in the lethal game of personal aggrandizement and power politics.

In the persona of the Queen--this monstrous spider-woman who ensnares and efficiently controls all in her orbit like the insignificant flies she swats and methodically counts throughout the picnic--Bond concentrates his acid comment on the corrupt, decadent, elitist social structure. She represents at once the obscene distortion of the nurturant force of mother, family, and the civilizing forces of order and humane conduct. No wonder some critics have seen her as a modern 'Ubu Reine'.

One production which emphasized a darkly symbolic reading was Peter Stein's (Zürich, Schauspielhaus, 1969):

Victoria sat on an elaborate throne, like a tennis umpire's chair perched on a ladder, in a room of melting architectural shapes, with seemingly organic and sinisterly womblike walls. In the garden-party scene, the actors were dwarfed by a gigantic folding deck-chair extending up into the flies, which became successively a gallows, a mountain, a mausoleum.¹⁹

For one critic, this "grotesque and fantastical" setting "with distorted perspectives and surrealistic effects" produced a "hallucinatory illusion" and shifted "the play's viewpoint to inside the mad world, so that Arthur's insanity became its norm."²⁰ This interpretation would forge an easier transition to the grotesquerie of Act Two. In Bond's text, however, the sole props are the huge picnic hamper and the walkie-talkies the plebs use to periodically report, "Dead Queen to base." Again, Bond needs the distancing mechanism of the anachronism (the walkie-talkies) to have us make the connection with the "real" beyond the farcical play-world. Thus, the emphasis is on the isolated object and the action which is offered for our political judgement. A

second distancing device designed to make the audience think in terms of wider tensions is the multi-focusing of events. The mad-cap action in which several things happen at once--shoe fetishism, whispered homosexual "endearments," Albert, who is now poisoned, writhing in agony--is presented as a bawdy political burlesque, but the language is lethal. In the confused struggle to kill the Queen, George pulls Arthur towards Len's dropped pistol, while the Queen commandeers Disraeli's rifle and fumbles with the catch. Suddenly a shot rings out from within the mêlée of Arthur, George and Len. The final portrait encompasses the grotesque image of Arthur wincing with pain as George's bloodied head slumps on his shoulder; Lord Menning in the throes of death murmuring, "Shoe, Shooe, Shoooe;" the Lord Chamberlain formally bowing his exit exclaiming, "My job is to serve the head of the country. But who is the head? Uncertainty always leads to ineffectiveness. I shall go to bed for a few weeks. [.] " Disraeli has the last word, "The day's catch?" (Sc. 5, pp. 163-4), which is precisely Bond's point. Human lives are equated with the rotting carcasses of dead birds that the aristos' have killed for sport.

In Act Two, the play moves into a ghostly orbit. With George's death, Arthur believes he is finally free and falls into a deep sleep. His 'waking in the morning' launches his journey into the dark regions of the mind, a mirror of the distorted forces at work in the larger landscape. We are progressively confronted with the chilling, grotesque spectacle of George who shrinks to a "ragged epaulette" of skull and bones, and finally only bones (see Plate 4). Bond incorporates various distancing mechanisms in the attempt to make manifest the social dialectics in counterplay with the powerful illusionist elements. In the man-



Plate 4

ner of an allegorical quest, he has Arthur act as a kind of witness to the moral chaos and insanity around him. The events which he "observes" in his lonely wanderings are really more intense combinations and permutations of the incidents in Act One. And at each juncture, Bond continues to play out blacker variations of the comic pantomime which he established in the first act. For example, music-hall humour coarsens and yet gives some zest, albeit perversely, to the mob lynching scene, as well as, presumably, keeping the episode rooted in concrete, material existence. And he pulls the audience back sharply from both the ugly violence of the lynching and Arthur's increasing madness with a moment of devastating satire. Florence, who is now completely metamorphosed ("walks and talks as John Brown," [Sc. 9, p. 175]) has the Lord Chamberlain after her: "What's up that kilt? [...] I can introduce you to a lot of nice people" (Sc. 9, p. 177).²¹ But the allegorized "reality" is either too wildly surreal (Victoria resurrecting George with the power of a sorceress), or too fanciful (Flo as John Brown), or too arbitrary (Flo playing with a dangling corpse as the "first hangwoman in history" or dispensing sexual aid to dying soldiers at the front), for its effects to be felt in the real world.

Finally, the distancing elements are at complete variance with the personal mood of lyrical terror as Arthur assumes center stage alone and speaks his anguished thoughts to George, his skeleton companion, while he feeds George's bones to the starving dogs. The grotesque mad imagery, in its suggestive appeal to the emotions and imagination, dominates for the remainder of the Act:

I know I gave your clothes away! They were beggars! They'd

been fighting. They were cold. [...] We'll take turns to sleep. [...] (Softly.) Don't stare. [...] Is it someone we know? [...] (ARTHUR has accidentally uncovered LEN's face. His features are blurred. His hair is plastered. He doesn't grin. His eyes are shut. ARTHUR turns and starts to walk back to his box. He stops. LEN has spoken to him.) [...] Could we sit with you? [...] It's nice to hear some intelligent conversation. (He looks at GEORGE. In tears.) [...] I pretend he hears because I'm lonely. [...] I'm a limited person. I can't face another hungry child, a man with one leg, a running woman, an empty house. [...] I don't like maimed cows, dead horses, and wounded sheep. I'm limited. [...] I talk too much - D'you dream? - So do I. D'you dream about the mill? There are men and women and children and cattle and birds and horses pushing a mill. They're grinding other cattle and people and children: they push each other in. Some fall in. It grinds their bones, you see. The ones pushing the wheel, even the animals, look up at the horizon. They stumble. Their feet get caught up in the rags and dressing that slip down from their wounds. They go round and round. At the end they go very fast. They shout. Half of them run in their sleep. Some are trampled on. They're sure they're reaching the horizon Later I come back. There's a dust storm. White powder everywhere. I find the mill and it's stopped. The last man died half in. (Sc. 11, pp. 184-5).

This horrific vision of the pending holocaust, linked with the vicious wheel of exploitation by which men justify their existence, is one of Bond's most telling poetic images.²² Profound despair spawns the illogic of nihilism. The inner schism widens until it finds its perverse expression in the ultimate political solution. Arthur, (still attached to George, but "a leg, an arm and half the ribs are gone" [Sc. 12, p. 188]), assumes the responsibility of becoming the great traitor and plans the most grotesque game of all. Hitler's vision was limited; he killed only one side (Sc. 12, pp. 186-187). Man's new weapon of consciousness can do one better. The mass suicide is presented as a bitter pantomime--a savage indictment of ritualized violence. Arthur's tug-of-war has Victoria's side and his own positioned at opposite edges of a precipice. At a given signal, Victoria's side drops the rope causing the other side to collapse. Human nature being what it is, Victoria and her men rush forward to witness the destruction only to be

decimated in turn as the precipice gives way. As Arthur descends the cliff and prepares to commit suicide himself, one notes that "he has lost the skull, but the bones are still on his shoulder" (Sc. 15, p. 195). Suddenly, a line of ghosts in black cowls is seen to move towards him. Seized with terror, he shoots himself only to realize the ghosts are fastened together, "like a row of paper, cut-out men." He screams out, "No! That's a lie! No! I killed you! You're free!

[.....] O god! The pit! The pit! Give them the kiss of life! Him! Him! (Sc. 15, pp. 195-6). It is a powerful moment, made even more disturbing by the grotesquely macabre sight of Arthur struggling to breathe a kiss of life into a dead man's mouth and wetting his hand on his head to give blood to the corpse. Even more horrible, George is suddenly seen to refasten himself to Arthur. We are left with Arthur's eerie, low moans, "No. No. No. No. No" (Sc. 15, p. 196). Thus, the pivotal point of the play's turning action is Arthur's intuitive, emotional grasp of reality revealed to him in the state of supreme madness. Bond sees "society as a wilderness inhabited (I should say haunted) by ghosts in chains."²³

Act Three, which is set in "heaven," addresses itself to a utopian alternative dimly hinted at by means of theatrical irony and grotesque parody. And it is in the final act that Bond makes extraordinary demands on the audience in both emotional and intellectual terms. The sudden shock of cannibalism literally enacted is such a gross assault on the senses and nerves that one reels in revulsion:

LEN runs downstage carrying a leg. It is torn off at the thigh and still wears its sock and shoe. The stump is ragged and bloody. LEN chews it. The crowd fight round him like sparrows.
(Sc. 16, p. 199) (See Plate 5.)



Plate 5

The excessively graphic depiction combined with Arthur's intensely felt moral crisis is so unnerving that it becomes almost cruel in an Artaudian sense and fights Bond's intent to transcend Artaud's submission to the "cruelty and darkness" of freedom.

Whether the principal distancing strategies which Bond offers, namely the radical juxtaposition of the disparate modes of macabre humour, parody, and the surreal, ensure sufficient leverage to balance the enormities presented depends, to some extent at least, on the production approach and on the viewer's tolerance of horror. Gaskill agreed with actor Jack Shepherd who described the third act as "pure Magritte": "it's absolutely true - strange things, like somebody holding a leg or an arm; and the thing is very cold like Magritte. It isn't sensual, it's rather a clinical quality."²⁴ Ruby Cohn has written of Bond's "comic brilliance" in this play, terming it a "diabolically comic fable."²⁵ But the violent enjambling of such a crude means to concretize the metaphor together with a macabre humour so perverse as to border on the sick, lead to Arthur's tormented cry, "O, God let me die" (Sc. 16, p. 199).

The problem is that Bond is juggling so many levels of reality through such extremely incongruent theatrical philosophies and modes. The image of man condemned to perpetuate the living death he had initiated on earth suggests a tragic view of life. To deny the roots of community is to be left with sheer need and hunger beyond any human quality. Bond needs the conjunction of the comic element to suggest a view of life contingent upon social reality. One is expected to digest, at the moment of the immediate emotional impact, the notes of savage irony. In this "heaven" that Victoria pronounces clean, good and just,

all are seemingly treated as equals--Len has moved to the top of the queue, and Victoria prides herself on her "common touch"--"Put the nosh on the lid, boys" (Sc. 21, p. 222).

At the same time a counter-movement forms in the vision of Arthur's rebellion, and a strange, haunting beauty shines through the horror, pulling in the opposite mood to the goulsh antics. In Scene Twenty, for example, Victoria is looking for Arthur's head which is cozily ensconced under Florence's skirt. The play veers between Arthur's touching poetry which evokes surreally an erotically charged universe, and Florence's "smacks...wriggles, grimaces" and grotesquely comic walk:

ARTHUR. ... They've cut off my body - but I'm alive. I could make love to you now. I can feel it. Hard.

.....

I'm like a fire in the sea or the sun underground. I'm alive.

.....

Kiss me! Lift my head in your hands and hold it in your mouth, then it will be all right.

.....

VICTORIA. You don't just lose a head.
(Sc. 20, pp. 215-216)

Flo, egged on by Victoria to do jumping exercises to relieve her headache, stumbles backwards and falls over the picnic hamper. The stage directions read:

([] She falls with her feet in the air. VICTORIA sees the head between her legs. She grasps FLORENCE's legs and holds them up. She twists her head round so that it is in line with ARTHUR's head.) (Sc. 20, p. 218).

George screams, "Meat!" (Sc. 20, pp. 218-19) and "puts the head under his jacket" and "runs upstage."²⁶ One is reminded of the macabre but funny popular British song, "With her head tucked underneath her arm/ She walked the bloody tower." Similarly, the final image of Victoria

extracting the iron fillings of her teeth to nail down the coffin of her rebellious charge is hilarious in a hideous way. Depending upon a variety of factors, either the terrible and the comic are held in mutual tension or the comic distancing is grossly at odds with the major visionary element and Bond's profoundly subversive moral intent. We are, at the peak moment of high farce, to understand how Arthur's movement towards freedom is ironically theatricalized in the image of his laughing head. In an earlier version, the head was graphically described by Flo: "There are blacklines round your eyes and mouth. Your skin looks like cloth" (Sc. 20, pp. 108-109).²⁷ The visual signs which Bond has depicted in careful stage directions throughout Acts Two and Three (the gradual "whittling down" of George to skull and bones, suggesting in an ironic inversion Arthur's growth towards wholeness and climaxing in his reduction to a voice)²⁸ now cohere into a strangely disturbing image of the birth of a reified consciousness at once primitive and futuristic. (George bites twice into the head, and each time Arthur "laughs loudly" [Sc. 20, pp. 218-219]). The moment that George runs back in with the head "half-eaten" (Sc. 20, p. 219), he feels no more pain and is, thereby, happily reconciled to Victoria's lobotomized "civilization"--its dictates of social control, and its supposed ultimate reward. Thus, this vision, together with Arthur's final "resurrection," silhouetted against the perversely parodic spectacle of the "Last Supper," and the image of Florence off to one side shedding her first tear, envisage man's claim to a freedom of the will, the imagination and the spirit. Man's true spiritual element lies not in redemption or salvation as in the sweet fairy-tale land of Victorian pantomime, but in the imaginative capacity to envisage change, a sur-

realistic capacity which is both terrifying and marvellous. The close is not cathartic; rather, it is profoundly disquieting. The sense of true freedom, of necessity, involves the pain of life which demands responsibility for one's fellow man.

Chapter Three Endnotes

¹ Bond, quoted in "A Discussion with Edward Bond," Gambit, 17 (October 1970), 15.

² There are varying explanations of the title. Bond obviously intends early "mourning" puns. Hay & Roberts gloss the development in Arthur as a change from a "premature mourning" vision in Scene 11 to his "early morning" in Sc. 21 (Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Bond: A Study of his Plays (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 76-77). Or, Victorian England is our early morning from which we are "still awaking" (Arthur Arnold, "Lines of Development in Bond's Plays," Theatre Quarterly, 2 (Jan.-Mar. 1972), 17).

³ All parenthetical, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, Plays: One Saved, Early Morning, The Pope's Wedding (London: Methuen, 1977).

⁴ Martin Esslin, "A Bond Honoured," Plays and Players, 15 (June 1968), 26.

⁵ Martin Esslin, "First Nights," Plays and Players, 16 (May 1969), 25.

⁶ Ronald Bryden, "Bond in a Wild Victorian Dreamland," The Observer Review (16 March 1969), p. 26.

⁷ Katherine Worth, Revolutions in Modern English Drama (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1972), p. 175.

⁸ Bond's reply to Arthur Arnold, Theatre Quarterly, p. 105.

⁹ Bond, quoted in Gambit, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹ Bond, quoted in Bond: A Study of his Plays, pp. 83-84.

¹² Historically, panto derives from the medieval harlequinade, noted for his fantastic acrobatic skills, bizarre and grotesque countenance, and mimed scurrilous social comment incurring the censure of the moralists. Traces of the harlequin found their way into the music-hall. By the Victorian reign, serious and popular drama were separated out by law. Patrons of the halls could drink and enjoy, but the performers were censured to keep their acts strictly to mime or song--acts which featured tilts at Royalty, grotesque parodies of legal procedures, lurid mimed melodramas, cockney comedians singing of unjust hangings, political burlesque, coarse vigorous clowning, and sexual skits in travesty. By 1912, the music-halls came under the Lord Chamberlain's Act allowing the spoken word, subject to strict censorship. By this time, the Christmas pantomime for children was established, having considerably altered from medieval times, and featuring startling visual effects,

extravagant action, and a fairy-tale atmosphere of beauty and horror combining to reinforce the traditional notions of good and evil, reward and punishment. Bit by bit, performers from the halls were invited to participate in the panto entertainment providing their acts were tidied up. Or, they performed in the actual pantomime often in travesty. For many a respectable Victorian and later Edwardian, this meant the only time they saw music-hall performers.

¹³ Gaskill, quoted in Bond: A Study of his Plays, p. 84.

¹⁴ Bond's view of human nature is in large part biological. He suggests that the origin of aggressive behaviour may be traced to the 'new brain split' or the "modern weapon of consciousness" which man as yet has not learned to use effectively: "The thing about a human being is that one develops a mind that ought to see the inefficiency, but we are so split up against ourselves, our minds, and emotions and the rest of it are so divided that we behave worse than the animals." See the discussion between Bond, and Irving Wardle in particular, in Gambit, pp. 12-13 and pp. 26-27.

In The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), Julian Jaynes attempts a historical accounting of the breakdown of the 'bicameral mind' (or, the once harmonious synchronization of the primitive and divine which characterized Mycenaean man.) The modern split begins with the evolution of Greek consciousness, and continues to evolve. In contemporary neurological terms, the mind-split is characterized by the division of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. The right side is now considered to be more creatively, spatially and visually oriented, while the left is more analytically geared. According to Jaynes, it is the right side which links back to the ancient source of divine authority in man. He substantiates his thesis with examples, both negative and positive, of this vestigial consciousness--poetic imagination, prophetic intuition, sorcery, schizophrenic hallucinations, to name but a few.

¹⁵ Worth, p. 175.

¹⁶ Bond, quoted in Bond: A Study of his Plays, p. 55.

¹⁷ Worth, p. 174.

¹⁸ Bond, quoted in "A Letter to Irene, 7 January 1970," reprinted in part in Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Edward Bond: A Companion to the Plays (London: TQ Publications, 1978), p. 43.

¹⁹ Christopher Innes, "The Political Spectrum of Edward Bond: From Rationalism to Rhapsody," Modern Drama, 25 (June 1982), 196.

²⁰ Innes, p. 196.

²¹ Gaskill omitted both this scene and the scene with Flo at the front. He further deleted Arthur's major speech which opens Scene 11,

and reversed Scenes 7 and 8. Thus, certain elements of the 'fantastic' are downplayed, or excised--the sense of a ghost-like atmosphere introducing Act Two; Flo in drag; the acute pathos of Arthur's inner state expressed in the mill-speech.²² This would seem to indicate an attempt on Gaskill's part to encourage a more analytical response. See Hay & Roberts's discussion of the cuts in Bond: A Study of his Plays, pp. 85-86, and the Playscript version: Edward Bond, Playscript 18 Early Morning (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968).

* 22 cf. William Blake, "MILTON": "And was Jerusalem builded here/
Among these dark Satanic mills?"

23 Bond, quoted in Bond: A Study of his Plays, p. 43.

24 "Interview with William Gaskill," Gambit, 17 (October 1970), 41.

25 Ruby Cohn, "Modest Proposals of Modern Socialists," Modern Drama, 25 (December 1982), 462.

26 In the Playscript version, the farcical recovery of the head was presented in a more vulgar way. George staggers towards Flo and begins to sniff her: "(He sniffs down the front of her dress. He drops on his knees. He sniffs her skirt loudly.) Meat! (He lifts the skirt and snatches out ARTHUR's head.)," p. 113.

27 Playscript, pp. 108-109.

28 Bond, quoted in Gambit, pp. 16-17.

Chapter Four:

Tragi-comic Inversions in The Swing and The Sea

Bond followed Early Morning with Narrow Road to the Deep North, a grim parable on the nature of power. Both Narrow Road to the Deep North (1968) and its re-write, The Bundle (1978),¹ assume the obvious distanced mode of orientalism much in the manner of Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle. As such, they exhibit the extreme form of abstraction in Bond's corpus where characters clearly adopt a functional style of role-playing, and both characters and events represent certain social and political forces.

Narrow Road to the Deep North combines orientalism with comic distortion. The play's launching point was inspired by a true incident in the life of the 17th century poet-priest Matsuo Basho who abandons a starving infant by a river-bank in order to travel North in search for enlightenment. Basho returns from his empty journey and becomes an accomplice on the side of imperialist Christian forces waging war against the peasant-tyrant Shogo (perhaps the abandoned child or perhaps another such victim). The "West" is typified by Georgina, a caricatured blend of a tambourine-thumping Salvation Army prosyletizer and an iron lady who rules by morality, and her simpleton husband, a British Commodore. In contrast, Shogo admits honestly to rule by atrocity. With brutally savage irony, the play's close finds Basho in command leading a frenzied mob through the streets while a huge placard shows Shogo's hideously mutilated body. This image is juxtaposed with the sight of a young disciple to whom Basho had refused religious counsel, committing hara-kiri, and Georgina who imagines she is about

to be raped, kneeling to God. As with Early Morning, the problem with too stylized a theatricalism is that the play's force is not felt in real enough terms. Secondly, the symbolic presence of the lone figure who emerges from the water at the play's end is overwhelmed by the pessimism of the overall climax.

But in two serious comedies, The Swing (1976) and The Sea (1973), Bond attempts a middle distance by way of a new tension between the real and unreal and between the tragic and comic response.

The Swing is the only play in which Bond dramatizes documented horror within a popular theatrical format. Bond's starting point was the occasion in 1911 when in Livermore, Kentucky, spectators paid to lynch on the vaudeville stage a black man accused of murder. One's immediate response is stunned disbelief that such an incident could have actually occurred--that either Bond availed himself of poetic license or, at the very least, adhered to John Grierson's definition of documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality."² Bond, however, has done his homework and is justified in utilizing such a horrendous moment in American history as the catalyst for his play.³ In Bond's radical defamiliarization of events, the historical incident is inverted so that a white man is lynched by a white audience, and a black man acts as M.C.: "the more you paid the better you sat, [...P]eople in the pricey seats got to empty their revolvers into the man. People in the gallery got one shot" (Sc. 1, p. 23).⁴ In announcing the plot at the outset, Paul foils the audience into expecting that a black man will be executed. He further serves as the play's moral commentator: "One day your people are gonna lynch each other in the gutter over a drop dime" (Sc. 1, p. 29).⁵

The vaudeville convention is initially incorporated into the realistic background of events. Mrs. Kroll, an aging vaudeville comedienne, is about to give her last show. The theatre is to be sold to the pointedly named Skinner, the typical frontier boom-town entrepreneur who smells the quick dollars to be made by converting the theatre into a shop selling high-class goods. Skinner also happens to run the town's vigilante group, the Citizen's Committee of Justice Riders. His glib rhetoric of law and order scarcely conceals a seething racial hatred and could serve as a forerunner of The Klansman's demented rationale. Appropriately, he later serves as M.C. to whip the audience into a frenzy before they are allowed to shoot. A sub-plot concerns Mrs. Kroll's innocent daughter Greta who is sexually repressed to the point of near-madness and imagines that she has been raped, before she finally does go mad. Events escalate with the burning and looting of Skinner's store, and the assault on Skinner.

Suddenly, Bond attempts a complete turn-about and has the vaudeville format assert itself as a theatrical artifice which he then manipulates towards exceedingly cruel effects. At this point, chickens are heard squawking offstage while Mrs. Kroll frantically pleads with her daughter not to run in the street in her nightdress. The play's director had this comment to make:

It needs a company with copper-bottomed confidence to play a high tragedy scene, to get it to work, and then progressively to break it apart and say "laugh at us." For a performer to do that is to risk a great deal.⁶

Whether the actors are successful or not, the "farce" seems such an obvious and arbitrarily imposed theatrical trick that the dramatic credibility gained thus far is deliberately lost. Bond needs this sud-

den shift to "pure farce" in order to show that "these people aren't caught up in the unalterable course of a tragedy; [...] they are only figures in a historical farce." He wants the lynching to clearly "depend on the absence, at that moment, of human responsibility - not the unalterable hand of fate."⁷

In the same way, Bond needs the clown in the lynching scene to be "just a funny clown." The premise is that once comic distancing occurs, the effect will then be "much more dangerous (and funny)"⁸ at the same time, implying that if this were real, the consequences for society would be horrendous. The scene begins on a cruel note. Fred is tied to a swing--its traditional associations of childhood and innocence savagely upended by the fearsome irony of the situation--while the audience within the play is heard to sing a rousing chorus of "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze." As with all Bond's plays, the obliqueness of his titles forms part of his approach to distance. The audience is challenged to think dialectically in terms of the title's connective links with the play's argument. The clown's props include a water pistol, and of course, the human fodder bound to the swing. His bits of funny business alternate between running around the stage looking for girls through the "sights" of his gun, squirting water at his armpits, his groin and inside his trousers causing a gush to spiral forth, and finally at Fred. The mixture of sexual titillation and crude clown play has the stage audience, at least, roaring while the clown's hysteria runs its own manic course. The shots from the spectators are at first isolated, and then "escalate [...] into a disorderly volley":

(FRED spins, twists, jerks, screams. Blood spurts. Lights snap to half, flicker out, come on immediately at full, fade, come back to full, cut out for a second, flash, come back to half,

snap up to full. [...] SKINNER runs to the swing, pushes it, runs back shaking blood from his hands. [...] Blood drips and swishes over the stage.) (Sc. 3, pp. 42-43)

Skinner brings the evening's entertainment to an orderly close as all sing the American national anthem.

One recognizes Bond's deadly purpose. There is the obvious, albeit rather arbitrary link between the clown's sexual hysteria and obsession and Skinner's world of racism, sexism and commercialism. And there is Bond's brutal castigation of cathartic violence in the way he forces, almost punishes the real audience by subjecting it to such a gross perversion of the principle of participatory theatre. And there is the grim irony whereby law and order are established when the populace can pay to kill. Bond's see-saw, however, is so desperately frantic that the grotesque comic-horror paradoxically reaches an almost melodramatic intensity, and at the same time leaves one chilled and sickened. The distancing devices of stage artifice, play-within-a-play, farce, a socio-historical framework, and irony may steady the ingestion of horror. But it seems more likely that the audience will be put off by the play's crudity. It may even resent being so flagrantly manipulated that it will dismiss the excesses of Bond's revolutionary hatred and savage rejection of the American dream--to say nothing of what they might take to be his own desperate need to depict the bourgeoisie in its death-throes. The lynching scene is the ugliest depiction of man's violence against his own species in Bond's entire canon. One has finally, I think, to question Hay and Roberts' statement that Bond is in "absolute control of the effects he wants to create."⁹

Presumably, the last scene aims at "bringing the audience back to

its senses," to quote once again Peter Brooks's intent with Marat-Sade. The house-lights go up to show workmen clearing the stage and carefully handling the corpse which has been stuffed into a carton.

Finally, they joke and scramble over the dime that Paul has unobtrusively thrown down. Whether this scene sufficiently neutralizes the bludgeoning of one's sensibility in order that one may glean the prophetic import of these few gestures is debatable.

Part of the problem with The Swing is the heightened concentration of such intense outrage packed into a short play. The context of anticipated horror together with the abrupt and radical shift from high tragedy to murderous farce demands a considerable sang-froid on the part of the audience to be receptive to the humour. In the full-length comedy, The Sea, the way in which the elements of genuine personal tragedy and comic artifice co-exist from the beginning serves to defamiliarize the audience and suggest an insane world where the norm seems to be man's cruelty and indifference to others's suffering and a total lack of communication. The Sea opens to the thunderous sound of a raging storm. A young man is heard to scream for help in the attempt to save his drowning friend. Amidst the confusion, noise and violence, the stage directions read: "The tempest grows louder" (Sc. 1, p. 10).¹⁰ (The allusion to The Tempest effects a certain counter-text distance, a technique which Bond exploits as a major distancing strategy in Lear and Restoration [to be discussed in Chapter Six]). A second measure of distance is effected by the humour which is offered both in a drunken character's music-hall song, "I don't know why - I sing'ss song," and a strange figure's wild accusation, "I know what's going on here" (Sc. 1, pp. 105-106). This dualistic formal

framework emphasizes the dialectical content.

The play's thematic focus concerns Hatch, the draper, and the exploitative relationship with the town's leading scion of the rich and powerful, Mrs. Rafi, who, both individually and by way of what she represents, succeeds in driving Hatch mad. Opposed to all this are the fresh possibilities for genuine dialogue between the young couple, Willy and Rose, and between a new and older generation personified by Willy and Evens. Bond skillfully interweaves the strands of the various plots. Rose and Willy struggle to come to terms with the tragic death of Colin, Rose's fiancé and Willy's friend. Willy seeks the help of Evens, the drunken beach hermit, in order to find his friend's body. In the course of their exchanges, Willy confronts the larger problems posed to him by his society. In the Rafi/Hatch plot, Bond concentrates his attack on the ills of a decaying capitalist order, an assault which finds extreme expression in the strong physical images such as Hatch's desperate slashing of the curtain material which Mrs. Rafi orders and then refuses; his grotesque stabbing of the corpse on the beach which he, in his madness, believes to be Willy, leader of an alien invasion sent from outer space to threaten his community; and the climactic bizarre cliff-top scene where Colin's ashes are to be consecrated.

Bond relies principally upon the comic telling to control and objectify the obsessive, absurdist elements in order to allow for recognition of the socio-political causes of irrational behaviour. The stylistic ruptures between the theatrical and near-realism are intended to reinforce the theme but the reinforcement is not easy to achieve in production. Writing to William Goodman at the Goodman Theatre Centre, Chicago, (1974) Bond stresses the importance of liveliness in the pro-

duction:

I gather from the reviews that the German productions treat the play as something very grim and serious. PLEASE remember it is labelled a COMEDY and for a reason. It should be played lightly and with as much fun as possible.11

At the same time, Bond enhances the dialectic by counterpoising Evens, the "wise fool," and Mrs. Rafi and Hatch, the "clowns." Evens and Willy provide the yardstick of normality by which to judge the irrational events and perceive them as a metaphor for the condition of society.

The principle of distance is further evidenced in the overall structure. Bond insists his priority is "the manipulation of time to serve the argument and not the story,"¹² a point which was lost in the convoluted gyrations of Early Morning. The Sea consists of eight short contrasting scenes alternating between the faster paced world of comedy and the more reflective world of the outdoor scenes on the beach. Providing the scene changes are swift, the sharpness of this distancing mechanism serves to break the psychologically real to force the audience to puzzle out the connective links and readjust its position towards the action.

Bond has advised young writers to heed the premise that "alienation isn't the removal of an emotion, it is the addition of a commentary."¹³ In his recent role as director, Bond cautions the actors that "a concept, an interpretation (of the situation, not the character) must be added to an emotion, and it is this concept...that is acted."¹⁴ Apart from laughter, which in Bond is always aimed at the political, Bond introduces in The Sea new distancing components in the form of a character as observer/commentator, and another as *raisonneur*. Willy is a considerable advance over the mad Arthur observing

the gross distortions of his world. And Evens as Bond's "wise fool" approaches Brecht's "untragic hero" when he sits down on the beach with Willy at the play's close and not only shares his wisdom of experience but admonishes Willy to go out and become involved in the creation of a better world. These new distancing elements would seem to attest to Bond's search for more explicit means of clarifying the problem of the individual in his society. As the play progresses, Bond skillfully defamiliarizes both the conventional comic and tragic categories, denying the habitual attitude of social acceptance that each mode traditionally provides.

Shades of the grotesque subtly colour the seemingly familiar world of a social comedy of manners. The fiancé of Mrs. Rafi's niece Rose, has drowned. Mrs. Rafi's priority is nonetheless Hatch's shop and his catalogue of luxury goods--Indian Dhurries, Japanese Nainsooks. Or rather, they are neo-colonial goods since they now come from Birmingham! To-day it is Utrecht velvet, yards and yards of it. With an imperious swish of her long skirts and Ostrich-plumed hat, she sweeps into Hatch's shop and commands him to order 126 yards cut in three-yard lengths. "Blue...blue, blue," she demands, a colour which is not part of Hatch's stock:

Don't jolly me along. I wouldn't be comfortable with an artificial material. I want velvet.

.....
You offer only shoddy! How can you attract a discriminating and rewarding class of client? (Sc. 2, pp. 107-108)

In between verbal insults, Mrs. Rafi proceeds to ruin nonchalantly two pairs of kid gloves--one by stretching too small a pair over her large hands and thumping her hand on the counter, tearing the seams, and the

other by catching her umbrella handle in the cuff. Hatch reacts like a mechanized drone, programmed to placate her every whim:

Gazelle. Five shillings and five and eleven. Buck. Close grained, hard wearing. Doe. Feel the softness, Mrs. Rafi.
(Sc. 2, p. 109)

On one level, the tone of mildly disquieting humour accentuates the general theme of dominant (and subservient) relationships--a theme on which Bond will perform more intense variations as the play proceeds. At a deeper level, Bond intends his dangerous clowns to jolt the audience into a clearer recognition of the causes of an unjust system. To this end, Bond continues to utilize the distancing device of a "fill-in-the-blanks technique" whereby the audience must do a bit of thinking to fill in the missing bits and make the connections between the scenes in order to deduce cause and effect as the play advances. It comes as a shock to learn that this mechanical creature is the same crazed figure in the storm who shone a torch in Willy's face and screamed, "Filthy beast." Now the focus is on the object of the curtains which represent both inner and outer distortions. In general symbolic terms, the blue of the material links with the blue of the sea, an association which, ideally, would evoke a state of steady repose. In this context, the emphasis is upon the socio-economic significance of the object as signifier of the morality of the action, and the consequence in emotional terms.¹⁵ Hatch is a cog in the profit-machine which corrodes the possibility of man functioning emotionally and morally as a human being. As Evens later remarks to Willy, "They hate each other. Force. Make. Use. Push. Burn. Sell. For what? A heap of rubbish" (Sc. 3, p. 118). Hatch's utter dependency upon a system which on the one hand

tantalizes with the prospect of a huge sale as the solution to all problems, and on the other threatens the workhouse if the bottom falls out, induces a crippling neurosis. Bond, with the character of Hatch, takes this state of alienation to its grotesque conclusion--paranoia, madness and violence--implying, perhaps simplistically, that it is but a few dangerous steps from the Birmingham factories to the more sophisticated manufacturing of nuclear arms. Initiated out of a fear and distrust which can so easily turn to hate, their production gives the lie to any sense of moral control. Hatch, once out of Mrs. Rafi's grasp, greedily clutches his money bag, makes an obscene gesture in defiance of the system, and seeks out his band of followers whom he progressively terrorizes into believing that Willy is a dangerous tool of the extraterrestrials:

You soon spot them behind this counter. You get a fair indication from the way they pay their bill. [...] Oh, some of them don't even know themselves. Their brains are taken out at night, bit by bit, and replaced by artificial material brought here in airships. (Sc. 5, p. 134)

Thus, the tensions in the comic-grotesque render the situation problematic, disallowing any comic escape. This mode also allows Bond to depict his characters as both victim and aggressor and to encompass both personal and political experience.

In a similar fashion, Bond calls into question the tragic response by interweaving elements of grotesque satire with sober realism. The mood shifts to the beach where Willy is trying to come to terms with his own personal grief. Evens lets him cry and says simply, "I'm sorry about the accident" (Sc. 3, p. 116). Evens' sensibility is in marked contrast to its perverse opposite shown by Hatch's outburst:

HATCH. [.] Did you see him cry, Billy?

HOLLARCUT. Ay.

HATCH. That was a sign. Crying: bad news. That's us. Those devils are up there watching. He's telling them we're onto him. (Sc. 3, p. 117)

Bond elicits our familiar sympathies and then checks them, not only by the split focus in the scene, but in the character of Evens as well. No "holy fool," Evens is a recluse who has chosen a quietist philosophy ("Li Po: you who are sated with life, now drink the dregs" [Sc. 3, p. 120]) but who also expresses himself in worrying paradoxes for the audience to resolve:

It's always the details that make the tragedy. Not anything larger. They used to say tragedy purified, helped you let go. Now it only embarrasses. They'll make a law against it. (Sc. 3, p. 118)

In his role as critical commentator on the play's action, Evens lowers the psychological temperature of Willy's state. There is a sense too in which he seems to speak for the author. In his note to The Sea, Bond explains his notion of tragedy and its function in his theatre of "rationalism." As a species, man's development of moral awareness lags behind technological advances, and since the moral progression is never fast enough, there is tragedy. This evolutionary view differs radically from the traditional concept of inherent character faults and the idea of catharsis, an idea which for Bond "would be immoral to induce in an audience in a society which is not workable":¹⁶

tragedy as something to use in our lives, that gives us sympathy and understanding of other people. Only a moron wants to grin all the time, and even he weeps with rage in the night. Tragedy in this sense...is necessary for moral maturity, it doesn't lead to despair, and it certainly has nothing to do

with a catharsis that makes us accept abominations to which there should be political solutions. It leads to knowledge and action....Life becomes meaningless when you stop acting on the things that concern you most: your moral involvement in society.¹⁷

The sea would then seem to symbolize for Bond man's moral element; its restless, unceasing, ever-changing ebb and flow mirrors the constant creation and re-creation of problems which man must solve if he is to survive, and reflects man's strength and resolve towards this end. Evens' "details" (Sc. 3, P. 118 quote) concern the recognition of the "limitations of the possible" in the realm of social inter-action and social processes.

Evens functions also as a mediating link between the seemingly disjointed worlds. The possibility that Evens offers of a tragic sense of man's social condition which may lead to a new moral understanding is immediately re-inforced by the presentation of a serio-comic parody of the bourgeois notion of tragedy. Thus, by juxtaposing opposing "heroic threads"--Evens' and Willy's realism, Mrs. Rafi's illusion, and finally Hatch's perverse mania to 'save' the town--Bond sets each in ironic contrast to the other.

The travestied rehearsal in the Rafi's house, Park house, of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is intended to work on several levels. The play-within-the-play allows Bond to operate parodically and in a satirical mode reminiscent of the sharp-witted revue style of British theatre in the fifties and sixties. In this way, the distanced mode breaks the illusion and serves to enhance the theme of dominant and subservient relations. It is in this context that Mrs. Rafi appears in the full colours of caricature intimidating her quivering minions to the point of hysteria in order for her to indulge her own passion to

play "grand tragedy":

Moved by the atmosphere I have created, I cry - "together with a large part of the audience, if things go as usual. The sound of my torment attracts Cerberus, the watch dog of hell. (Sc. 4, p. 123)

Mafanwy Price,¹⁸ one of the ladies in Mrs. Rafi's amateur theatrical group, has been coerced into being a dog, rather than being allowed to express her own desire to be a "floral maid-of-honour." But even her careful imitation of a dog-paddle (from studying her own dog Roger) is squashed:

MAFANWY. It's so difficult to pretend I'm swimming when I am in fact walking.

MRS. RAFI. Act, Miss Price. Remember your audience will do most of the work for you. They have already been set up by the poetry that has gone before.

MAFANWY (sudden temper). I can't! I can't!

MRS. RAFI. Every year the same. One sympathizes with god when he struggled to breathe life into the intractable clay. Do you not wish to support the coastguard fund? Has it no meaning for you? (Sc. 4, p. 123)

The whole scenario is a biting comment on the irrelevance of bourgeois theatre. The theatre of "imitation" is the art of a class which can afford the luxury of emotional self-indulgence, soul-searching and "heroic" illusions. It is also an art form which reflects a class system whose function is to codify, repress and subjugate. The scene's satirical tone has a deadeningly civilized Edwardian flavour. In clinging parasitically to the past, the perverted imagination distorts the notion of change.¹⁹

MRS. RAFI. I see a white thing shining down in the darkness.

RACHEL. "That is the...reflection...of...Narcissus. It is condemned to haunt these...waters for ever -

MRS. RAFI. Ah horror, Ah horror.

RACHEL. - and...stare...up at the tormented and harrowed...faces of those who...pass to death. Look, and turn...back.

MRS. RAFI. I cannot.

MRS. RAFI poses on an imaginary prow and stares at the distant far shore of Styx. The rest [..] softly hum the 'Eton Boating Song'.

MRS. RAFI (ecstatic). Eurydice. Beloved. I see you. (Sc. 4, pp. 129-130)

The performance takes place in the drawing-room where the curtains have been closed to shut out the real ("MAFANWY. In this town you can't get away from the sea." "MRS. RAFI. The curtains. The curtains. Shut it out" [Sc. 4, p. 122]). Reality intrudes nonetheless with the arrival of Willy mid-way through the rehearsal. This interruptive device not only breaks what might be the conventional response to the comedy, but also underscores the grotesque inappropriateness of the mock-tragedy. As a silent observer, Willy re-lives the horror of the storm. When the sound of gunfire suddenly breaks the precious "mood of art" (as it will later on the cliff), Willy is observed staring ahead, his face ashen. Rose leaves the group to join Willy while the others discuss the stage designs. The audience is kept at two removes, aware of the young couple who sit apart talking quietly. Thus, Mrs. Rafi's mindless emoting is shown in an even more cruel, ironic light. Bond would have us understand that out of this combined private and social experience, Willy finds the strength to talk openly with Rose, and also to cope with Hatch's madness.

In Scene Five which follows, we are returned to the draper's shop

where Hatch's fears are confirmed. Mrs. Rafi refuses the material on the grounds that Hatch failed in his duty as a coastguard to respond to Willy's cries for help. Hatch, at first in disbelief, pleads and cajoles, and then as his terror mounts, grabs his cutting shears. Bond deliberately aims for a complex response with the cutting sequence. It is unnerving to watch a man's emotional reserves crumble to the breaking point until he lashes out at the first object or person he encounters. In sheer physical terms, the scene has an enormous impact. Huge bolts of slashed velvet unroll over the floor while Hatch compulsively rips and tears until in a moment of stunned silence his scissors find their real target--Mrs. Rafi's arm. Bond utilizes several strategies to cool the emotional force of the scene. The use of counterpointed actions and moods at key intervals throughout gives a sharper edge to the frightening spectre of an element in society out of control. (At one point, prim and proper Mrs. Tilehouse breaks out of character and, like a figure of popular farce, is reported to be "tannin' Thompson's [Mrs. Rafi's gardener] arse with her brolly" [Sc. 5, p. 139]). Tony Coult rightly observes that "one of Bond's most characteristic pieces of stagecraft is a kind of theatre counterpoint."²⁰ The success of this see-saw effects depends upon the artful integration of the various elements held in tension. In this scene of The Sea, Bond's orchestration is superb.

As Hatch begins his frenzied slashing of the material, our attention is riveted on the object, the material scapegoat for all Hatch's pent-up frustrations and the perverse manifestation of his need to be in absolute control. His desperate situation is heavily ironic. In confronting the system (represented by the curtain material and Mrs. Rafi), he

destroys his livelihood and himself in the process.

A crucial distancing element is the method of acting. Bond cautions that "the actor playing Hatch musn't be obvious [in showing] ...that he's cracking."²¹ The priority is to astonish the audience, not induce it to empathize with the stage events in a manner which would lead to catharsis. Rather than bringing the self to the role, the actor is to record the urgency of a situation which could suddenly explode, with dangerous implications for society as a whole. The mere physical feat of the arduous cutting would demand a highly skilled and concentrated performance. And equally in emotional terms, the role demands a tight discipline. In one intense moment, this miserable figure seems almost pitiable; in the next, he smiles ("cunningly") and brandishes his shears causing Mrs. Rafi to appear genuinely "frightened and angry":

HATCH (still cutting). [...] (In tears) I walked my life away on this floor. Up and down...Three yards...Why isn't the floor worn through...Thirty years...I'm worn through...

(He goes on cutting, tearing, ripping and slashing.)

(smiles and cuts). These shears are part of my hand. Watch how the cloth leads them. That's the gesture of my soul, Mrs. Rafi, there's a whole way of life in that...(Sc. 5, p. 140)

The confusion of sympathies is deliberately designed to force the audience to confront the causes of Hatch's obsessions and neuroses. In an ironic theatrical jibe directed as much to the actors, in particular Hatch, as well as the audience who may have become too caught up in the action, Bond has Mrs. Rafi shout first, "Mr. Hatch, remember who we are", and then, when she is hurt, "Hatch, you're a fool" (Sc. 5, p. 142). Bond's denunciation of the class system is subtle, but stinging.

Hatch, of course, is a fool in more ways than one--his total lack of understanding of his predicament, its real causes and his own ludicrous contradictions. But in theatrical terms, the effect of the tonal shifts is to place the emphasis upon the performance as artifice. The scene ends on an absurdly comic note preventing the audience from wholly embracing a personally tragic view of the situation:

HATCH. [...] She tried to grab my shears, Jack. She must be a lady burglar. [...] You know they come in here and whisper, ask for 'intimate garments.

.....
There's the worst. Leaves the curtain open and turns the mirror - brazen! - so you can see the darkness underneath.
(Sc. 5, p. 142)

Mrs. Tilehouse who had collapsed unconscious in a chair revives to exclaim, "After this I shall regard Gomorrah as a spa resort" (Sc. 5, p. 144).

This tone is immediately countered with the sober interlude of the young couple on the beach who attempt to articulate what life's struggle really means. The interlude is no romantic idyll. Bond deliberately de-sentimentalizes the encounter and places the emphasis upon comprehension. The disturbing image which was the catalyst for the play²² and which was intended to re-inforce both the fact that life at times is "unbearable" and the truth of the human impulse towards freedom, is carefully described in the stage directions:

The jersey is pulled up over the head and the arms, which are lifted up and bent at the elbows in the act of removing the jersey - so the jersey forms a hood covering the head, neck, shoulders, arms and hands. [...] (Sc. 6, p. 144)

One notes how Willy and Rose's dialogue expands outwards bit by bit from their own private world of suffering to include the sharing of their

common experience and the shedding of illusions. Willy is able to confront Rose's idealized memory of Colin and help her face up to reality: "[...] not be guided by some distant light. [...] Turn back and look into the fire. Listen to the howl of the flames. The rest is lies" (Sc. 6, pp. 147-148). Willy's tone is low-keyed, factual--a quiet anger. When Rose leaves, he is able to approach the body and speak quite coldly. The detached manner of the witness/observer is presumably aimed at effecting a measure of distance in the audience prior to the violent attack on the corpse, as well as lending credence to Willy's comment during the assault ("That's an innocent murder" [Sc. 6, p. 149]). Further attempts to sustain spectator objectivity and control the response to the horror are Rose's comment after being told of the incident, "But it seems so violent," and Evens' calm and sensible handling of the situation, asking Rose to quietly fetch a horse and cart, "No need to gape." Finally, Bond has Hatch ironically comment in his madness on his own mad behaviour.

Bond sets the stage for his aggro-effect with careful stage directions: "A sound in the distance. Not a tune, but a high inarticulate, sing-song whining, mad, with the note of a hunter in it" (Sc. 6, p. 149). The eerie notes which accompany Hatch's approach to the corpse are reminiscent of the stoning episode in Saved (the "curious buzzing" sound; Pam's "sing-song voice"), and are designed to grate on the nerves. Unlike Saved, however, the distancing elements in the scene as a whole seem to be more carefully calculated towards effecting an engrossing tension between involvement and the prompting of reasoned judgement.

The grim humour is savagely ironic. As Hatch comes on with a knife,

he babbles and raves: "What drags him back time after time? Obsession. You must get him Mr. Hatch" (Sc. 6, p. 149). He falls on the body and knives it in a frenzy screaming:

Kill it! Kill it! Kill it! At last! What's this? Water!
Look, water! Water, not blood? (Stabbing.) Kill it! Kill it!
(He stops.) More water? (Stabs.) The filthy beast!

WILLY (to himself). Hit it. That's an innocent murder. (Sc. 6, p. 149)

Willy's comment coming mid-way breaks the action and signifies a double meaning: it is a corpse, and Hatch is mad. As one of Bond's characters in a later play comments on the world, "Hate is like a clown armed with a knife. He must draw blood to cap the joke, you know?"²³ (And one recalls, too, the end of The Swing.) The monstrous joke is on Hatch and, by analogy, on those who view man as a violent creature and who believe that one can only transform reality by mutilating it--by killing, or by dreaming of final solutions. Hatch, finally, is a "Hitleresque concept"²⁴ for Bond. It may be argued that the fascist link is not clearly demonstrated in the world of the play. Bond does succeed, though, in challenging the audience to see the violent action not only in relationship to Hatch's slashing of the velvet, but as a logical manifestation of a regressive and repressive reason and imagination, distorted by these same forces at work in an obscenely affluent and wasteful material culture. One must add, however, that the skillful handling of the incident is paramount. The German production had real water spouting from the corpse, an effect which Bond deemed "totally unnecessary."²⁵ What is needed is a slight abstract touch without losing the real force of the scene--a touch which may be obtained through the clown's impersonality and the tone of Willy's paradoxical

pronouncement.

Bond's extraordinary final tableau is of a society on the verge of moral bankruptcy. The bizarre funeral procession wends its way to the cliff-top facing the sea, complete with upright piano (out-of-tune), resplendent banner embroidered in red and gold silk, and precious urn. Mrs. Rafi, not to be outdone by Mrs. Tilehouse's operatic descant, and loudly-voiced searchings for her smelling salts, digs into the urn and grabs a handful of the ashes in order to make her recitation more dramatic. Suddenly, Hatch runs on stage screaming that he has killed the 'first one' (namely Willy), and begins a mad dance. While the ladies are attacking him with hymn books and the Vicar is kneeling and praying ("[...] in time of war and tumult. Save us and deliver us[...]") Mrs. Rafi flings a handful of ashes at Hatch, shouting above the wind, "Have you no respect for the dead?" (Sc. 7, p. 157). At one point, Bond's stage directions read, "The spectators gasp" (Sc. 7, p. 155). Again, Bond not only places the real audience squarely in the participant's hot seat implicating it in the fiasco, but he also seems to anticipate the audience's response. Our laughter is uncomfortable but we do laugh as we gasp at the grotesque combination of the desecration of the dead young man's ashes done in exaggerated comic terms. And through the laughter we have a sense too of a world where paradoxically, these puppet clowns trammelled by Mrs. Rafi's strings signal the desperate need for change by waging their own ludicrous war on their crippling environment. Unlike the almost existential angst of Early Morning, the fantastical element is consistently edged with a tough satirical bite.

The mood quickly sobers as Hatch realizes Willy is alive. Covered

in ashes and sobbing, Hatch crumples into a tiny heap in the center of the stage, while the clowns gaze at him incomprehendingly (see Plate 6). The chorus-like effect freezes the action and gives a super-imposed portrait of alienated beings perched dangerously on the tip of a planet, their ghost-like shells outlined against the cliff-top and open sky, their barbaric rituals and dessicated language as ineffectual as Mrs. Tilehouse's smelling salts, or the hollow sound from the piano, or the Vicar's pieties drowned in the wind. It is a world in ashes, its moral center the jumbled heap of a madman.

Certain productions have left off the last scene with Bond's *raison-nur*. Without Evens' final speech, the dialectic loses its full force. The persona of the ethical outsider who serves as witness to an alien, hostile environment but who also becomes progressively involved in the events, now earns the right to pronounce prophetic judgement and possibly to act as a catalyst for change. The moral fable of the rat and rat-catcher keeps the general tenor of the play's parabolic significance and serves to convey a broadly philosophical insight into man as part of an evolutionary history:

I believe in the rat. [...] Because rats build nests. [...] And in time it will change into the rat catcher. [...] I believe in sand and stone and water because the wind stirs them into a dirty sea and it gives birth to living things. (Sc. 8, p. 167)

The other side of faith in the continuation of life is the history of the "wise rat-catcher," or man, "who understands the voice of the thing he is going to kill," (Sc. 8, p. 168), and therefore is more to be condemned. It is this, for Bond, which is "ultimately unacceptable" to human beings. It can only lead to a grimmer, more alienated world in which "men will look at each other's viscera as they pass in the



Plate 6

street" (Sc. 8, p. 168).

Bond indicates that The Sea concludes a series of plays²⁷ began with The Pope's Wedding. In thematic terms, it suggests the possibility of fruitful dialogue between seemingly alienated worlds, a possibility brutally thwarted by suspicion and miscomprehension on both sides in The Pope's Wedding. In formal terms, The Sea shows a refinement in comic distancing techniques which are, in turn, played off against the tragic response. The device of a *raisonneur* as moral commentator belongs to the popular tradition of music-hall. As a theatrical device, it serves to lift the play from the bounds of strict realism, and allows Bond a measure of control of the dramatic experience. At the same time, the character of Evens is fully integrated into the dramatic action.

In another sense, The Sea also serves as a transitional work. By virtue of its essentially suspended ending, the onus is upon the audience to seek solutions to the social and moral problems which the play has raised. Evens invites the audience to take the longer view of human existence which is continually evolving towards a future as yet unnamed, pregnant with seeds of hope or destruction. On this sober, reflective note, Bond begins his backward trek into history, or what he terms "a moral discovery of the past."²⁸

Chapter Four Endnotes

¹ The Bundle is a parable of the moral dilemma of revolutionary violence. The central protagonist, Wang, was sold as a young boy to a poet-judge, in order to save the lives of his adopted parents who had rescued him as an infant from abandonment by a river-bank. He later leads a successful revolution against the forces of oppression, but at the cost of sacrificing his aged parents. In his "Note on Dramatic Method" which prefaces the play, Bond describes how he experimented with various means in order to make the analysis more fully dramatic in its own right, and not have the analysis swamped by the story of Wang. The action is constructed clearly around the dialectical argument with breaks to emphasize the choices which Wang makes, and the consequences attendant upon each choice. As such, the play takes on the manner of a Brechtian *Lehrstücke*.

² Grierson on Documentary, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber, 1966), p. 13.

³ The lynched negro's offense was the shooting of a white antagonist, son of a prominent local citizen, in a poolroom brawl. Given the flimsy structure of the town jail, and the fury of an avenging mob of fifty men, the Marshall and his deputies hid the terrified prisoner beneath the stage of the town opera house. The mob broke in, overpowered the Marshall and his men, dragged the negro to the center of the stage, and bound him hand and foot. The avengers ranged themselves in the orchestra pit and at a given signal from their leader fired about 200 pistol and rifle shots. One piercing scream was heard. The negro's body was left where it lay, "a limp and bloody bundle." It was said, but not confirmed, that only those who were willing to pay for the privilege of shooting (ostensibly to raise money for the white victim's family) were allowed to participate in the shooting. See the New York Times, 21 Apr. 1911, p. 1, col. 4; 22 Apr. 1911, p. 12, col. 5; 13 May 1911, p. 1, col. 4.

⁴ All parenthetical, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, A-A-America, and Stone (London: Methuen, 1976).

⁵ cf. Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1953). There is the hint that Bond's homework reading may have included Ellison's classic novel on racism. There is reference in Bond's play to a character called Reinhart, the name of Ellison's central protagonist. And Bond's single black character, Paul, in his role as chronicler of his people's history, silent witness to present events, and seer into the future bears a certain affinity to Ellison's hero.

⁶ Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Bond: A Study of his Plays (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 233.

⁷ Bond, "Letter to Angela Praesent," re-printed in Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, A Companion to the Plays (London: TQ Publications, 1978), p. 73.

- ⁸ Ibid., p. 72.
- ⁹ Bond: A Study of his Plays, p. 233.
- ¹⁰ All parenthetical, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, Plays: Two Lear, The Sea, Narrow Road to the Deep North, Black Mass, Passion (London: Methuen, 1978).
- ¹¹ Bond, quoted in A Companion to the Plays, p. 56.
- ¹² Edward Bond, "On Brecht: A Letter to Peter Holland," Theatre Quarterly, 8 (Summer 1978), 34.
- ¹³ Bond, quoted in A Companion to the Plays, p. 49.
- ¹⁴ Edward Bond, "Us, Our Drama and the National Theatre," Plays and Players, 26 (October 1978), p. 9.
- ¹⁵ Peter Holland has written an illuminating article on the significance of objects in Bond's theatre, tracing a direct influence to Brecht. See "Brecht, Bond, Gaskill, and the Practise of Political Theatre," Theatre Quarterly, 8 (Summer 1978), 24-33.
- ¹⁶ Recorded conversation with Bond and Philip Roberts, British Council LSA, R12010, 31 March 1977.
- ¹⁷ Bond, "Author's Program Note on The Sea," The Sea (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 124.
- ¹⁸ "Myfanwy Price" is a common Welsh name often made fun of, and which figures greatly in Under Milk Wood. To a well-theatred audience, the allusion to Mr. Mog Edwards, who says, "Myfanwy Price! [] I am a draper mad with love", and the name itself of Bond's draper, Hatch, giving as it does the echo "down the hatch," contribute to the distancing process.
- ¹⁹ Bond would later write his own Marxist version of the Orpheus myth in the form of a script for a ballet, in collaboration with composer Hans Werner Henze. The ballet was performed by the Stuttgart Ballet Company in March 1979. The script is as yet unpublished.
- ²⁰ Tony Coult, The Plays of Edward Bond (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 80.
- ²¹ Bond, quoted in A Companion to the Plays, p. 56.
- ²² Noted in Bond: A Study of his Plays, pp. 158-159.
- ²³ Edward Bond, Bingo (London: Methuen, 1974), (Sc. 4, p. 34).
- ²⁴ Bond, quoted in A Companion to the Plays, p. 56.
- ²⁵ Bond, quoted in A Companion to the Plays, p. 56.

26 Interview with Bond in Glenn Loney, "The First Cycle," Performing Arts Journal, 1 (Fall 1976), 38.

27 For a further account, see Bond's explanation in Bond: A Study of his Plays, p. 163.

28 Edward Bond, "A Note on Dramatic Method," The Bundle (London: Methuen, 1978), p. xiv.

Chapter Five:

The Historical Epic as a Distanced Mode in

Bingo and The Fool

Bond has written:

We who live in history are free to fall into chaos
We're not free to fall out of history¹

He has characterized his history plays as epic/historical, (epic in Brecht's sense of the term), or story theatre--"the theatre of change, the only theatre that can analyse and explain our condition."² The subjective/objective axis acquires new bearings, but the desired tension between involvement and critical understanding remains a constant concern.

Ruby Cohn has termed Bond's historical drama "invented or embellished history,"³ thereby taking its rightful place in his "Fabulous Theatre" which by her definition would seem to exclude Bond's notion of a "rational theatre." (By her accounting, Cohn is able to contain the subjectivism of Early Morning within her general discussion of Bond's "historical" drama. Whilst it may be argued that historical "facts" appear to be very fluid for Bond, there is nonetheless a marked difference between the emphasis upon inner "truth" in Early Morning, and the deliberate inclusion of objective historical "truths" in his historical epics.) Cohn rightly perceives, however, the element in Bond's drama which gives it its compelling, at times haunting force. But the fantastic element is a means of lifting the play world out of the circumscribed confines of naturalism, not for the sake of escapism but in order to render the extreme distortions and anxieties of our despairing

world in a strange, and therefore problematic light. (Bond himself distinguishes between "fantasy...a blue dog with six legs..." and 'imagination' which implies "a certain moral experience."⁴) And one might add that the theatrical zest which Bond sought through the comic distancing and buffos of his early plays is now rendered by the powerful telling of his tales, whether they concern the events leading to Shakespeare's suicide, or John Clare's descent into madness. In choosing such strong central characters and tragic events, however, Bond does risk having the audience interpret the plays exclusively in traditional dramatic terms--as personal tragedies, for example, eliciting merely the conventional responses of easy sympathy, identification and catharsis. Added to this are the violent sensual images which reinforce the personal torment each character suffers. To extrapolate one element, however, in any Bond play, is to deny the complexity of the total experience, whether it achieves Bond's intent or not.

In order to pull the audience back from total surrender or escape into the "fabulous" realm, Bond employs a distanced epic mode which holds pathos in check, dampens the passionate outbursts, and controls horror, thereby forcing the viewer's emotional and intellectual energy to meet the play's political challenge. The length and breadth of his longer, serious history plays allow Bond the possibility to explore his political ideas in the cooler, objective form of the epic narrative. Rather than achieving the usual plot comforts of the conventional linear narrative climaxing in a dénouement, the epic structure is designed to cut the narrative with short, contrasting scenes, in the way a film editor can edit a montage of shots in order to prevent the viewer from losing herself in or to an illusion. Thus, the new

tension between story and epic analysis replaces that between popular theatre techniques in serious political drama.

For Bond, "the essence of epic theatre is the way it selects, connects and judges."⁵ Its structure pursues the principle of the dialectical process in bringing together the contrasting elements in society, and discovering causal connections between them. The audience, in the act of teasing out the connective links, becomes an active participant in the analysis of society. This in itself shows that experience can be grasped coherently and rationally, and that, therefore, society can be improved. On the one hand, the objective historical experience invites a critical view of the past as the shaper of the present; on the other, it serves as a metaphor for our times. Bond can thus encompass the paradoxical notions of historical inevitability and of social reality as dynamic and evolving. Further, the audience is forced to imbibe the horror of history as its own reality rather than as the feverish projection of the author's own tormented vision. Bond's backward look embodies the same revolutionary purpose he hoped to achieve through the distorted antics of his crude buffos and farceurs. The specific socio/historical causal framework demands that the audience view not only the characters and events of the play world from this distanced perspective, but that, in addition, it sees itself as part of living history and the larger context of shaping social and political forces. Through the epic pattern, the particular is made general and the general particular:

In the epic-lyric the individual and particular are no longer isolated but are placed in a historical, social, human pattern....dramatic development doesn't come from the individual coming to terms with himself but from his changing

society so that everyone in it may be more human.⁶

Bingo: 'Scenes of Money and Death', tells the story of Shakespeare who sided with the wealthy landowners over the Welcombe enclosure issue and the resultant loss of common land for the small, tenant farmers, and the creation of a new, poor class. As a result of bartering his birth-right as a man and an artist, for the illusion of freedom, security and peace in his retirement years, Shakespeare becomes disillusioned and commits suicide.

The sub-title announces the subject of the dialectic. In spelling this out, Bond makes a direct appeal to the intelligence of the audience to understand these 'scenes of something' in terms of the play's argument. At the same time, the strange conjunction of the title and sub-title challenges the viewer to puzzle out the connective links, and in turn, to piece together the connotations of the game of bingo with the treatment of the central character whose august stature hardly conjures up a mindless throw in a game of chance.

From the first few scenes in Bingo, Shakespeare's life is presented as part of the history he is living; his conflict bound up with the critically changing times. Bond knows the audience will bring to a play about Shakespeare its own trusted baggage of associated "knowledge," values, attitudes and emotions. In the audience's mind is the creator of King Lear whose moral vision of man's essential humanity in the face of man's inhumanity is still the apogée of profound illumination for the Christian Humanist West. Instead, we are confronted with a world-weary bard who sits motionless in the fall chill of his garden, clutching not a play but a business document. Shakespeare has retired to his country sanctuary, fenced in by a huge hedge, and away from the

savagery of London life--"the severed heads on a gate" leading to his theatre, over-crowded prisons and workhouses, the crowd's relish in the cruel sport of bear-baiting, and the vicarious thrill of public floggings and hangings. For much of the first scene, he "doesn't react" (Sc. 1, p. 3)⁷ to the swirl of events in his own immediate world. When he does, his language is flat, taciturn. For example, his daughter Judith appears periodically to plead with him or berate him only to be cruelly rebuffed: "You speak so badly. Such banalities. So stale and ugly" (Sc. 2, p. 18). Purely domestic details are kept to a minimum. We learn that his wife is confined to the house and is ill partly through years of his neglect. But Bond's main thrust is the depiction of the harsh outer world which progressively imposes itself upon Shakespeare's deceptive calm.

Although the characters who people his landscape are nameless--Old Woman, Old Man, Son (reminiscent of mystery and morality play figures)--suggesting that they are all victims of his society, they are not mere social ciphers. With deft strokes, Bond invests them with a raw vulnerability and an earthy vitality. The contrast this affords with the portrayal of Shakespeare's immobility and passivity establishes the ironic framework in which to view Shakespeare's behaviour more objectively.

The background details are presented in the manner of vivid narrative fragments, narrowly skirting a strictly presentational style. Bond's music-hall background never seems far from his practice of theatre. Frequent interruptions, the brevity of each "sketch," the impeccable timing and precise rhythm of constant entrances and exits demand on the part of the actor the same lightness of touch and broad

• gestural mode that a comedian lends to his role. This somewhat impersonal quality establishes the tenor of the play. For example, we have the brief vignette of the Old Woman who recounts the circumstances of her husband, the Old Man, who is now a simpleton as a result of an axe blow suffered in the service of a press gang. She tells Judith how he is both husband and child. Her telling is paradoxically both poignant and yet somewhat removed in the manner of a chronicle. Later, the Old Man will break down and sob like a child when he learns the young beggar woman with whom he has a casual sexual relationship has been found and will probably hang. As a child he loved hangings--! The implication is clear. Bond keeps the human image, but his approach is completely de-sentimentalized and directed more towards the understanding of social facts and causes of the human misery.

The central vignettes exemplify class opposition--a young beggar woman and Combe. As Shakespeare is confronted with these disparities, he momentarily asserts himself before lapsing back into silence. The Young Woman, half-crazed from whippings and years of running and hiding from a law which deemed poverty a criminal offense, and hanging the penalty for begging, finds temporary refuge in Shakespeare's orchard. Shakespeare offers her money and turns his back on her cavorting behind the hedge with the Old Man.

Combe is the land entrepreneur whose view of men is that they are "donkeys, who need carrots and sticks." Money talks louder than words. His arguments for enclosure spell out the coming world--the world of profit and loss which undergirds the consumer mentality:

we can get rid of the bad farmers who grow starvation in their fields like a crop, and create seven hundred poor in a town of

less than two thousand. But - in the meantime the town council will oppose me. They don't want to feed the new poor while they wait for history to catch up with the facts. (Sc. 1, p. 6)

Shakespeare voices a more human concern:

A lot of the small holders don't have written leases. They just followed their fathers onto the land - and their fathers had followed their fathers. If you get rid of them and the short-lease tenants - there'll be more than seven hundred poor to feed. And if you grow less wheat the price of bread will go up - (Sc. 1, pp. 5-6)

Combe offers to guarantee Shakespeare's continued financial security if he will remain uninvolved--"It pays to sit in a garden" (Sc. 1, p. 7). Shakespeare insists that their private deal has nothing to do with the wider political issue: "You read too much into it. I'm protecting my own interests. Not supporting you, or fighting the town" (Sc. 1, p. 7). The freedom from the dirty world of politics implies equally, however, the freedom from not taking a stand either way.

Thus, in both formal and thematic terms, Bond's presentation of his central character--seemingly detached from outer events and yet of necessity involved in Combe's world--alerts the audience to its metaphorical import. Its attention is drawn to the play's social texture, and the intellectual positions Shakespeare and Combe represent. In this way the audience is invited to see the enclosure issue not only in its historical context but as a paradigm of contemporary exploitation in a world ruled by power, profit and greed. Bond's selection of the enclosure incident is in itself the "addition of a commentary" or, a distancing strategy. The issue is both free from contemporary detail, and yet shows our modern experience in a fresh, new light. Combe's rationale sounds an all-too-familiar chord in our capitalist system.

where the manipulation of commodities (and people as by-products) camouflages what amounts to feeding off the world's poor. And more dangerously, Combe's own brand of butchery is masked under the guise of laws to protect the common good. The Son finds his father with the Young Woman and brings her before Combe:

COMBE. We have her sort in front of us every week[...]. Do anything for money - though they'd rather do nothing.[...] The law says you're to be whipped here in the shopping place till the blood runs and then sent back to your parish [...].

YOUNG WOMAN. Yont whip us' sir? I were whip afore an' that hurt my yead sorely. I couldn't go with people arter. I walked okkard an' fell down in the road. I were a gal then an' that's only better now.

COMBE. If there's something wrong with your head it'll do it good. Doctors whip mad people.[...] If you lead your sort of life you must learn to pay for it. (To the SON). Take her to the lock-up. (Sc. 1, p. 9)

Through the long winter, Shakespeare broods over what he should do. Bond's use of Shakespeare as the central character is particularly dramatically effective in his moral exploration of the past in order to shed light on the present. On the one hand, Bingo dramatizes the anguished conflict between the poet/seer and his fraudulent behaviour which aids and abets the very injustices which his own tormented character, Lear, railed against on the heath. But on the other hand, Bingo displays individual acts of charity such as Shakespeare's tokens of kindness to the Young Woman, the Old Man and the Old Woman who care for him in the second scene. However, the subsequent horror shows these acts to be band-aids for the Christian conscience; they lose their effectiveness as quickly as they are applied. The contemporary audience has the advantage of historical perspective. Perhaps Shakespeare was helpless to alter a social process already set in motion.

The historical specifics change, but the antagonism between aspiration and deed, between social responsibility and individual compromise out of self-interest remains a pressing concern.

Shakespeare signs and events move quickly. The play turns on the shocking image of the gibbeted girl which opens Scene Three:

Hill. A pleasant warm day. Slight fresh wind. [...] An upright post with two short beams forming a narrow cleft. The YOUNG WOMAN's head is in this and her body is suspended against the post. A sack is wrapped round her from hips to ankles. A rope is wound round the sack and the top half of her body to steady her against the post. ... She has been dead one day. The face is grey, the eyes closed and the hair has become wispy. (Sc. 3, p. 20)

The visual and visceral impact is sharp and deeply disturbing. And yet various distancing techniques work to incorporate the grotesque sight into Bond's objective perception of history. The image is borrowed from a Rembrandt drawing. (Bond's working notes tell how he struggled to find a non-melodramatic means of presenting the hanging. Although members of the theatre audience may not know the drawing, Bond offers the information in detailed stage directions (Sc. 3, p. 20) in order that it be taken into account in any serious analysis of the play.) Shakespeare remains downstage facing the audience with his back to the girl and apart from the various personages who react to and comment on the event (see Plate 7). This visual contrast sharply dramatizes the widening gulf between Shakespeare's closed world and events beyond. At the same time, the additional focus on the other characters' comments ironically implicates Shakespeare in every social detail, each word driving the wedge of guilt in further. In this way, Bond keeps uppermost in our mind the issue of enclosure and Shakespeare's compromise, and the wider political implications of the multiple links of the chain



Plate 7

of violence, corruption and death built into a money ethic.

One 'turn' of dialogue, for example, includes the Son who sees the hanging as part of God's plan, and the girl as Satan's whore. This detail recalls both how the Young Woman had to sell her body to survive, and the fact that it was the Son's own sexual repression combined with religious fervour which made him see the coupling of his father with the Young Woman as "ugly. Loike an' animal," and which brought the incident to Combe's attention. In another 'turn', Joan, a farm labourer at Welcombe, describes the hanging--"She die summat slow. No family or friends t'swing on her legs.[...] She yont afford a pay the hangman t' do it." (Sc. 3, p. 22)--while the Son comments on the bets the crowd made on how long she would live. Each of these 'turns' revolves around the corpse as though it were a malleable sculpture, each view eliciting a different response and inviting the audience to assess the social attitudes the characters express. Thus, by effectively focusing on an alienated culture, Bond traces in the remainder of the play the consequences in both personal and political terms.

Shakespeare would still prefer to disclaim personal responsibility ("No. She'd have been caught. Burning...") (Sc. 3, p. 24), but the image of the dead girl re-awakens old torments. For a brief moment, the old fire burns in the fearful image of the baited bear desperately slashing away at his brutal predators. We have the sense that the image externalizes Shakespeare's deep moral crisis, while at the same time it signals outwards to a brutal, terrorized world. In that instant, Shakespeare becomes the bear, or becomes a character in one of his plays, roaring against cruelty and injustice. There is even a sense of self-laceration. But the language is very much Bond's. The

paucity of emotive adjectives and the use, primarily, of hard, precise nouns, sharp consonants and tough verbs place the emphasis upon the action we are to judge, rather than on mere character revelation, and reinforces the idea of victimization bound up with aggressivity. Bond's selection of language is both powerful and chilling, demanding a certain restraint in the acting. We feel Shakespeare's torment, and yet we are not swayed from the examination of cruelty:

Flesh and blood. Strips of skin. Teeth scrapping bone. The bear will crush one of the skulls. Big feet slithering in dog's brain. [...] Slash, slash. It couldn't see but it could hear. It grabbed the whips. [...] Broke them. Slashed back at the men. Slash, slash. [...] (Sc. 3, p. 25)

Bingo is largely about the responsibility of the artist in his society. (A few of Bond's plays, including The Fool, which will be subsequently discussed, and Narrow Road to the Deep North, feature artists as central characters.) For Bond, "All imagination is political":

It has the urgency of passion, the force of appetite, the self-authenticity of pain or happiness.⁸

Shakespeare's art, as Bond presents it, plumbs the depths of human suffering and sides with the defenceless and innocent--the bear, and by implication, the dead girl. But his life would make him "the hangman's assistant." The re-living of the past results in Shakespeare's first anguished self-questioning:

I quietened the storms inside me. But the storm breaks outside. To have usurped the place of god, and lied...(Sc. 3, p. 27)

Pauses are rare in Bond and when they do occur, they are intended to

provoke the audience towards deeper thought. In the minds of some, for whom Shakespeare's legacy is truth incarnate, this almost amounts to a blasphemy. Or at the very least, it signals a temporary lapse in a moment of despair. The ellipsis dots which follow the word "lied" suggest a pregnant emphasis.

The pub scene which follows, interweaves both personal and political dimensions. As Shakespeare's inner world disintegrates, the world around him darkens. Bond establishes two abrasive areas of tension--between Shakespeare and Jonson on the one side, and between Combe and the peasants Jerome, Wally, the Son, on the other. As Bond builds to a dramatic high, he incorporates certain distancing devices to temper the emotional heat and aid the audience in understanding the dialectic in terms of the socio-historical context. Bond's first tool is the lethal irony which drips icily from Jonson's bitter-coated tongue. Secondly, the scene is structured so as to give Jonson the role of mediator in order to forge the links between Shakespeare, Combe, and the anarchists. Finally, Bond uses the device of simultaneous dialogue to superimpose an over-view at the same time as the audience is caught up in the heated session between Combe and the peasants. Commenting on this scene as a whole, Jane Howell talks of the difficulty in maintaining the right balance:

[You need the] same violence from Jonson as you have from Combe and the Son over the other side of the stage - they both claw and tear, so that Shakespeare is torn from both sides like the bear....Then it will work and be funny [in a bleak sense].⁹

It is the same effect which Bond sought in the lynching scene in The Swing. Here, Bond's saving grace is Jonson's devastating wit which

entertains as it keeps the audience at one remove, and forces it to sharpen its own intellectual apparatus. "Your recent stuff's been pretty peculiar. What was The Winter's Tale about? I ask to be polite," (Sc. 4, p. 30) Jonson queries. His real reason in asking Shakespeare to meet him was to touch him up for a loan, which Shakespeare finally gives as he had done for the beggar woman. Jonson hammers away with a steady barrage of insults in order to provoke Shakespeare into an active confrontation:

What's your life been like? Any real blood, any prison? [...] Life doesn't seem to touch you, I mean soil you: You walk by on the clean pavement. [...] You are serene. Serene. [...] (Sc. 4, pp. 31-32)

But Shakespeare's only response is to drink himself into a stupor. Each barbed attack links back to the hanged girl and Shakespeare's evasion of political responsibility, and points up the irony of Shakespeare's predicament. To compound the irony, Jonson has been physically to hell and back and has become the hardened cynic filled with hate for the human species, his nihilism, the black side of the artist's compromise:

I killed [a man] once. [...] I've been in prison four times. Dark smelly places. No gardens. Sorry yours is too big. They kept coming in and taking people out to cut bits off them. Their hands. Take off their noses. Cut their stomachs open. Rummage round inside with a dirty fist and drag everything out. The law. [...] (Sc. 4, p. 31)

The moment Jerome is heard to exclaim, "I'll break Combe's neck", Jonson resumes his scathing attack on Shakespeare, "Where was I? Yes: hate. I hate you because you smile" (Sc. 4, p. 34).

The word "hate" spawns the subtly counterpointed dialogue between the peasants and Jonson. During the simultaneous dialogue, our

attention has to encompass Shakespeare who has slumped forward on the table, the stormy confrontation between Combe and the peasants, and Jonson who is "drunk but controlled" and who continues talking as he exits and re-enters with another bottle. Jonson's moment lends itself to the style of playing out to the audience, producing an air of theatricality to counter-balance the 'real':

COMBE. Every time you fill my
ditches I'll dig them out.
Every time you pull down my
fence I'll put it back.
There'll be more broken
fences.
(Sc. 4, p. 36)

JONSON. To spend my life
wandering through quiet
fields. Charm fish from water
with a song. Gather simple
eggs. Muse with my reflection
in quiet water. [.]

Bond utilizes here a technique which he developed in writing the libretto or "actions for music" for the revolutionary opera We Come to the River in collaboration with Hans Werner Henze. In the opera, the effect of extended irony to comment on the brutality of war was achieved by utilizing three stages to play three scenes simultaneously --dialogue and music (the musicians are on one stage) work together in an ironic contrapuntal arrangement. But whether the device of simultaneity to counterpoint the visual elements and the action can be a successful tool for analytical purposes remains a subject for debate.¹⁰

Although in this scene in Bingo all the words of simultaneous dialogue can not possibly be heard at once, the general effect of sharply antagonistic worlds and attitudes is keenly felt. The device injects a mode of stage artifice into a realistic dramatic conflict, breaking the stage illusion and involving the audience as dual role-players (both detached and involved) in this potentially dangerous charade. Jonson's light cynical banter as cool observer of the scene is in sharp contrast

to the taut dialogue between Combe and Jerome, and is cruelly inappropriate to the urgency of the situation. His mockery of the romantic artist's idyll (a cruel echo of Shakespeare's "serenity") is juxtaposed with Combe's mockery of the anarchist's dream world; Combe's reiteration of the real world measured in tangibles is bounced off Jonson's dismissal of art as a practical commodity. Jonson's comments show him ironically as much a silent conspirator as Shakespeare, in that he detaches himself from any involvement in the political turmoil raging around him. Turning to Shakespeare, he shakes him and caustically informs him, "The pilgrims have come." Thus, the distancing mechanisms serve to challenge the world of appearances represented by Combe's mentality, and all misguided responses to such a fixed mental state. The scene's final confrontation is between Shakespeare and Jerome:

SHAKESPEARE. You've been filling the ditches.

JEROME. No.

SHAKESPEARE. Lie to me. Lie. Lie. You have to lie to me now.
(Sc. 4, p. 38)

Shakespeare's despairing words are double-edged. He can no longer lie to himself, but, at the same time, he is no longer entitled to hear the truth.

The chilling landscape of the snow scene is the logical sequel to Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale. Shakespeare drunkenly wanders in the snow, and engages briefly in a child's game of snowballs with the Old Man while dark, huddled, quiet figures are seen to "pass quickly over the top of the stage." He then confronts his daughter Judith and admits he is at fault for having corrupted her with false values. For

Judith, his words are meaningless.. Having known only affection bought by possessions, she can only return in kind. Shakespeare is left alone with memories of the sonnets of his youth and thoughts of death. A few critics see Bingo as a "magnificent cry of total despair."¹¹ And yet Bond succeeds in keeping the dualistic strategy by enlarging the focus in this and the suicide scene in order to stress the importance of the inter-relatedness of events. Thus, the moment that Shakespeare despairs, "Every writer writes in other men's blood" (Sc. 5, p. 43), a shot rings out, and a voice is heard to cry and whimper weakly. Shakespeare ignores the cry and delivers his own Lear-like eulogy. But this eulogy equally sounds the death-knell of humanist despair which is but an empty echo in an inhospitable landscape filled with hate, violence, and injustice:

I could lie in this snow a whole life. [..] New Worlds. Keys turning new locks - pushing the iron open like lion's teeth. [..] Wolves will drag me through the snow. I'll sit in their lair and smile and be rich. In the morning or when I die the sun will rise and melt it all away. The dream. [..] A dream that leads to sleep. [..] Was anything done? Was anything done? (Sc. 5, p. 43)

(Bond had considered titling his play "Was Anything Done?" in reference to the quote in Leonardo Da Vinci's Notebooks ["Tell me if ever anything was done?"]¹²)

The final violence of suicide does not immediately follow as one might expect. Shakespeare comes to judge himself which in turn serves to implicate the entire play:

I howled when they suffered, but they were whipped and hanged so that I could be free. [..] If children go in rags we make the wind. If the table's empty we blight the harvest. (Sc. 6, pp. 48-49)

One notes the significant pronoun change from the subjective "I" to the collective "we". Shakespeare then joins with the Son who has been accused of shooting his father, in order to protect him against Combe. But the moment the Son admits to the killing, Shakespeare asks for the poison. Bond has written that "there is no such thing as a pure action."¹³ Shakespeare's idealism would not embrace the necessity for political realism. On the other hand, the Son, who has become politically involved to the point of violence, has been ambiguously represented throughout the play as an unstable religious fanatic. His hatred of sex becomes enmeshed with the hatred of class injustice. In one sense, he is a victim of his society. But he is also to be condemned for his failure to judge his action. At the end, he waivers between acceptance and denial of the killing, and decides to leave for the New World. The play closes on two images of money and death juxtaposed. Shakespeare writhes horribly on the floor while Judith ransacks his bed for his will, and the Son thinks of greener pastures when he has just killed his father.

Bingo is a powerful work melding emotive force with clear, epic analysis. One is ultimately as affected by the moral, cultural and political issues which are raised, as by the tragic spectacle of Shakespeare's suicide. Bond successfully encompasses the notions of self-integrity, the necessity for social action and the clear acceptance of the responsibility for such action. While demonstrating the insidious web of violence and corruption which touches every thread of a social fabric woven by money and continuing to plead for rational change, he squarely faces the fact that if society is not changed rationally, irrational means will be found.

With The Fool: 'Scenes of Bread and Love,' we jump ahead to the nineteenth century and the dawn of the Industrial Revolution which ushered in the capitalistic ethic, the destruction of communal life on the land, and indigenous folk culture. The historical incident is again the enclosure of common lands, but the focus this time is on the life of the rural labourers whose active resistance led to food riots, imprisonment, and hanging. The nineteenth century was also the artistic celebration of the romantic notion of the individual. The Fool tells the story of the village poet, John Clare, who was driven mad by the mistakes of a whole age. From the beginning, Clare is the outsider, isolated by his genius and temperament from the external reality which sees his chums brought to trial and his best friend Darkie hanged for looting, rioting, and violence against the local Parson. The second half of the play delineates with bitter irony Clare's first taste of success, only for him to be betrayed by the censorship of his society and his wife. Poverty, incarceration in the asylum, and eventual insanity complete the portrait of the man and artist alienated from the self and his world. In a supreme moment of madness, Clare has a vision of what might have been and what yet could be. His struggle embodies both the artistic and political consciousness of his time, with strong allusions to our present age and the general question of the creation of a human culture.

The dialectic of bread and love resonates on many levels, while Darkie and Clare represent the extreme states of action and thought. And this divisiveness is further exacerbated by the dichotomy in Clare who seeks freedom in his ideal, Mary. At the most essential level, it characterizes a society which literally murders the creative impulse.

essential for change.

The Fool is perhaps Bond's warmest and most compassionate play. Even the upper classes wear a more recognizably human face, although they scarcely justify Harold Hobson's interpretation of the play as "unashamedly snobbish right-wing."¹⁴ More to the point is the general problem of the play's emotional impact. Bond is dealing with highly volatile subject matter, and the particular situation runs close to Bond's own roots. (The action takes place in The Fens, East Anglia, and the dialect is East Anglian. Bond's grandfather was an itinerant farm labourer in this community, and Bond spent part of his childhood visiting his grandparents.) And this, combined with Bond's urgent sense of suffering and outrage at a system which destroys basic human decencies and the moral fabric of community, demands the tightest control if it is not to escape into subjectivism. In part, the objective/historical framework lends distance and gives greater clarity to the social argument. But the most vital distancing strategy remains the necessary directorial and acting approach. In this regard, the log book for the rehearsals of the first production of The Fool (1975), is especially helpful.

Peter Gill, the assigned Royal Court director, describes a fundamental dualism which he finds in Bond's work:

I set myself the task to try and make it accessible, and to try and pull out of it that actual warmth which Edward has as a writer and as a person. Especially as there is also a sense in which his writing tries to stifle the human qualities in the characters and the human impulses of the play.¹⁵

Bond gives Clare only one main scene of his own in the first half of the play, the scene with Mary, a servant in Lord Milton's house. The act-

ress playing Mary found it equally difficult not to romanticize it and to convey the richness of content packed in the density of Bond's language:

Personally you bleed for John Clare....I have only a short space of time in which to create the potential for Clare's passion. Bond's language is so condensed. It's like poetry. But you have to deliver it in such a way that it releases the mass of information underlying the words. Working with it is very delicate....Bond's images are so massive and powerful... you just have to have the courage to say them and live through them.¹⁶

The scene in question provoked incredibly divergent responses. Either it was seen as a "prosaic act of copulation in a wood," or as the "decisive poetical, metaphysical, mystical experience which determined a man's whole life!"¹⁷ What is not discussed is the total context in which it occurs. Clare and Mary meet and make love in the dark of Milton's woods, pierced by the shaft of moonlight, and in full view of Milton's armed gamekeepers:

MARY. Hungry?

CLARE. Allus hungry.

MARY takes out bread and gives him some. They eat.

MARY. Stole it.

CLARE (touches her breast while he eats). Well built gal.

[...] Like t' live in this forest. The two on us. Tread the reeds an' creep in. (Sc. 2, p. 14)¹⁸

The mood is abruptly jarred by a keeper's whistle, a gun blast, the keeper's comment--"Never drive that out the wood. Animal in rut. Under your feet, step over 'em, worms rolled up [...]"--(Sc. 2, p. 14)--and Clare:

CLARE. Bugger's gone.

MARY (quietly amused. Looks down at her crotch). You made
little drops on my hair. Silver in this moonlight.

CLARE. On't goo. (Sc. 2, p. 15)

We next catch a brief glimpse of Clare during the night of the riots. Clare, with all that's happening around him, is obsessed only with finding his Mary. He will see her once more, years later, when he escapes briefly from the asylum to discover she has become a tramp, - "Grotesque, filthy, ugly" (Sc. 7, p. 60) - and to realize his life has been a fantasy.

Martin Esslin stresses the view that Bond is concerned to show "the dilemmas of a poetic temperament, which implies an excessively lively imagination and the capacity to become deeply obsessed with a beloved individual."¹⁹ This suggests that Bond wants our sympathy above all for a given of human nature which brings on the individual's tragic fate. And yet Bond gives us the poetic thread of the play as necessarily bound up with the larger social dynamic, suggesting instead that subjective experience is in large part mediated through the social and political consciousness of the time. As in Bingo, the movement is away from traditional character drama. Darkie, the rebel, who dominates the first part of the play, explains the social problem to Clare with the assistance of Patty, his sister and Clare's fiancé:

DARKIE. [.] They're cuttin' the forest down t' make fields.

.....
Milton want the land for corn.

.....
They'll drain the common fen an' turn off the river.

CLARE. Thass a lot a old scare talk.

PATTY (nervously). Thass true boy. They saw chaps gooin' round

the fields this mornin with chains an' w~~as~~tin' books.

[.] Wrote the river down in the books.

CLARE. You heard a this gall? (She nods.) How'd you git rid of a river - (Laughs.) turn the river off.

PATTY. Dam her up an' pump her out boy!

CLARE. Can't t' thass our's much as his. An' the fens. An' the trees. What's it mean boy? We'll lose our fishin' - our wood - cows on the fen common. How'll we live? Not on the few bob they pay us for workin' their land. We need us own bit a land.

DARKIE. They take all the land they'll hev t'pay us proper wages.


CLARE. Like factory boys? They git proper wages? (Sc. 2, p. 11)

Clare is initially seen as part of his community which has to face certain material facts. He opens the play by getting the Mummers Play going. The Mummers Play was a folk custom traditionally associated with the winter solstice. Lord Milton and his guests merrily applaud the play, which has Colonel Bullslasher ("known as Boney") brutally slay Saint George and take his money, and follow the entertainment with their own words of wisdom before offering hot pies and punch:

PARSON. But we are entering a new age. An iron age. New engines, new factories, cities, ways, laws. The old ways must go. The noble horse and the hand are slow. [.] We must work for the common good. God bless you.

5 MILTON. The war made us all prosperous but prices have fallen with the peace. Wages must follow. Not because I say so. That is a law of economic science. [.] Civilization costs money like everything else. (Sc. 1, p. 6)

Darkie refuses their cheer ("His drink'd choke me"):

 Six day a week I goo t'work in the dark an' come home in the dark - for what? Ten shillin'. Even Judas got thirty - but he come from a good family an' wouldn't work for less. (Sc. 1, p. 7)

One of the more effective distancing strategies is the role of Milton. Bond's Milton, unlike Blake's, is genuinely of the party of evil. By means of the counter-allusion, Bond can use Milton to stand for the forces of reaction, in league with the Parson, and later the Doctor, whom Milton hires in order to commit Clare to the asylum.

The play's force builds on these fundamentally irreconcilable antagonisms. Three central images best illustrate the problem of the right tension between involvement and critical understanding in order that the audience perceive the dialectic and understand it in terms of the wider socio-historical context: the stripping of the Parson; the prison scene; and the boxing scene.

Clare is conspicuously absent from the first. Events which lead up to the stripping are swift: "Whole village up t'night!" "We'll doo all the big houses." "Proper silver. On't need candles in 'em. Light the room up by themselves" (Sc. 3, pp. 16-17). The Parson has fled to the woods to escape the rioters. He suddenly comes up against Darkie and his band. The scene's precisely orchestrated text builds in emotional intensity. Its choreography has four movements. Initially, the confrontation is between Darkie and the Parson, while all the others are grouped standing apart. Darkie angrily turns the Parson's pockets out, pulls his gold ring off, yanks his gold cross free, breaks his silver walking stick. With each gesture, he spits out words of hate. The second movement brings Mary and Betty into the action while the men continue to remain apart. Betty is amazed at the "pearly buttons," and Mary shrieks with laughter as she shows Betty how they fasten to studs. The Parson's cry, "Aren't you ashamed?" is tersely echoed by an angry chorus:

BETTY. No. No. No. No. I on't ashamed. I'm ashamed I can't feed my kid.

.....

PETER. I'm ashamed I work in parson's field an' crawl home like an animal.

MILES. I'm ashamed the sweat roll off me while you git fat!

.....

HAMO. I'm ashamed t'goo t'sleep with the dirt out your fields on me hands every night. (Sc. 3, p. 22)

Bond strikes a precarious balance between the real and unreal. The chorus-like effect increases the theatricality, making it more efficient without being rigidly stylized (and hence 'unreal'). At the same time, the "chorus" also serves as a moral commentator on the action, forcing the audience to concentrate on both the socio/economic facts which are given and the morality of the action. The third movement involves the men in the actual stripping. The tempo builds and the words shorten and sharpen: "Git it off." "Off." "Pull it off." At the same time, certain distancing factors such as multiple focus and sharp tonal contrasts check the intensity as the men's fury builds. Betty stands in awe, touching the Parson's shoes: "Softer'n gloves" (Sc. 3, p. 22).

Mary, who is shrewd and out for herself, is on the ground searching for a lost button stud. The focus is further split by the action of young Lawrence who crawls about the stage, his bloodied head wrapped in an enormous bundle of stolen linen. This addition of melodramatic action forms but one of the many abrasive elements in the scene which nonetheless cohere into a single image. The actor who played Lawrence found the demands made upon him both frustrating and challenging:

Bond's grip on the scene is so tight....the general focus...is so specific-it doesn't allow much room to relax or create.... Even though I'm crying I've got to be conscious of orchestrat-

ing my crawling round the stage so that it fits in with the image of the scene....I love the play and I'm not bored with it. But I don't enjoy doing it. It's just like taking exams.²⁰

The actor who played Bob also stresses the precedence of technique over the expression of purely inner emotions:

I can't think of it in terms of character. I have to work off every moment. That's the way the scenes are built up. It's a play of moments, instead of character....I feel like I'm a piece of moving scenery, doing its thing in the right place.... I can't identify any of the people around me apart from what they do on stage.²¹

And yet all agreed on the shattering impact of the scene. The actor who played Peter discusses the kind of "basic, nitty-gritty feelings" which Bond elicits:

my character moves from mad, irresponsible elation through cold anger to a final despair at the hopelessness of the situation. Look at our relationship to the parson. And our growing consciousness of our exploitation. At first we don't realize it, then wham, suddenly we're confronted with it.²²

This is, of course, precisely the learning experience Bond intends for the audience. He exhibits his chilling manipulation and control in the way that he confronts the audience with extreme emotional states while not allowing the actor (or the audience) the normal psychological build-up towards these states.

Bond's language has its own built-in tension between emotional immediacy and taut control. In part, the use of dialect distances and points up more sharply class differences. But the East Anglian accent itself serves a specific purpose for Bond:

I use it because of its curious concrete feel, its repetitive-ness, it's like a sort of hammer knocking, knocking, knocking.

But at the same time it can be very agile and witty. It's language which imitates experience. Because language shouldn't be just words, it should be something that moves in the mouth and forces gestures and forces action.²³

It may be argued that the use of accents limits the universality of Bond's plays. But by way of its concrete showing of the dynamic action, it becomes an effective theatrical device to convey the public significance of the metaphorical action.

The third movement builds to a crescendo as Darkie explodes in a cold rage:

Your flesh cold now boy? 'Fraid I put my fist in your face? Hev a fist in my face all day. On't like my fist wave in your eye? Hev a fist stuck in my eye every day. (Sc. 3, p. 23)

As quickly, it subsides for a brief second with Bob and Betty's objective comments:

BOB. More clothes under that.

BETTY. Walkin' shop. (Sc. 3, p. 23).

It is suddenly a powerful and very disturbing moment when the Parson stands stripped and shivering while the others stand and stare almost in awe. It is in this mood that first one and then another pinch and pull at his skin:

BETTY. My baby. My baby on't got proper skin like that. Look how soft that is. Like silk lace. My baby's born hard - hev animal skin like summat live in the road. [.] Look at that. Come away in handfuls. (Sc. 3, p. 23)

The word "flesh" is sounded like one long repetitive note and is finally mingled with a general crying and the Parson's weeping. The effect is a very curious one--compelling, haunting, moving, grotesque, and yet

one remains somehow detached. The chorus becomes almost anonymous expressing a near-stylized anguish which contrasts sharply with the Parson's abject self-pity (see Plate 8). Peter Gill was concerned that either the audience might laugh at the actual stripping, or that the "dream-like" quality which Gill responds to in Bond's work might supersede the real. Gill acknowledges, however, that "Bond is like a really good painter, as opposed to a designer; he penetrates to something which when you do it has a kind of real image."²⁴ Bond manipulates the changing rhythms, tonal contrasts and mood shifts so that each movement advances the argument towards a chilling liberating irony. The rioters are seen as victims of the well-being of a society which functions on exploitation and guilt; their gross act of defiance is a moral rebellion against its values. Bond's tough, anti-romantic stance forces the audience to question who is the real thief even before Darkie pronounces a judgement that transcends an exclusively emotional or subjective response:

Where you stole that flesh boy? Your flesh is stolen goods.
You're covered in stolen goods when you strip! [.] You call us
thief when we took silver. You took us flesh! (Sc. 3, p. 24)

The final movement of quiet despair is clinched by Betty's angry gesture of flinging a blood-stained piece of linen at the Parson to cover himself: "Cover it! On't you throw charity back in my face!" (Sc. 3, p. 24).

Bond does admit that the problem of sympathy for the Parson might arise. More importantly, one is led to a critical judgement about a society's theft of basic human rights. "Sympathy, charity, yes," Bond replies, "but this can be used to support the system that impoverishes,



Plate 8

so I'm afraid harder questions are asked of us than where our sympathies lie."²⁵ Elsewhere Bond has expanded upon his need to make his stage metaphors more specific, and therefore more reconciled with his objective description of the scene:

what I wanted to say is 'We are starving, uncultured, ludicrous, clumsy;...You are refined, sensitive, imaginative; ... Because you are a thief.' So the ideal way of showing that was just to take his clothes away and to say you are still a thief because you are still covered in stolen goods. You stole our flesh.²⁶

And I think Bond succeeds in conveying the general social and political statement beyond the particular ugliness in a way he was not able to accomplish with, for example, the stoning incident in Saved. Here, his reach encompasses the "profounder emotionalism"²⁷ of epic theatre's multi-dimensional experience.

Bond closes the scene with the arrival of Lord Milton, whose first reaction is to regard the rioter's behaviour as that of naughty children and to let them go to stave off further violence. But when one of his men accidentally kills Lawrence, Lord Milton quickly orders them all rounded up and marched off under the protection of his guns.

The prison scene presented special difficulties for Peter Gill. The painful situation with Patty and Clare who wait with Darkie and the boys until they learn who is to be pardoned, lends itself to conventional dramatic playing. And yet he had to deal with Clare's strange manic behaviour, behaviour that could be handled expressionistically, a stage-craze and disavows. Twice, Clare becomes convulsed with uncontrollable laughter which spills out beyond the cramped prison cell and sets off different kinds of laughter throughout the prison--nervous and hysterical at first, and finally, a kind of hysterical sobbing. The

first outburst of laughter coincides with Patty's news that "Scribblin' come t' summat. Gen'man bin. Talk 'bout a book" (Sc. 4, p. 28). And as Clare's laughter occasions the larger laughter outside, the allusion is clearly to the possibility of freedom for all, including Clare, whose recognition might eventuate in a way out of the social morass if the artist can become a catalyst for change (Miles: "Write 'bout this place. What goo on" Sc. 4, p. 28). And Clare, ironically, does learn something from his experience in the first cell, because it is not only his love poetry but his political verse which his society condemns. Initially, then, the laughter is a shared laughter inviting the audience to participate in its message of hope. However, the laughter quickly freezes as the Parson's cruel, sanctimonious and hypocritical sermonizing grimly reminds the prisoners of the truth of the world outside:

Forget this world, its misery and waste, all luxury and vice,
its painted vanities. [...] Die to this dark world. Live in
eternal day. (BOB cries a little. The PARSON turns to him
eagerly. He takes the crying as a sign.) Yes, yes. [...] God
is here. (Sc. 4, p. 29)

As the laughter outside builds, indicating that some prisoners have been released, the group inside the cell listen in silence and then begin to pound frantically on the cell door. With these few gestures, Bond shows the desperate need for freedom and a true justice which would allow for the natural expression of shared human impulses, not the mad confines of a world which keeps human beings alienated and locked in fear. As the reprieve comes for all in the cell but Darkie and four others outside, the group's jubilation is the grotesque embodiment of the distortion of human behaviour--a distortion triggered

by the painful absurdity of their circumstances.

Up to this point, Bond interweaves credibly the contradictions in both the private and public spheres. With Clare's second outburst, the play's movement is more inward. The laughter outside seems less realistic and loses its force as an objective comment on the wider political circumstance. Clare sits for a moment "with his head in his hands":

CLARE begins to laugh. It is easy, not hysterical, but not calm. It wells up in him and overflows.

.....
CLARE lies on the bench. He covers himself with the blanket to muffle the sound.

.....
CLARE falls on the floor. He rolls about under the blanket. Off, there is a short burst of laughter. It becomes hysterical - like sobbing. It lasts for a few seconds. CLARE laughs happily through it. (Sc. 4, pp. 33-34)

The effect is extremely disquieting. On the one hand, it does pull us up sharply from an easy emotional surrender to the immediate dreadful circumstances--Darkie's fate, his silent courage in the face of death, his gift of his green coat to Clare, his acceptance of Clare and the final good-bye. Each of these painful moments is acutely felt. But on the other hand the cruel, almost perverse inappropriateness of Clare's laughter intimates that Clare's pain is deeper, larger than himself ("Hurts. Hurts" [Sc. 5, p. 34]). On the symbolic level, Clare's laughter reverberates more darkly, courting death and despair in perhaps the only way he knows how. Essentially, Clare's laughter reveals the private pain of his obsession with Mary. Once Patty leaves, Clare tells Darkie that he had a girl with him the night of the riots and he hopes Darkie might know her whereabouts. Clare and Darkie want the same thing, but Clare's notion of freedom is still bound up with his "angel of freedom." In the real-life John Clare's original words, Mary is

apotheosized:

To Mary

Thou seem'dst an angel when I met thee first,
Nor has aught made thee otherwise to me:
Possession had not cloyed my love, nor curst
Fancy's wild visions with reality.

John Clare²⁸

Bond recasts Clare's poem into a modern version:

Mary

You are a poet and should have known
You must imagine the real and not the illusion

Your woman spent her life under your roof
You never met - not once
In the living room or kitchen
Clare, you created illusions
And they destroy poets

Edward Bond²⁹

The movement of the second half of the play is towards the possibility of a higher synthesis. Although such a possibility is not realized in the events of this play, it is offered, nonetheless, as one which the audience may effect.

Bond performs another variation of theatrical counterpoint in the boxing scene in order to dramatize the larger social processes in action. The scene's action is split between the group downstage which comprises Clare and his London literary patrons, and the fight upstage. In sheer physical terms, the scene presents a daring theatrical challenge. Peter Gill realized it would work only if "[all the actors] are in the scene together... playing the whole scene as a scene."³⁰ The actors had to work within this double perspective, adjusting their tone to the second action. One actor commented, "The way the focus shifts... is like a film in the way the audience's attention is drawn from one

element to another."³¹ The self-conscious theatricality of performance establishes a certain separateness of the self from the role and this same duality between participation and detachment which transfers to the audience prevents it from relating solely on an individual and personal level. Equally, the tough physical dynamics of the boxing match demand the utmost skill in timing and control if the appearance of mere staginess in the scene as a whole is to be avoided.

Again, as in the cloth cutting scene in The Sea and the pub scene in Bingo, we are confronted with two apparently disparate worlds which ironically emerge as a single destructive force. On one side we have the black boxer who sells his pound of flesh to the elegant Marquis who goads him on to beat the Irishman to a pulp ("Do it stylish") (Sc. 5, p. 43). On the other side in the poet's corner, Clare is politely pulverized by Admiral Lord Radstock: "Who controls the brute in man? Polite society. Well, your verse undermines its authority. There'd be chaos" (Sc. 5, p. 43). The scene fascinates in the way it polarizes, meshes and then splits out again to reveal Clare's identification with the defeated Irishman. One feels every cruel blow that is dealt Clare and yet it is apprehended at one ironic remove.

Bond surrounds Clare with a rag-tag assortment of creatures, each of whom is as isolated from the real world as he is. Mrs. Emmerson is in love with the idea of the buccolic poet who dwells on some higher plane of existence communing with his lofty muse. Charles Lamb, "dressed as a literary romantic" and drunk, ironically does see through the grass and the trees and acknowledges Clare as the "fool" of the play's title for daring to speak the truth:

Truth shelters in the gutter:

.....
Only a wise man tries to do that-- or another sort of fool.
(Sc. 5, p. 39)

Lamb is accompanied by his mad sister Mary who, like our modern-day shopping-bag ladies, is forced to scrounge among the refuse bins of a morally destitute society. With her bags of rotted food, Mary is "protected" by the straight-jacket she carries with her. And finally, there is Lord Radstock who between "Tut. Tut." and confused snatches of Clare's poetry which he obviously has not read, extorts his pound of flesh by reminding Clare that his verses offend the new land owning class--the only class who can read let alone afford to buy his books. Meanwhile, a pair of monocled Harrow fops vie with the backers of the Irishman--one a greasy Cockney and the other a slimy opportunist who has actually backed the black man. The sound of hurting flesh recalls the stripping scene. The question now is society's theft of the material and spiritual sustenance of the artist (and hence, of culture). Both Clare and Jackson are bound to their patrons in the iron vice of their age. And for this, they are Bond's 'bigger fools'.

In the final scenes, the spectacle of Clare's anguished suffering and crushing isolation is painfully felt in immediate and real terms. There is a danger that the emotional impact might overwhelm. And yet each scene is carefully structured in order to demonstrate the cost in human terms of both the distorted inner vision and the obscene political reality. In addition to specific distancing strategies--theatrical role-playing, the shifting to the modes of the grotesque and comic-grotesque--the scenes sprawl in epic fashion, in time and space. The use of gaps between scenes serves as a "non-recuperative flash forward technique," or a distanced mode to the extent that it involves brain-

work on the part of the audience in figuring out how the action has progressed from A to C to F... Often the "explanation" will come late in the scene. By these means, the traditional emphatic response is subverted and re-directed towards a profounder feeling and understanding of the societal pressures which bring about the tragedy.

Five years hence, we see Patty and Clare mired in a domestic hell, existing on the raw edge of despair and desperation. With the arrival of Mrs. Emmerson, Lord Milton and his circus--his keeper ready with a gun in case of trouble, the Doctor, and the Parson--the metaphor of the boxing ring, denoting the relations between those who dominate and those who are forced to conform, is made grotesquely manifest. If equal weight is given to the performative aspects of characters in their social roles, their unwittingly ironic self-comments should reveal their own blindness and serve to condemn society at large. The Parson admonishes Clare to be on his best behaviour, to which Clare retorts, "On'y got the one behaviour so he'll hev t'make doo. Others hev" (Sc. 6, p. 56). It is precisely this fundamental problem which Bond poses. All the characters take the appearance for reality. Clare is betrayed because he imagines that he is a "boxer an' Lord Bryon" (Sc. 6, p. 57), a confession which Patty was forced to reveal to the Parson. On the one hand, he is savaged by the satanic forces in society and is a victim of his romantic illusions. On the other hand, the image connotes both the possibility of the man of action and of vision. If effectively combined, they would threaten the foundations of society. Thus, even before Clare is cruelly bound up in ropes and shoved into a cart like a dangerous animal, there is the disturbing realization that all are bound in straight-jackets of crippling attitudes and values.

The analysis is further advanced by means of the concrete, visual object. As we are caught up in the horrible action of Clare about to be carted off, our attention is forcibly drawn to the sight of bags and bags of unsold books, the bags themselves woven of fine hessian. We come to understand that the most punishing insult is the fact that Clare is now hopelessly in debt to his publisher for the unsold books, their printing costs having doubled since Clare's dialect had to be edited. Lord Milton insists the bags be returned since they are valuable hunting bags. The scene recalls Mary's bags of wasted food and the "protection" of her straight-jacket, and by way of metaphoric association, the coercive "protection" of the boxers' backers, the enclosure of common lands for private gain in the name of progress, and the cultural and economic "protection" of the actors in their guise as mummers, each image in its own way reinforcing the cruel waste of human potential shown throughout the play.

In the subsequent scene where we see Clare years later, mad but still articulate, Bond manipulates our response. Initially, the real and unreal co-exist uneasily. Clare's encounter with Mary, now a grotesque tramp and with Darkie, who gags on the piece of bread which Mary offers, intensifies the horror of Clare's inner struggle. This image is quickly juxtaposed and measured against ugly external reality in the scenario of itinerant Irish workers who are forced to scrounge for scraps of food and sex in the dark and dangerous woods of alien territory. Clare's sudden "lucid" insight in a state of madness, expressed in the long speech which I quote below, is thus linked to the wider suffering. Bond would have us understand that Clare is more "rational" here than at any other time in the play, his madness a meta-

phor for sanity in an otherwise insane world. (On the subject of metaphorical madness in Bond's plays, Tony Coult alludes to the influence of R.D. Laing.³²) In this way, our own imaginative and empathic response is called into question. The change in Clare is cruelly ironic. Only when he is mad does he break free from his cultural conditioning. But his vision is intended to refute the notion that man has only "one behaviour." Above all, it is this fixed precept that will not do:

Bread goo from mouth t'mouth an' what it taste of: other mouths. Talkin' an' laughin'. Thinkin' people. I wandered round an' round. Where to? Here. An' a blind man git here before me. The blind goo in a straight line. We should have come t'gether. She git the bread. He crack the heads when they come after us. An' I - I'd hev teach him how to eat. I am a poet an' I teach men how to eat. Then she on't goo in rags. He on't blind. An' I - on't goo mad in a madhouse. (Sc. 7, p. 66)

The power of the closing scene is felt through the chilling juxtaposition of both the imagistic and symbolic frames of reference, and the wider ramifications of the dialectic of 'bread' and 'love'. In the icy comfort of the sun-drenched sitting-room of the asylum, where all are 'nourished' and 'cared for', Mary Lamb and "Napoleon" play chess. Clare is wheeled in, strapped in a straight jacket. "He makes rhythmic sounds [...] and writhes from side to side." His appearance is that of "a shrivelled puppet. His head nods like a doll's. His face is white" (Sc. 8, p. 68). Bond deliberately juxtaposes this dreadful image with the Doctor's invitation to Lord Milton to take "meat tea" and Lord Milton's long speech on the changing times. On the surface, it appears as though Milton has learned something, but his self-justification serves to confirm his state of blindness:

The dawn hurts my eyes. I hate my son. [.] I was cruel some-
times. Foolish. But did I hate? No. [.] He hates. [.] In
love with his factories. It's changed. (Sc. 8, p. 69)

The 'dawn of change' has more sweeping consequences.. The moment Milton
leaves, "The door swings slowly open. It catches the sun. It flashes
once into the room. Brilliantly. Silence. An owl calls in the trees"
(Sc. 8, p. 69). The layers of irony in this scene multiply outwards.
It recalls the boxing scene and Charles Lamb's double-edged prophecy of
the poet-fool's truth:

The goddess of wisdom is a bird of prey, the owl. But the fools
have hunted her and put her in a cage. If you try to let her
out she savages your hand. Only a wise man tries to do that -
or another sort of fool. (Sc. 5, p. 39)

It recalls too the Doctor's comment in coming to fetch Clare in Scene
Six: "Then I can start disentangling the truth from the poetry" (Sc.
6, p. 58), and Clare's own role as Doctor in the Mummers Play, and his
newly-envisaged role of the artist as a different kind of healer in
society. In sharp contrast to Lord Milton's "blindness," the image of
light flashing ~~brilliantly~~ thus pays tribute to Clare's rebellious
spirit which is still felt in the hard consonants of his truncated
speech. Bond has written:

So I learned in my cell
And my dark friend in his
That one day our bread might taste of reason

Reason is the mark of kin
Poetry destroys illusions and doesn't create them
And hope is a passion that will not let men
Rest in asylum's peace

("The Fool" Poems)³³

Milton returns with Patty who has experienced the death of her two sons

in the war and who has somehow survived:

CLARE. L...l...

MARY LAMB. You look all right.

PATTY. Yes, well.

CLARE. G...g...

MARY LAMB. Grey hair.

PATTY. On't git younger. P'raps I'll see you again some time.
[.] Sorry you on't had a proper life. Us hev t' make the
most of what there is. On't us, boy? No use lettin' goo.
(Pats his arm.) Learn some way t'stay on top. I'd be a fool
t'cry now. (Sc. 8, p. 71)

Patty's speech is addressed as much to the audience as to Clare. Bond would prefer that we understand the truth by not giving in to any purely personal feelings of pity.

The play closes on the chilling note of Milton's hurried exit and his retracted statement about his son: "Not true. Does his duty. Means very well. Scrupulous in fact" (Sc. 8, p. 71). The poet has not been assigned to grotesque oblivion; rather, his words (and the crimes they record) may yet become part of living history, ready to do battle against the blind forces of habit and self-interest.

The Fool is a deeply moving and complex play. Its emotional force is, however, so raw that it would require skillful handling both in the restraint of the acting approach, and in the directorial emphasis upon the commentary which is inherent in the text, the epic structure of the scenes, and the specific distancing techniques.

Chapter Five Endnotes

¹ Edward Bond, "A Poem," "The Worlds," with "The Activists Papers" (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 157.

² Edward Bond, "Us, Our Drama and the National Theatre," Plays and Players, 26 (October 1978), p. 9.

³ Ruby Cohn, "The Fabulous Theatre of Edward Bond," in Essays on Contemporary British Drama, eds. Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim (Munich: Max Hueber, 1981), p. 196.

⁴ Bond, quoted in Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, A Companion to the Plays (London: TQ Publications, 1978), pp. 62-63.

⁵ Bond, "The Worlds," with "The Activists Papers," p. 108.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 131; 129.

⁷ Until further notice, all parenthetical, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, Bingo (London: Methuen, 1974).

⁸ Bond, Introduction to "Bingo", p. viii.

⁹ Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Bond: A Study of his Plays (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 192.

¹⁰ On the subject of simultaneity, critical responses to the opera were very mixed. For one critic, the challenge was too "taxing...the eye and ear so grossly overburdened that in attending to one aspect of the drama and the music one almost inevitably misses the other" (Peter Heyworth, "Activating Opera," The Observer Review [8 July, 1976], p. 19). Another critic acknowledged that "the strange counter-point... made us wonder as to the nature of the victory" (Richard Blackford, "The Road to the River," Music and Musicians, 24 [July 1976], 24). Yet another critic praised the total work for its "dialectical power" (Christopher Hunt, "Henze and Bond Break Down Barriers," Opera, [July 1976], p. 605).

¹¹ Michael Anderson, "Exeter," Plays and Players, 21 (January 1974), 62.

¹² Noted in Hay and Roberts, p. 182.

¹³ Bond, quoted in Hay and Roberts, A Companion to the Plays, p. 61.

¹⁴ Harold Hobson, quoted in Martin Esslin, "Nor Yet A 'Fool' to Fame," Theatre Quarterly, 6 (Spring 1976), 42.

¹⁵ Peter Gill, "Edward Bond's 'The Fool' at the Royal Court Theatre," Theatre Quarterly, 6 (Spring 1976), 31.

16 Ibid., p. 19.

17 The first quote is by Frank Marcus, quoted in Esslin, "Nor Yet A 'Fool' to Fame," 42; the second quote is by Esslin, 42.

18 All parenthetical part, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, The Fool and We Come to the River (London: Methuen, 1976).

19 Esslin, 41.

20 Gill, 23.

21 Ibid., p. 22.

22 Ibid., p. 22.

23 Assessment and Interview with Tony Coult, "Creating What is Normal," Plays and Players, 23 (December 1975), 11.

24 Gill, 30.

25 British Recording London Film Catalogue, London Week-end Television and Reinart Moritz Productions, 1980. (Scenes from four of Bond's plays and Interview with Bond by Melvyn Bragg.)

26 Interview with Bond, Christopher Innes, "Edward Bond: From Rationalism to Rhapsody," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 23 (Summer 1979), 112-113.

27 In Charles Marowitz's view, upon assessing the audience-effect of Peter Brook's King Lear, "the removal of sympathy and identification is the price we must pay for epic objectivity; that in forfeiting our conventional empathy for the poor old geezer tossed out on a stormy night by two cruel daughters, we prepare ourselves for the profounder emotionalism which comes from understanding the merciless logic of the play's totality; the realization that the tragedy is not Lear's but ours." Theatre At Work, eds. Charles Marowitz and Simon Trussler (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), pp. 123-132.

28 Gill, 19.

29 Bond, Theatre Poems and Songs (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 63.

30 Gill, 27.

31 Ibid., 23.

32 Tony Coult, The Plays of Edward Bond (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 65.

33 Bond, "Clare: Autobiography of a Dead Man" and "Culture," Theatre Poems and Songs, pp. 64 and 60.

Chapter Six:

Counter-Text Distancing in Lear and Restoration

By creating a "counter-text" to known legends and literary conventions Bond is able to achieve a distinctively new dialectical mode of perception. In both Lear (1971) and Restoration (1981), the playing off of a politically-oriented modern version against a "familiar" subject matter serves simultaneously as a principal distanced mode and as the dramatic substance of the play. Here as elsewhere Bond's political parables are designed to confront the audience with the frightening consequences of power which has lost its moral impulse: "It is so easy to subordinate justice to power, but when this happens power takes on the dynamics and dialectics of aggression."¹

For his first experiment with the counter-text strategy Bond turns to the legend of King Lear as a metaphor for our violent times. The unspeakable torments King Lear suffers on the heath mirror a world which is splintering towards the grotesque; the struggle for power assumes monstrous shape in the emblematic blinding of Gloucester. Bond complicates the cruelty which is already contained in King Lear, and for many, maximizes it to the point of intolerability. In his version the scenes of torture, mutilation and the carnage of war perpetrated by Lear's daughters are repeated by counter-revolutionary forces with a savagery made even more hideous and frightening by their institutionalized methods of butchery. King Lear's sorrowful lines, "Then let them anatomize Regan[...] Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (Act III, Sc. vi, lines 80-81)² are literally enacted in a grotesquely bizarre autopsy scene. Bond has Lear himself blinded,

embodying in the one character the nadir of human suffering. His companion in madness, the ghost of a gravedigger's boy, is gored by the pigs he once tended. For many critics, Bond's Lear not only eviscerates King Lear but is one "long scream of pain,"³ protest and unrelenting horror with nothing more to say than the tired truism that power corrupts.

In addition to the accumulation of horrors, Bond risks the surrender of the audience's emotions to profound pity for Lear. His Lear too travels the dark and lonely road of madness and painful insight into himself and man's relation with his world. Shakesperian echoes reverberate in macabre animal imagery and the strange mixture of the grotesque and pathos personified in the presence of the ghost, a more serious version of King Lear's fool.

But whereas in Shakespeare's drama the unmediated pity and fear of high tragedy climaxes in a brief, unbearable reconciliation of love which is as quickly transformed into death, Bond's final act charts Lear's torturous path beyond the ambiguous one suggested by Kent at the close of King Lear, beyond the despairing vision that "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport" (Act IV, Sc. ii, lines 39-40), and beyond the stoic dictum "Men must endure / Their going hence[.] / Ripeness is all" (Act V, Sc. ii, lines 9-11). For, whether an interpretation of this credo approximates a Christian humanism which sees life as a preparation for death, or draws upon the notion of a metaphysical evil whereby an existential angst--or folly--is the only possible response, both place man in an eternal state of unfreedom which can elicit only passive acquiescence in the face of a tragic fatalism. A passive stance in a world where anti-

human forces seem on the verge of precipitating unparalleled disaster ultimately negates that which for Bond is man's true potential and must be condemned:

On us lie the burdens of morals and choice
These like roots are a way to be in the world
Without them we'd be in eons⁴

Bond mines the Lear legend for its essential truth that "man without pity is mad" (Act III, Sc. 3, p. 98).⁵ But he intends his play's upward movement to further embrace Lear's (and our own) evolving moral and political consciousness towards a neo-Marxist view of man determined not merely by social forces, but capable of changing his world. Thus the play combines a parallel movement in which Bond savagely debunks myths and attitudes which hinder or pervert the notion of social and political responsibility--political elitism and its justifying morality and philosophy, and the cultural experience of bourgeois heroics.

By means of the counter-text, Lear is seen in an ironic relationship to King Lear. The dualistic response which is ensured by this radical perspective in both emotional and intellectual terms is further strengthened by specific distancing techniques which Bond has used before: the sharp juxtaposition of incongruent styles--the real and the theatrical gesture or popular theatre idioms such as farce, guignol and the supernatural. Unlike Early Morning where the skeleton of George merely intensified the grotesque pathos, the ghost device in Lear works through ironic reversal. Lear begins in ignorance and fear and gradually achieves moral stature and political understanding. The ghost begins in innocence and sympathy and progressively becomes a

sinister false raisonneur. The clarity of Bond's message is in part dependent upon the extent to which the significance of the ghost is integrated into the moral scheme. And as before, Bond's distancing arsenal is aimed at a new kind of involvement which forces the complicity of the audience but which at the same time hinders the complete illusion effected by undue emotional and imaginative involvement in the inner lives of the characters. Bond's assault on the audience is ultimately intended, of course, to liberate the rigid, conformist and conventional mentality which clings to debilitating myths and attitudes which instill fear and paralyse the impulse for change.

Of paramount importance is the manner of handling the plot if the outrage, the situation of cruelty and its roots are to be understood as social and political and not as psychological or metaphysical. He spells out the conscious over-all purpose of his structure as follows:

Act One shows a world dominated by myth. Act Two shows the clash between myth and reality, between superstitious men and the autonomous world. Act Three shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove real by dying in it.⁶

Towards this end, Bond dispenses with the Gloucester sub-plot which served to reinforce not only King Lear's awesome suffering but also to underscore the sense of a cruel, hostile universe. Instead, he maintains the momentum of political events equally strongly with the intent of making Lear's subjectivity objective.

The play opens onto the political madness. A workman on Lear's wall is killed by a blow from a pick-axe. Shouts of panic, warning attempts and cries for water are stifled by a soldier's brutish order to "move 'im then!" (Act I, Sc. 1, p. 15) and the Foreman's ugly command to shove his body under a tarpaulin out of sight of the Royal

Visitors. In place of King Lear's cruel love-test which immediately engendered psychological interest, Lear's great ambition is the building of an enormous wall, ostensibly to ensure peace and freedom. Immediately one thinks of the ancient monoliths throughout history and the gulags of our own century. Behind the outer walls are the supportive structures of government, law and order. And behind these walls are the psychic cages of man's own making.

The opening incident, depicted with a tough realism, creates a climate of immediacy and urgency and places the emphasis upon action in the society at large. The precise naturalistic details are quickly juxtaposed with the style of theatrical formalism. The arrival of Lear and his entourage carries with it the absurd, ceremonial rituals of class and office. For Bodice and Fontanelle (Bond's versions of Goneril and Reagan),⁷ the wall accident is a tedious irrelevance and their automatic responses are inane platitudes:

BODICE (shakes ENGINEER's hand). Our visit has been so enjoyable and informative.

FONTANELLE. Such an interesting day. (Act I, Sc. 1, p. 16)

Like King Lear, Lear is quickly roused to anger when his grandiose scheme is threatened:

LEAR. The officers must make the men work!

.....

It's a flogging crime to delay work. [.] You must deal with this fever. They treat their men like cattle. When they finish work they must be kept in dry huts. [.] You waste men. (Act I, Sc. 1, p. 16)

Civil rebellion is, however, already seething underfoot.

LEAR. They dug the wall up again last night.

OFFICER. Local farmers. We can't catch them, they scuttle back home so fast.

LEAR. Use spring traps. (Act I, Sc. 1, p. 17)

The action edges imperceptibly towards farce when Lear, desperate to substantiate his sense of power which has already lost its credibility, orders a firing squad to kill an innocent workman in order to set an example, and then forgets to move out of its way. He finally has to take matters into his own hands and shoot the man himself:

When I'm dead my people will live in freedom and peace and remember my name, no - venerate it!...They are my sheep and if one of them is lost I'd take fire to hell to bring him out. I loved and cared for all my children, and now you've sold them to their enemies! (He shoots THIRD WORKER, and his body slumps forwards on the post in a low bow.) There's no more time, it's too late to learn anything. (Act I, Sc. 1, p. 21)

Thus, by means of the protracted juxtaposition of the real and comic formalism, Bond can effect an ironic contrast depicting the two worlds (rulers and ruled, and by metaphorical extension, private and public tragedy) as one--a dehumanized society where all act in fear, and the common man is reduced to animal fodder and killed at will when the work slows down.

At the apex of an elitist social structure is a leadership whose policy is to crush and disclaim responsibility believing that a structured hierarchy is necessary to stave off chaos and keep the "animal" (or the lower classes) at bay. As usual, essential motives and attitudes behind relations based on power are offered for analysis. The comic treatment of cruelty not only deflates the heroic posture but extends, by analogy, into our world. Lear wants credibility on a

global scale; his feudal thinking is but one step from the collapse into fascism and his rationales only too familiar:

LEAR. [...] I'm not free to be kind or merciful. I must build the fortress.

.....

BODICE. Small and petty! All these things are in your head. [...]

LEAR: [...] I killed the fathers therefore the sons must hate me. [...]

BODICE. [...] - how can they be your friends if you treat them like enemies? That's why they threatened you: it was political necessity.

.....

I order you not to shoot this man. Our husbands will shoot anyone who shoots him. (Act I, Sc. 1, pp. 19-20)

The daughters are already corrupt. Bodice's absurd rhetoric is but a mechanical reflection of her father's thinking and behaviour. Listening to the tape of the Royal Court production directed by William Gaskill was especially helpful in assessing the temper of the play.⁸

The audience immediately picked up on the comic treatment of Lear and his daughters in this first scene, particularly with Bodice's lines. But Lear received his laughs too. Gaskill had suggested to the actors that they think in terms of "the Royal Family visiting a shipyard, carrying umbrellas."⁹ This frame of mind together with the slightly exaggerated tone of upper class accents would bring a wit to the staging, sharpening the element of satire. And by means of the semi-comic opening, Bond can show his dangerous clowns equally imprisoned by rigid, destructive attitudes predicated on ignorance and fear and fueled by hatred. This comic detachment is also exploited in the scenes which follow, culminating in the hideously comic torture scene

in which Warrington, Lear's Foreign Policy Advisor, who was bribed by each of the sisters to betray Lear, and in turn the other sister, is captured and maimed.

Lear is next seen in the ludicrous light of an antideluvian General still pretending to the spoils of his adolescence. His daughters have married rebel dukes and launched a full-scale war to oust Lear from his realm; Lear is preparing a counter-attack. Traditional march music accompanies his salute:--"Greetings to my friends the 9th"--while the Bishop gives the necessary support:--"God blesses the righteous. He has nothing to do with women who make war" (Act I, Sc. 2, p. 23). The following scene is a very funny double sisters' act done in the manner of the music-hall with asides out to the audience, each sister vying to outdo the other in the game of one-upmanship on their new husbands. On tape, the audience reacted with an outburst of applause as Bond milks the sexual metaphor to connote the lust for power. Fontanelle behaves like a furious, frustrated child whose new mechanical toy fails to perform:

FONTANELLE (*aside*). I'm bitterly disappointed in my husband. [.] When he gets on top of me I'm so angry I have to count to ten. That's long enough. Then I wait till he's asleep and work myself off. I'm not making do with that for long. (Act I, Sc. 3, p. 24)

Bodice, in contrast, is a bloodless abstraction who feels nothing but contempt for the male species:

BODICE (*aside*). I'm not disappointed in my husband. I expected nothing. There is some satisfaction in listening to him squeak on top of me while he tries to get his little paddle in. I lie still and tell myself while he whines, you'll pay for this my lad. He sees me smiling and contented and thinks it's his virility. (Act I, Sc. 3, p. 24)

In presenting the daughters as wound-up puppet-figures of political lust, their inner workings assembled early in life by a master clown, Bond forges the link between political repression and pornography which is an important point to grasp if the violence which follows is not to appear gratuitous. The ultimate perversion of the nurturing principle is finally realized in aggressive feminist tactics where the female delights in sadistic revenge on the failure of men to create a sane, secure world.

Bond has written in a poem entitled "On Leaving the Theatre," "Have you been entertained? / Laughter that's not also an idea / Is cruel."¹⁰ Gaskill was especially concerned to get the right "wave-length of humour"¹¹ for the sadistic scenes. Judging from the tape, he succeeded in the torture scene, at least up to a point, in realizing the comic possibilities in fusion with the grotesque and the graphically real. Bond's chilling ploys to manipulate the grotesque effects are achieved through comically sharp contrasts which not only allow for swift, varied pacing so the horror is not dwelled upon, but which also further his thematic purpose by the manner in which they involve the audience in both emotional and intellectual terms, permitting the action to be seen in complex ways.

The sequence of Warrington's torture begins on a note of forceful irony. Bodice, now (like her sister) ensconced in power and greedy for more, knows the right scapegoat to better her interests: "Private, you look strong and capable, would you like to go up in the world?" And Soldier A knows the tastes of the class to whom he has to curry favour if he wants to survive: "Yer wan' 'im done in a fancy way? Thass sometimes arst for. I once 'ad t' cut a throat for some ladies t' see

once" (Act I, Sc. 4, p. 27). Having initiated the action, Bodice allows him to "choose" and coolly removes herself to "sit on her riding stick" and knit her own fancy stitches. Fontanelle, for her part, regrets having already cut Warrington's tongue out and now seems impatient at the prospect of her first real violence. The biggest laughs greet the soldier's lines after Fontanelle has jumped into the fray:

SOLDIER A (hits WARRINGTON). O, 'e wants it the 'ard way. (Hits him.) Look at 'im puttin' on the officer class! (Hits him.) Don't pull yer pips on me, laddie.

FONTANELLE. Use the boot! (SOLDIER A kicks him.) Jump on him. (She pushes SOLDIER A.) Jump on his head!

SOLDIER A. Lay off, lady, lay off! 'Oo's killin' 'im, me or you?

BODICE (knits). One plain, two pearl, one plain.

FONTANELLE. Throw him up and drop him. I want to hear him drop.

SOLDIER A. Thass a bit 'eavy, yer need proper gear t' drop 'em - [.] (Act I, Sc. 4, p. 28)

The grotesque intensifies as the more "familiar" world of the cruelty in King Lear is subverted by a gloating sadism. Fontanelle has to have Warrington's pain pointed out to her:

SOLDIER A (jerks WARRINGTON's head up). Look at 'is eyes, Miss. Thass boney-fidey sufferin'.

FONTANELLE. O yes, tears and blood. I wish my father was here. (Act I, Sc. 4, p. 28)

Fascinated at the sight of blood, she swoops like a vulture down on his lungs, shrieking in high-pitched staccato squeals: "Look at his hands like boiling crabs! Kill it! [.] Kill him inside! [.] Father! [.] I want to sit on his lungs!" Bodice, impassively knitting, announces

sardonically: "She was just the same at school" (Act I, Sc. 4, p. 28). The laughter is less bold, but comes nonetheless, as a result of both the Soldier's outrageous gesture and Bodice's dead-pan quip.

The comic tensions which Bond sets up are complex. His manic puppets approach Grand Guignol, an appropriate form for the mechanized cruelty that he wishes to depict. Its primitive horror can fascinate and yet it is, nevertheless, an extreme form of theatrical distancing, such that it seems utterly removed from reality. Bond risks precariously juggling both extreme effects. The gross physicality and near-expressionistic hysteria of Fontanelle's antics as she acts out her repressed fantasies to kill the object of her hatred are played off against the brutally real, and both these are in turn given an incisive edge by Bodice's attitude of icy nonchalance. If the one comic approach is sense-oriented and risks offending subliminally or near-viscerally, the counterpart is towards a merciless objectivity aimed at deflating the histrionic and forcing the audience to assess the commentary. The issue is not only the utter dessication of any humane feelings, but the ordinariness of violence as though it were as common and acceptable as knitting or going to school (itself, in this context, part of the repressive conditioning process).

In turn, the Soldier's music-hall working-class humour, which combines involvement and detachment, appeals more to the emotional intelligence and is therefore an appropriate kind of buffer to mediate somewhat between the bloody effect of Warrington's mutilated state, and the fantastic grotesque. Bond hopes to draw our attention to the question as to who is the real killer, the hireling or the one who hires? Are he and Fontanelle both trapped animals out for blood? Is his revenge a

consequence of class hatred? And is Bodice, now the master trainer with her domesticated whips, equally confined to her trainer's cage?

Just prior to Bond's final savage twist to this particular profanation of the ritual cruelty in Shakespeare, he gives us a brief playlet which elicits ready laughs:

BODICE (to SOLDIER A). Down on your knees.

SOLDIER A. Me?

BODICE. Down! (SOLDIER A kneels). Beg for his life.

SOLDIER A (confused). 'Is? (Aside). What a pair! - O spare 'im, mum.

BODICE (knits). No. (Act I, Sc. 4, pp. 28-29)

Whether one laughs partly in relief, the sting somewhat removed, or nervously, or despite oneself knowing that one is laughing at something horrible, the laughter is ambiguous. The sudden aside, inserted parenthetically, conflicts with the play-acting, breaking the frame of the stage for a split-second. This distancing device not only allows the soldier objective space to articulate his attitude towards events, but serves as a chilling reminder that through our shared laughter, we are being connected with our world and forced to question, if not condemn, the nature of our own responsibility in a morally insane world which we accept out of apathy and indifference.

Any expectations towards cathartic release through laughter suddenly freeze in mid-air and the tight-rope snaps as the final horror is played out. With practised sang-froid, and the formality of authority, Bodice hands her knitting to Fontanelle:

BODICE. It's my duty to inform you -

SOLDIER A. Keep still! Keep yer eyes on madam when she talks t'yer.

BODICE. - that your pardon has been refused. He can't talk or write, but he's cunning - he'll find some way of telling lies. We must shut him up inside himself. (She pokes the needles into WARRINGTON's ears.) I'll just jog these in and out a little. Doodee, doodee, doodee, doo.

FONTANELLE. He can see my face but he can't hear me laugh!

BODICE. Fancy! Like staring into a silent storm.
(Act I, Sc. 4, p. 29)

Herbert Blau terms Bond's comedy "too ferocious to be believed."¹² On tape, no one laughed. Unlike the metaphysical farce of the absurd, there comes a point at which the unthinkable can no longer be laughed at. The events move closer to the tragic. If Bond's political coordinates have worked and the scene is judged in its entirety, the tragedy will be seen as political. Bond gives the Soldier leaving the stage with Warrington the final comment and a slim shred of compassion: "Walking offal! Don't blame me, I've got a job t' do. [.] Yer'll live if yer want to" (Act I, Sc. 4, p. 30).

From the dizzying heights of this grotesque circus, we are suddenly plunged into a landscape of terror, both imagined and real. Echoes of the heath sound in the howl of the wind and in Lear's ravings against his daughters. But it is minimalist art done with incredible precision and economy. Unlike Shakespeare's language which allows for the welling up of an immense pity for King Lear in the subjective storm scene, Bond's language is pared to the bone. Harsh visual and aural transitions effect swift changes in mood and action. Firstly, there is the hideous sight of Warrington who is now mad and ready to lunge at Lear with a knife. Secondly, the brief calm which Lear finds in the kindness of a gravedigger's house is quickly turned into nightmare with

the arrival of the daughters' soldiers whose orders are to kill deserters from the wall. We are ironically returned to the beginning and the consequences of Lear's policy: "'Wall death'. [...] The stink of it even when you were asleep! Living in a grave!" (Act I, Sc. 7, p. 39).

The violence is ugly and real, and yet it is monitored very carefully to give some breathing space between the excessive horrors. The sequence where the soldiers confront the gravedigger's pregnant wife begins on a note of crude humour (SERGEANT, "Come on, darlin', yer must a 'ad some one t' put yer in that class"; SOLDIER F, "Couldn't a bin 'im"; SOLDIER D, "E'd 'ave t' use a carrot" [Act I, Sc. 7, p. 42]), but no one laughs. Is it because the humour is too crude? Or, rather, is the sense of impending violence too real? The comic interruption does allow for the action to begin at a rapid tempo and this creates a sharp contrast with the sudden silent tension as the soldiers take the wife behind the laundry sheets, and the gravedigger's boy emerges from the well with Warrington's body. The dramatic tension is further controlled by the multiple focus in the scene. Bond manipulates the space by having Lear off up-stage as an observer. And the moment when the boy suddenly screams his wife's name--"Cordelia!" (Act I, Sc. 7, p. 43)--the action freezes for a split second in a shocking dissonance to our traditional association with her name. Finally, the near-stylized and bizarre image of the boy's imminent death by shooting, is suddenly juxtaposed with the sight of the soldier preparing to rape his wife, and the sound of pigs being slaughtered off-stage. The multi-visual and auditory theatrical effects heighten the total shock effect. And yet the final image of the boy shrouded in a sheet has the curious

effect of lifting the horror onto a wider, symbolic frame of reference as soon as it occurs:

The BOY turns slowly away and as he does so the sheet folds round him. For a second he stands in silence with the white sheet draped round him. Only his head is seen. It is pushed back in shock and his eyes and mouth are open. He stands rigid. Suddenly a huge red stain spreads on the sheet. (Act I, Sc. 7, p. 44) (See Plate 9)

Leslie Smith offers an interesting analysis:

This is not simply a shock effect....It is a strange, fantastic image of a living man turning into a ghost before our eyes, preparing the way for the continuing presence of the boy as a ghost accompanying Lear....The red stain is a fine image of the creeping and spreading violence consuming the world of the play: and in the strange paradox it also suggests of a bleeding ghost, it evokes a kind of death-in-life, a feeling of something sinister and unhealthy which we shall increasingly come to associate with the ghost of the gravedigger's boy.¹³

Whether the distancing intended by the calculated juxtaposition of the real and the theatrically contorted thrown-back figure is a sufficient check is difficult to determine. We are at the same time forced to take straight the sight of the soldier's blood-covered face from having slaughtered the pigs and in the same breath, the piercing sound of Cordelia's screams as she is raped. And the interjection of the soldier's humour is so black, one can only gasp: "muttering contentedly". An I'll 'ave 'er reekin' a pig blood. Somethin' t' write 'ome t' tell mother" (Act I, Sc. 7, p. 45). Finally, Lear rages against his daughters' cruelty and injustice as the Carpenter who has befriended Cordelia and the gravedigger's boy kills the soldiers one by one.

In Act Two, the two pivotal scenes (Scenes 2 and 6) take place in prison cells, microcosms of the walls of the inner self and the larger



Shooting of Grave Digger's Boy and rape of Cordelia in Deirdre
Clancy's scene sketch (above) and as realized (right).



insanity. In theatrical terms, within each "cell" scene, poetic and visionary elements are juxtaposed incongruently with humour, realism, and heightened theatrical gesture. Both are preceded and followed by short, rapid scenes which delineate the political action. The first and last scenes take place respectively in a courtroom and outside at the wall, as each regime is seen to be obsessed with the necessity of re-building the wall. Stylistically, farce still colours the old regime in Scenes One and Four and is in marked contrast to the tough realism depicting the struggle of the rebel forces now led by Cordelia and the Carpenter. Bond thus carefully engineers the mad scenes which convey Lear's inner state within an over-all epic design inviting the audience to link Lear's private anguish with the external suffering. Thus, the use of a counter-text as a distancing strategy works to both political and philosophical advantage. At each juncture, one compares and judges the two worlds, and hence two views of man. The closed world of bourgeois tragedy progressively explodes outwards onto a new view of man embedded within the totality of social forces.

By the courtroom farce which begins Act Two, the play-world becomes transformed into a public institution. Thus, not only Lear, but we, by analogy, are on trial too.

Bodice has the first laugh:

This is a political trial: politics is the higher form of justice. The old king's mad and it's dangerous to let him live. Family sentiment doesn't cloud our judgement. (Act II, Sc. 1, p. 46)

Lear receives a laugh too when he denies his daughters:

How ugly that voice is! [L.] It sounds like chains on a prison

wall. [..] And she walks like something struggling in a sack.
(Act II, Sc. 1, p. 48)

The abrupt tone change from the mood of farce in Lear's long speech which follows comes as a shock. When he is cruelly given the mirror, presumably so that he will hang himself by his own testimony ("Madmen are frightened of themselves"), his mind begins to give way. Staring at him is a bloodied caged animal, with tears running down its face, its wings broken, its hands cut off, its snout pressing the glass, licking the blood from its hair: "O god, give it to me! Let me hold it and stroke it and wipe its blood!" (Act II, Sc. 1, p. 49). As Bodice takes the mirror back to "polish it [..] and see it's not cracked" (a cruel pun on the word "cracked"), Lear cries out: "Then kill it. Kill it. Kill it. Don't let her torment it. [..] My daughters have been murdered and these monsters have taken their place. I hear all their victims cry, where is justice?" (Act II, Sc. 1, p. 49). One thinks of King Lear kneeling on the heath and crying out to his silent God man's inhumanity to man. Lear's vision of injustice also begins to broaden. But unlike Shakespeare's King Lear who expresses his feelings of pity for mankind in direct, personal terms, and whose lengthy speeches intensify the audience's psychic involvement in his tormented state, Bond's Lear adopts the more impersonal verbal disguise of an animal metaphor. It is less a question of personal identification in the strict, psychological sense, but more a recognition of the horror of Lear's political situation. In depicting the state of unfreedom in graphic visual terms, Bond intends the audience to connect the various cells, cages and walls. Thus we are made more powerfully aware of the metaphor of man as a caged animal cruelly imprisoned within a society

of arbitrary justice and morality. And it is this reality which terrifies Lear. (Bond suggested that the programme cover "include pictures of prisoners all over the world" as well as showing a monkey crouched in the corner of a cage.)¹⁴ At the same time, it is the first adumbration of the larger feeling of compassion for the common suffering which liberates the imagination and arouses the need to "see feelingly."

It is at this point, in the first cell, that the ghost appears, and the walls of the inner self begin to manifest themselves. The ghost fails to see the animal, and only Lear in his madness sees the ghost. (And of course, only the audience sees the ghost.) As in Early Morning, the ghost device establishes a theatrical dichotomy exteriorizing the inner conflict. And as Bond presents the figure in such highly physical terms, it serves to entice our imagination and augment our sensory involvement. At the same time, by virtue of its theatricality, the ghost is intended to embody an idea crucial to the advance of the moral argument. In Lear, the device becomes a more sophisticated critical tool, partly because of the distance accorded by the counter-text. The boy's betrayal and death as a political victim of Lear's regime is in our minds as it becomes part of Lear's social conscience. And the active dialogue between Lear and the ghost allows the ghost to assume the function of moral commentator forcing us to concentrate on the antagonistic contradictions in Lear and the consequences in terms of society as a whole.

Lear struggles to keep the animal from finding him and turns to the ghost to revive his daughters' childhood selves. The dream-like re-enactment of the past is strangely moving. One of Bond's poems begins

with the line, "Daughters should be stones worn smooth by fathers' tears."¹⁵ Instead of tears, they knew only terror--fear of authority, war and death. Torn by the gulf between reality and what might have been, Lear envisages hell and heaven on Earth:

We won't chain ourselves to the dead, or send our children to school in the graveyard. The torturers and ministers and priests will lose their office. And we'll pass each other in the street without shuddering at what we've done to each other.
.....

The animal will slip out of its cage, and lie in the fields, and run by the river, and groom itself in the sun, and sleep in its hole from night to morning. (Act II, Sc. 2, p. 54)

The entire sequence, however, is in three parts, and Bond interweaves between each part a completely incongruous mini-drama of a comic music-hall soldiers' inspection scene, and a serio-comic speech by the Old Orderly, one of thousands of nameless prisoners rounded up at will and locked away forever for crimes not even recorded. In this way, the inner journey is sharply jarred by reminders of the political reality. The close of the scene is very touching and yet double-edged. The grotesquely pathetic state of the ghost who is rotting, shrivelled, white and thin, has something uncanny about it personifying at once the state of Lear's own feelings which he fears exposing, but at the same time signalling the near-solipsistic state in which Lear is imprisoned for much of Act Two. When he does bring himself to dare to touch the ghost, Lear feels for the first time stirrings of compassion and pity for another human being:

GHOST. Let me stay with you, Lear.[...] Feel how thin I am.[...] Are you afraid to touch me?
.....

I'm afraid. Let me stay with you[...]

LEAR. Yes, yes, poor boy. [...] We'll help each other. Cry while I sleep, and I'll cry and watch you while you sleep. [...] The sound of the human voice will comfort us.
(Act II, Sc. 2, p. 56)

In sharp contrast to this brief mood of "sanity," we are immediately confronted with the new political madness. Heading the insurgent forces are Cordelia and the Carpenter, the two whose names traditionally evoke kindness, mercy, love and Christian goodness. A wounded soldier is given water and then left to die alone:

CORDELIA. To fight like us you must hate, we can't trust a man unless he hates.

.....
When we have power these things won't be necessary. (Act II, Sc. 3, pp. 58-59)

We are forcibly returned to Lear's political wall-building.

When we next see Lear prior to the grim climax in the second cell, he is chained to a prison convoy which, with cruel irony, unites prisoners from both sides and all walks of life, suggesting a bleak picture of world-wide victimization. The irony multiplies as Lear, now "serene" in his seeming resignation to the cruelty around him, admits he wronged the boy, and yet fails to recognize Fontanelle who is also chained and who hysterically pleads with her Father to help her.

The actions which open Scene Six rapidly alternate between intense panic as prisoners are systematically obliterated in accordance with the master list, and the routine shuffling about of the Old Orderly; between the poetic stillness of Lear's new wonderment at the sky and Fontanelle's hysteria. With the arrival of the Carpenter, his Commandant and the prison "Doctor," a chill descends as, firstly, Fontanelle is quickly disposed of by being shot in the back, and, secondly, the

autopsy table is wheeled out and the bare electric bulb is switched on. The cell takes on the sterile, alien guise of a clinical laboratory--or a modern torture chamber--where the operation to be conducted is on human nature itself.

The cold, clinical setting is one means of defamiliarizing events. More important is the hope that Shakespeare is ever-present in the audience's mind:--the line, "Is there any cause in nature..." (King Lear, Act III, Sc. vi, line 81); the imagined trial of his daughters; the blinding of Gloucester; the restoration of King Lear to fatherhood and kingship. Bond's savage treatment of events should provoke disturbing questions the instant the horror strikes home. At the same time, ironic tensions which are reinforced by the disparate, stylistic conjunctions which Bond sets up serve to further control and illuminate events.

Both the autopsy and the blinding are engineered by a prison hack (the Fourth Prisoner) who has wheedled his way into a position of authority to save his own neck, lying that he was a "political" on the right side. Quick to learn that cynicism and opportunism are politically effective skills under the new authorities, he loses no time in transferring his competency to efficient methods of butchery and torture: "A little autopsy. Not a big one. We know what she died of. But I handle this routine work methodically. Otherwise they think you can't be trusted with bigger things" (Act II, Sc. 6, pp. 72-73). This terrifying robotic version of Bond's desensitized monsters not only has the personal attributes of a lobotomized imagination and personality, but has command as well of the latest technological skills and equipment. With each incision into the object called "Lear's daughter," he

delivers Lear a tidy lecture on what constitutes the human being, his arid, matter-of-fact tone sounding a cruel contrast to each of Lear's wide-eyed questions, and pointing up more forcefully Lear's self-absorbed state:

LEAR. So much blood and bits and pieces packed in with all that care. Where is the...where...?

FOURTH PRISONER. What is the question?

LEAR. Where is the beast? The blood is as still as a lake. Where...? Where...?

FOURTH PRISONER (to SOLDIER O). What's the man asking? [..]
(Act II, Sc. 6, p. 73)

The grotesque irony is that both live in worlds blind to reality: the materialist who sees only things; and the superstitious believer whose mind is clouded by myth. The moment that Lear discovers only beauty in her horribly violated body is then even more powerful and hauntingly moving:

She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child. The things are so beautiful. I am astonished. [..] If I had known this beauty and patience and care how I would have loved her.
(Act II, Sc. 6, p. 73)

His anguished cry, "Did I make this - and destroy it?" (Act II, Sc. 6, p. 73) is deeply affecting. Bond, however, is quick to shift gears. Lear's moment of "epiphany" is paradoxically presented in harsh, theatrical terms which are simultaneously concrete and metaphorical. Thereby, Bond has us analysing and judging Lear's own self-judgement (and in turn, our own emotional response) as the shock registers:

LEAR. I destroyed her! I knew nothing, saw nothing, learned nothing! Fool! Fool! He puts his hands into FONTANELLE and

brings them out covered with dark blood and smeared with viscera. The SOLDIERS react awkwardly and ineffectually.)
Look at my dead daughter!

BODICE. No! No!

LEAR. Look! I killed her! [...] Murderer! And now I must begin again. [...] I must become a child, hungry and stripped and shivering in blood, I must open my eyes and see. (Act II, Sc. 6, p. 74)

Form and content merge. Bond's frightening visualization explodes the fearful notion of intrinsic evil, placing the onus of responsibility squarely upon man.

Gaskill felt that the actor playing Lear took a big gamble in playing this scene: "The author has made a big gesture. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work, but you have to have the courage to play it."¹⁶ For at least one critic who saw the production, it came close to approaching "Grand Guignol," and yet it did work:

it could so easily have been either ludicrous, or overpoweringly offensive....There was no laughter of the wrong kind.... We were too deep in feeling, too affected by the solemn and complex movement of events.¹⁷

In the wrong hands, however, it could degenerate into a crass, theatrical conceit, failing to disturb the audience, let alone stimulate the audience to infer cause and effect and the crucial notion of responsibility. It was at this point that the audience watching the Yale production began to rise and flee, an exodus which became a landslide by the end of the scene. The reason Walter Kerr gives is that, up until this point, "no one had believed in a bit of the blood all evening long."¹⁸ The right balancing of the personally touching, the intensity of the grotesque and theatricalization is obviously an extremely tricky one. And only if the balance is right, will Bond's layers of

sophisticated irony be absorbed and expand outwards.

The most obvious irony is that at the moment of insight, Lear is blinded. More subtle is the way Bond has his version stand in clear opposition to the tragic resolution in King Lear. In an ironic reversal of the legend whereby judgement was ruled on King Lear, Bond's Lear comes to an understanding of his responsibility in the tragic outcome of events and pronounces self-judgement. There is no cathartic release: The most lethal irony concerns Lear's situation. The moment where he becomes a fuller, human being, he is suddenly a serious threat to the state. For a few quick seconds, pandemonium breaks out: "(The COMMANDANT runs in shouting and pointing at the SOLDIERS.)" "You! - You! - What is this? "Get it under control!" (Act II, Sc. 6, p. 74). Order is restored with the brutal bayoneting of Bodice. The soldiers, in a state of panic and concerned to leave nothing undone, stab her three times and disembowel her for good measure. Bond spares us nothing, as though we needed a particularly grim reminder of the political facts interjected between the two "theatrical" sequences which enact the autopsy and the blinding of Lear.

The blinding sequence is an incident of Orwellian terror. The crowning device (see Plate 10)--a savage parody of the symbolic crown of authority in a cruel conjunction with the painful irony of Lear's brief illusion that he is King again--is designed to extract the eyes and preserve them in formaldehyde crystals for future scientific use:

LEAR. No, no. You mustn't touch my eyes. I must have my eyes!

.....

FOURTH PRISONER. Understand, this isn't an instrument of torture, but a scientific device.



Lover in strait-jacket 'crowned' with blinding machine.

.....
Nice and steady. (He removes one of LEAR's eyes.)

LEAR. Aahh!

FOURTH PRISONER. Note how the eye passes into the lower chamber and is received into a soothing solution of formaldehyde crystals. One more please. [.]

LEAR. Aaaahh!

FOURTH PRISONER (looking at the eyes in the glass container).
Perfect.

LEAR (jerking in the chair). Aaaahh! The sun! It hurts my eyes.

FOURTH PRISONER (sprays an aerosol into LEAR's eye sockets).
That will assist the formation of scab and discourage flies.
(To SOLDIERS.) Clean this up with a bucket and mop. (Act II, Sc. 6, p. 77)

It is the demonic vision of totalitarianism perfected. This reader, for one, still winces each time she re-reads the scene, feeling the aerosol spray in her own sockets. On tape, there were a few nervous twitters of laughter as the "Doctor" explained how he had developed the gadget when he was a boy scout. Amazingly, even Lear's second "Aaaahh!" occasioned a few laughs, following as it does the perversely absurd explanation of the crystals, and signifying perhaps, the acute discomfort of the audience. For the remainder of the scene, there was absolute silence as Lear is led away by the ghost, stumbling, crying out his pain and wiping the blood from his face. (The scene was responded to with terrific applause.)

The horror is acutely felt, and yet, is not dwelled upon. As the ghost leads Lear out, he counsels Lear "to bear it" (Act II, Sc. 6, p. 78) ("Ripeness is all" [King Lear, Act V, Sc. 11, line 11]). But expectations that we will be led to the cliff and yet further extremes

of pity and terror are quickly extinguished. Instead, we are, as at the close of Act One, ironically returned to the wall, and thereby reminded of the political inevitability of events. And touches of the colloquially real defuse somewhat the sense of overpowering grief:

FARMER. [..] See, sir, when the ol' king went mad they stop buildin' his wall, [..]

FARMER'S WIFE. An' now they're buildin' the wall again, count a the govermin's changed. [..]

LEAR. I could learn to endure my blindness with patience, I could never endure this!
.....

I've heard your voices. I'd never seen a poor man! You take too much pity out of me, if there's no pity I shall die of grief.

SON. That ol' boy's a great rambler. (Act II, Sc. 7, p. 79-80)

Act Three builds on Lear's despairing question "how to live" and tests out possible alternatives which finally reach beyond the world of tragic fatalism to encompass the larger issue of man's moral blindness and political ignorance in the face of a distorted world. The distance afforded by the counter-text keeps the two worlds forcibly in context before us. Lear's question articulates then the larger problem which Bond poses to his public, involving it in the dialectical learning process. Lear is at no time alone on stage; his personal grief and anger is always seen in relationship to the outer events. The ideas which Bond advances continue to be partly submerged in the imagistic mode (Lear's parables and the supernatural), but are, in addition, directly argued out. Lear's suffering and wisdom earn him the respect of a group of young people, and together they create a seeming oasis in the midst of the insanity. Initially, Lear speaks in parables to an

increasing number of deserters and dissenters until, for the second time, his influence poses a threat and his speech is curtailed. His confrontation with the new Councillor sparks a new anger but with it the feeling of utter helplessness in the face of misery and injustice: "I'm buried alive in a wall. [...] I know nothing, I can do nothing, I am nothing" (Act III, Sc. 2, p. 94). It is at this moment of profound personal despair that the ghost assumes his diabolical role of the sinister raisonneur. Now "thinner, shrunk, a livid white," he whispers, "Yes. That's the world you have to learn to live in. Learn it! Let me poison the well." He continues, "Cordelia will come tomorrow and you can tell her you know how to keep silent at last" (Act III, Sc. 2, pp. 94-95). And it is after Lear's confrontation with Cordelia that the final savage act occurs.

Scene Three begins tensely. The sound of wind and the squeal of pigs off-stage accompany the eerie sight of the ghost whose "flesh has dried up, its hair is matted, its face is like a seashell, the eyes are full of terror" (Act III, Sc. 3, p. 96). Bond quickly counter-poses the note of pathos both in Lear's cry, ("They're coming to bury me and I'm still asking how to live."), and in the ghost's voice ("Now I'm dead I'm afraid of death" [Act III, Sc. 3, pp. 96-97]), with the firm, steady voice of Cordelia and Lear's sane argument:

LEAR. You have two enemies, lies and the truth. You sacrifice truth to destroy lies, and you sacrifice life to destroy death. It isn't sane. [...] If a god had made the world, might would always be right, that would be so wise, we'd be spared so much suffering. But we made the world - out of our smallness and weakness. Our lives are awkward and fragile and we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and man without pity is mad.

.....

CORDELIA. You only understand self-pity. [...] we'll make the society you only dream of.

LEAR. [...] Your law always does more harm than crime, and your morality is a form of violence. (Act III, Sc. 3, pp. 98-99)

The moment Lear resolves to act, the pigs are heard again and the ghost stumbles in covered in blood. Lear holds him and says quietly, "It's far too late! You were killed long ago! You must die! I love you, I'll always remember you, but I can't help you. Die, for your own sake die!" (Act III, Sc. 3, p. 100). He then delivers a moving valediction:

I see my life, a black tree by a pool. The branches are covered with tears. The tears are shining with light. The wind blows the tears in the sky. And my tears fall down on me. (Act III, Sc. 3, p. 100)

I have mentioned that the intensity of Bond's aggro-effects and the use of the grotesque often accompanied by heightened theatrical effects have invited comparison with Artaud. Bond's intent, however, is to savagely debunk deeper myths latent in the psyche and at the same time disallow purging of the emotions in order that the audience be energized towards new perceptions, a new social consciousness and greater political awareness. From the first cell, the ghost has embodied the notions of goodness, original innocence, the age of miracles, or a golden past idyll.¹⁹ The cluster of associations becomes progressively wider, finally incorporating the concepts of endurance and fate which accompany "grand tragedy." Bond undercuts the pathos by having the ghost become a sinister tempter of destructive attitudes. In one sense, his savage death is a parody of the recovery into love. In another sense, his death, which is really a murder (Lear ironically betrays him a second time by his new resolve), re-enacts the Christian

god's killing his only son. The way it is presented is grotesque and ironic and yet, paradoxically, a human act signifying that Christ's suffering did not redeem the world's suffering. Finally, it may be said to represent the necessary death of spiritual anguish, personal despair or the death of the subjective self as the sole means to rectify the world's ills. Bond's humanism is a tougher one. Whatever moral qualities man develops, he must still reckon with society; personal rectification is not enough. Lear's eulogy for the ghost may be said, then, to represent the transcendence of the particular self and the embracing of the tree of man, or the synthesis of the subjective and objective. Just as the ghost was gored by pigs with their association of the earthiness, or the rough reality of the world of man, the tree's tears project a world of changed values and connote both the promise of fresh, invigorating life and the possibility of death.

Immediately upon the closing words of Lear's testimony, there is the sound of wind while the wall is seen to be moved on stage, its awesome and fearful presence commanding the entire stage space. Unlike the wind of the subjective storm scene, this new wind suggests the storm of change. The final scene shows Lear--small, frail and old-- at the wall digging at the earth with a small spade. After three attempts, he is shot, ironically by a man he once tried to help. Lear's final act is a moral one in a new sense--a social gesture against the repressive forces in society which, in his blindness and ignorance he had initiated and perpetuated. It is not unnoticed: "One of them looks back") (Act III, Sc. 4, p. 102). Nor were his examples unheeded by his young followers: "We talk to people but we don't really help them.[...] truth without power is always dangerous. And we

should fight! Freedom's not an idea, it's a passion!" (Act III, Sc. 2, p. 90). The ending is thus open-ended, allowing the audience to leave, variously shaken, outraged, and disturbed by the problem as to whether political change can be humanized.

Lear is a deeply compassionate work, dramatically daring, and intellectually and politically provocative. The clarity of Bond's message may well have been obscured, however, for those who found the play too grim, depressing and even pessimistic. When the comic distancing narrows to near-zero, or the bizarre theatricalism is too grotesque, or the juxtapositions are too violent and the irony too sophisticated, then, the attempt to absorb Bond's moral and political ideas places too much strain on the audience. In addition, the use of a counter-text as a successful critical distancing strategy would depend partly on the degree of understanding of the original. But when Bond turns his hand to serious comedy in Restoration, he finds in the conventions of Restoration comedy a distanced mode which delights as it instructs, achieving that rare blend of emotional force and the detachment necessary for critical judgement.

One of the defining characteristics of Restoration comedy is the fop or false wit whose artifice of dissembling is his chief strategem or vicious weapon to manipulate and control others. As artifice, the mode demands that inner feelings, intentions and character be masked by a language--a formal, impersonal stylistic posturing, as typified by the man of mode. The mode dances through sudden reverses, to create a mixture of laughter and cruelty, and tricks and counter-tricks of plot occurring with rapid liveliness. Since there is no strain for verisimilitude, the acting approach is cool and studied. The pointed brevity

of the wit serves as a restraining device, ensuring an objectivity of portrayal. Bond can manipulate this dispassionate critical weapon for his own ends, utilizing it to punctuate excesses of action. He can then further portray Lord Are as both a central dramatic character, and at the same time shift attention to his function in society as representative of certain social and political forces. And since the main thrust of the Restoration convention is the depiction of the closed world of an aristocratic amorality which clings to a Hobbsian and Machiavellian view of man garbed in all the gilded accoutrements of the beau monde, Bond can, through the use of a counter-text, parody the convention, debunk its attitudes and values, and show the monster's double-dealing beneath the clown mask.

The play is sub-titled A Pastoral. The town/country dichotomy allows for the theme of animality, and, as in Lear, the reduction of the lower class to animals justifies the political structure. Linked with this is the satirical use of pastoral as a dialectical teaching mode.²⁰ By exploiting the comic texture to the full and sustaining it throughout, Bond integrates the principal distancing device, the fop's wit, into the dramatic structure, both formally and thematically. It becomes, literally, the dramatic subject of the counter-text. No longer the comic butt, the fop, as the play progresses, becomes the dangerous clown pulling the strings of power, and more frighteningly so, since he is not only enslaved to his convention, but remains the masterful puppeteer, unscathed at the play's close. As he manipulates events in the play-world, he also acts for his author and manipulates the responses of the audience, not only through laughter but through his frequent asides, stage-managing our dual role as self-conscious

players in his world which, by our enforced complicity, becomes our own.

The usual double-plot in Restoration comedy, which effected a satisfying resolution or a moral yard-stick by which to judge the gross fools, was the action of the "Truewit." In a radical transformation that constitutes a second major distancing device, Bond's "Truewits" are the working class. Incorporated into the structure of the story which tells of the innocent boy who is led to the gallows because he trusted the honour of the "Gentleman's Creed," is a third, and very powerful distancing weapon. Songs in the Brechtian mode, but to the accompaniment of aggressive, discordant rock music powerfully combine the kind of immediate confrontation Bond seeks, together with detachment. For the duration of the songs, the actors step in and out of character, projecting a world both forwards and backwards in time, delineating a political realism which is disturbingly contemporary. The songs represent for Bond a form of "public soliloquy" which combines both "a politically informed commentary" on the action, and the expression of a more developed political consciousness than is evinced by the characters' actions in the play:

Whole characters or groups could be permeated with public soliloquy so that we feel they're both in and outside their time and aren't eternal prisoners of the present appearance of things."²¹

Finally, the juxtaposition of the two worlds--"upstairs and downstairs" as it were--are sharply set off one against the other, dramatically reinforced by the mixed modes of artifice and the colloquially real. By means of the second, we are invited to judge the first, and at the same time, to see the insidious links which bind the two worlds in the same mad prison.

Scene One opens onto a bare stage, its sole prop an artificial tree to which Lord Are, book in hand, is ludicrously hitched by his long scarf, attempting to imitate a drawing depicting the "nonchalant, supine" pose of a country squire enjoying the fruits of his landed estates. Bond's wit is evident in his use of a counter-artwork (Are is trying to recreate a picture) as a visual representation of the dialectical intent behind his counter-text strategy. His "scab" of a servant is obliged to find an appropriate flower:

ARE. Rip up that pesky little thing on the path. That'll teach it to grow where gentlemen walk. [.] Smell it! If it smells too reprehensible throw it aside. I hate the gross odours the country gives off. 'Tis always in a sweat! Compare me to the sketch. (Part I, Sc. 1, p. 7)²²

Bond teases the audience with his choice of name which suggests at once a country yokel sound, or more crudely, "arse," as in the possessive form of "Are's." More seriously, it connotes the way things 'are'--the unchangeable present. Are's pose of detachment is in honour of the arrival of Hardache, the iron merchant, and his daughter Ann, whom Are intends to wed since he is broke: "Yonder comes my money." (Reads.) (Part I, Sc. 1, p. 10). The familiar world of Restoration comedy is thus quickly sketched, inviting initially our satirical laughter. Disquieting undertones, however, ripple the surface. Bob, (or 'The Great Boob' as Are comes to call him) the country servant, is put in his place:

ARE. Bob, yonder is a paddock. Go and graze.

BOB. Graze, sir?

ARE. A country lad must know how to graze!

BOB (aside). I must learn their ways if I'm to survive. - Ay.

sir. (Part I, Sc. 1, p. 9)

The irony of Bob's self-comment is multi-layered. He learns their ways in the sense that he is taken in by appearance and hangs because of it (an ironic echo of Are's "hitching" himself to a tree). In another sense, he learns the truth of this world only when it is too late. In yet another, he is prevented from learning in time since he is as trapped by the stalks he is forced to chew as Are is by his scarf hitched to the tree.

The "ways of this world" materialize in Hardache. His daughter Ann is sold for the coal under Are's land (which he, at this point is unaware he has); Are acquires in the bargain a wife who is "not uncomely, but the neglect is beyond redemption." Style cannot strike at any age like a conversion, its rudiments are learned in the nursery or never. That redness of cheek might be had off a coster's barrow for ha'pence" (Part I, Sc. 1, p. 11). Ann for her part has "second thoughts, seeing that Lord Are has a few years left in him: "Can't you find one in a wheel-chair or at least on a crutch, so a body might hope?" (Part I, Sc. 1, p. 12). Still, panelled carriages, diamonds, a black maid and the first box at the theatre hold sway. The bargain struck, Are asks Hardache to "pray unhitch me." Hardache's power to "free" Are actually binds him as securely as Are's illusion of freedom which rests on his own sense of superiority.

The next few scenes show the underbelly of this iron world. Seething with frustration and latent violence, it explodes in the fracas between Bob and Frank, the city servant, which in turn is mirrored more fiercely in the imagery of the songs. Interspersed with this terror is the "newly-wed" scene where tongues sharpen their blade-like

edges. The latter scene falls between the "downstairs" scenes (Two and Four), sharply contrasting the frustrated tirades of the idle rich at play, and the mindless tasks forced upon those who grant them this luxury. Frank's tough "Song of Learning"--"For fifty thousand years I lived in a shack / I learned that a shack is not a place to live / For fifty thousand years I watched rich men tuck in like swine / From now on the food is gonna be mine / Fifty thousand years I lived well / I learned how to blow up your hell" (Part I, Sc. 2, pp. 19-20)--immediately follows his refusal to work outside: "If this was London an' his lordship stood on that line I'd have to clean the front of his boots an' Bobby'd have to clean the back" (Part I, Sc. 2, p. 19). Ann's "learning" is of a different kind:

ARE. 'Twas agreed ye spent six months in the country learning manners. A wholly optimistic time but a newly married man is fond and believes in miracles - as well he may.

.....

ANN. I'll learn you this my lad! Your title lasted six hundred years but it'll likely die with you! I shan't enter your bedroom till you can hear the singing at Convent Garden when the window's shut!

ARE. [.] I tell ye ma'am, your father palmed me dud coin. I've had ladies swell for far less labour and far more pleasure.

ANN. You monster! You promised me -

ARE. Ma'am a gentleman will promise anything to avoid quarrelling in church with a parson. (Part I, Sc. 3, pp. 22-23)

Ann schemes revenge. Thwarted by her servant Rose (Bob's black wife) who refuses to perform voodoo, or dress up as a ghost to terrify Are, Ann has to devise her own means of escape. Rose has at this point but a dream of freedom: "I am black / At night I press through the

land unseen / Though you lie awake / My smile is as sharp as the blade
in my hand[.] / Men and women work in the fields / All that they grow
they own[.] / And the song of freedom is sung" (Part I, Sc. 3, pp.
25-26).

The theatrical dichotomy of song and dramatic action grants an epic perspective. By setting the characters in a greater context than themselves, the songs give a sense of the urgency of the wider problem and force the audience to concentrate on the abrasive tensions in society. This adding of a bridge between the physicality of events in the play-world and the rational purpose is particularly effective in the "Thieving Scene." The violent fight between Bob and Frank erupts over Frank's theft of Lord Are's silver. Frank is first bound to a chair and roughed about until he hands over one spoon. Bob would sooner stay on the "right" side and turn Frank over to the authorities, believing that the forces of law and order are for the good of the people. Frank's rage is in defiance of the system: "Yer have to steal in my job if yer wanna live. Yer fetch an' carry for 'em, pick 'em up, get 'em upstairs, put 'em to bed, clean up the spew. Stands to reason they drop anythin' - it's yourn. That's only right" (Part I, Sc. 4, p. 33). When he is bolted into a chest, he can only scream and kick against the mad confines of his world. With savage irony, Bond has Bob sing the end of the scene's song:

The calf will be tied to the slaughterhouse door
The butcher will cut its throat with his knife
It will sink to its knees and bleed out its life

The morning is over, the work is done
You eat and drink and have your fun
The butcher is sharpening his knife today
Do you know - do you care - who will get away?
(Part I, Sc. 4, p. 37)

By means of incisive dramatic irony, we are led into the slaughterhouse of the next scene. Only the texture changes.

Ann, disguised as a ghost, upsets Lord Are at breakfast. Not to be undaunted, he brandishes a rapier ("Fore god I am taken with my style. Who'd have thought I'd unloose such a show of bravado?" [Part I, Sc. 5, p. 43]) and runs her through:

ARE. Why 'tis a heavy ghost! I had thought to go whisk-whisk and - as I am a gentleman - opened the window for it and it had vanished in a puff of smoke. The ghost bleeds. [.] 'Fore god 'tis flesh and blood. My wife. [.] With a hole in her breast. Before breakfast. [.] An amendment is called for. It were a foolish figure I should cut. A buffoon. [.] A man cannot think with his dead wife sprawled on the carpet. (Part I, Sc. 5, pp. 43-44)

His "salvation" comes in the form of Bob, the "dupe," who is terrified at the sight of the "ghost" now grotesquely manoeuvred onto a chair. Lord Are then "saves" Bob from the apparition by telling him to close his eyes and take the rapier like a cross:

Terror! ARE makes ghost sounds and lifts ANN towards BOB. BOB points the rapier. ARE leans ANN on the rapier's point.

.....

ARE. [.] Bob what have ye done? [.] Murdered your mistress.

BOB. My mistress?

ARE. 'Tis - 'twas - she. I cannot say why she is so dressed. I do not recall she mentioned a fancy-dress breakfast. It seems unlikely. Who can fathom the mind of one suddenly raised to the peerage? (Part I, Sc. 5, p. 46)

Bond's lethal wit is devastating. As one critic put it, "Mr. Bond may have fasted in sackcloth and ashes after writing lines like those."²³ The convention serves him beautifully in order to convey the sinister, hidden violence built into the machinery of this society. Horror and

humour synthesize--the icy nonchalance of the witty delivery guarding the necessary detachment. The closing play-let done in broad asides to the audience points up further the cruel indifference of this world and forces the audience to question the nature of the real tragedy:

ARE. Her ladyship is dead.

MOTHER. Dead?

ARE. (aside). O the tedium of a tragedy: everything is said twice and then thrice. (Part I, Sc. 5, p. 47)

Part Two is framed in irony. It is the question of justice which brings the two worlds together. As Rose confronts Lord Are with the fact that she knows the truth and will do battle for Bob, Are's world is threatened. The jailer is forced to meet the jailed:

ARE. [.] Marrying the coalman's daughter blemished my name, but this - 'tis a scene from a farce. [.] A lord dragged down by a working man? 'Tis against all civil order. Ye see the enormity of the thing? [.] Make me a fool or a villain and the mob will dance in the street. [.] (Part II, Sc. 6, p. 56)

And as reality confounds appearance ("There's a style to these things Bob. The terror of the law, majesty of office [.] 'Tis not unknown for [the pardon] to be held back till the man comes 'to the scaffold" [Part II, Sc. 8, p. 74]) Lord Are delivers his sugar-coated poison: "Ye have this chance to serve your country. Robert the Hero, hail!" (Part II, Sc. 6, p. 56). We are suddenly confronted with our own century's atrocities cloaked in a gentleman's smile;

He steps out of the way to let her pass
On one arm she carries a child

He takes the child and holds it on his shoulder
He opens the gate to let the woman pass

What politeness he shows the stranger!
In his hand there's a rifle
At the door to the gas chamber
He hands the child back to her arms
(Part II, Sc. 6, pp. 56-57)

Bond's use of the distancing device of anachronism is powerfully effective in this play: it serves to convey within the distanced perspective afforded by the songs a tremor of recognition (as it will later a prophetic vision [Part II, Sc. 11, p. 91]) as it shocks--an effect he was unable to achieve, for example, in the surreal context of Early Morning.

Bob still must "trust the clown": "We accuse him we'll starve gal. [...] We jist hev to go along for the sake of appearance - like he say" (Part II, Sc. 6, p. 57). The state of unfreedom to which all are bound is cruelly brought home by "an unconscious joke so black that the audience at the Royal Court could be heard drawing in their breath."²⁴ Bob's Mother warns Rose not to meddle: "Jist ont stand in my boy's way when he hev his chance to goo up in the world" (Part II, Sc. 7, p. 64). The choice is the clown (Are) or the conjuror (Hardache), twin sides of the same tarnished coin. Rose confronts Bob with the truth of her own lived experience:

My mother saw her chains, she's had marks on her wrist all her life. There are no signs on you till you're dead. How can yer fight for freedom when yer think you've got it? [...] It's a circus! The clown kicks the mongrel and it licks his boots. He kicks it harder and it rolls on its back an' wags its tail - an' all the dogs laugh. (Part II, Sc. 8, p. 78.)

In a last desperate attempt, she seeks help from yet another clown. We are moved abruptly from the "homey" confines of Bob's iron world (sardonically called "Holme Cottage" where Bob [under house arrest] is

struggling to learn to read under the "kind" tutelage of the Parson and the "compassionate" patronage of Lord Are) to Lady Are's gilded cage.

Bond's formidable portrait of Lady Are joins his gallery of ludicrous grotesques. (Irene Handl apparently gave an "uproarious"²⁵ performance.) A larger-than-life character, she holds command, a resplendent example of the gross decadence of a class which reeks of decay:

LADY ARE. 'Tis true my figure sets a fashion few could follow - but the prince always liked a lady of carriage. He'd bed me still but his flesh is wore out with paint. His servants daub it on when they're drunk and he's too blind to wipe it off. Last week his whiskers were plastered to his cheeks with cold cream. They carry him round the palace in a sedan chair. [.] (Part II, Sc. 9, p. 81.)

The promise of a reprieve motivated by personal revenge against her despised brother is painfully counterpoised with the solemn and lyrical song "The Fair Tree of Liberty" which tells of natural justice and freedom: "And so the fair tree grows / As tall as the pine and strong as the oak [.] / As our forefathers spoke" (Part II, Sc. 10, p. 84).

The contrast which this affords serves to further heighten the outrage which follows. Lord Are seemingly secure in his deceit unmasks himself ("For the first time he is seen in a shirt and breeches and without a wig" [Part II, Sc. 10, p. 84]). He sees himself in tune with nature ("Flowers nodded, lambs bleated" [Part II, Sc. 10, p. 85]). The moment that 'all is well with the world' a Messenger arrives with Bob's pardon (secured by Lady Are) to take to the prison. With the sudden twist of events, his world is again threatened. In the art of double-dealing, however, the stakes are high and the cards are stacked. With a practised zest and panache, he aims his wit at the Messenger, rooting

him to the spot. Bond superbly manipulates the old comedian's ploy whereby one builds the tension through laughter, and once the audience is with you, one can then be outrageous. The Messenger, disarmed and foiled by Are's promise to take it safely himself, unwittingly becomes a party to Are's murderous guile. The moment the Messenger leaves, Are asks Bob's Mother to light a fire ("Warm thy old hands at the blaze. Here is a paper to start it" [Part Two, Sc. 10, p. 89]). One can only gasp at the realization that Bob's Mother is unknowingly feeding her son's pardon to the flames. Suddenly Lord Are panics as he realizes that his finery for the hanging is not in order. Having come too close to courting death himself, he becomes desperate to keep his hand on power, coercion and control:

LORD ARE. [.] Where is the button! D'ye see it? No! 'Tis off! (Throws his blue coat on the floor.) Here, here (Thumps his chest.) where every fool can see it! You ancient hag must I sew it myself? [.] (Part I, Sc. 11, p. 90)

The horrific consequences of a society suddenly out of control are terrifyingly imaged in Bob's song "Suddenly":

It came suddenly like a bomb
They didn't die with the gestures of dying
They didn't cover their heads in fear
They didn't lift their hands in supplication
They died with the gestures of living

So sudden was the disaster
So swift the moment of fate
It fell at the time of the midday meal
When the fork was halfway between
The mouth and the plate
(Part II, Sc. 11, p. 91)

In order to keep this larger prophetic vision before us, Bond skillfully averts ending the story of Bob's plight on a melodramatic high

note. Several centers of interest split the focus and interrupt the main action: the Parson's sanctimonious prayers; Mrs. Wilson's pragmatic busyness in the role of the hangman's wife; Frank and Bob's ballad; Bob's "Drum Song"; Bob and Rose's farewell. If this scene is played in the manner of frequent 'turns,' none of the dramatic excitement and sense of urgency will be lost, and yet the personal and touching will not claim our sole attention. Bob's final aside to the audience will then carry its full weight: "I ont believe this" (Part II, Sc. 11, p. 98).

The play draws to a powerful close as Rose is seen to stand on London Bridge and face the audience: "What have I learned? If nothing, then I was hanged" (Part II, Sc. 12, p. 99). Her disturbing question, which is intended as a final challenge to the audience, is reinforced by her final song conveyed in a lyricism both hard, cold and yet resounding with passionate conviction:

Once Satan roamed the earth to find
Souls that money could buy
Now he comes to steal your mind
He doesn't wait till you die

Man is what he knows - or doesn't know
The empty men reap death and sow
Famine wherever they march
But they do not own the earth

Geese fly over the moon but do not know
That for a moment they fill the world with
beauty[. . .]
But we may know who we
are and where we go

Even tougher is her new resolve: "I must have one hand of iron and the other of steel. There is a gentle breeze from the city. I cross the bridge and go into the streets" (Part II, Sc. 12, pp. 99-100).

Bond does not shrink from the possibility of revolutionary violence in the building of a more humane world. In the socio-historical context of the play, Bob's death changes nothing; those who were responsible for his hanging are still confined to their dark cage. By means of the stark distancing, and the anachronistic time-shifts, the emphasis is primarily upon an altered state of consciousness. With his most recent plays, only one question burns in Bond's mind:

can you create socialist consciousness before the revolution, before you have real political power?...we do live, if not in a post revolutionary society, then in a post revolutionary world....in the West, artists have to do two things: they have to try to add to the "climate" which makes for a revolution, and...we have to try to create images of the reformed human consciousness as it would be possible for us: we have to use art to prove that it is possible.²⁶

Restoration is a subtle play as provocative in its intellectual and political insights as it is richly entertaining. Its success depends upon the principal distancing effects of a counter-text to an established literary mode and subject matter, and a sophisticated modern version of songs in the Brechtian mode which together artfully advance the notion of a Marxist historicist vision of man.

Chapter Six Endnotes

¹ Bond, "Author's Preface," Bond: Two Lear, The Sea, Narrow Road to the Deep North, Black Mass, Passion (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 11.

² William Shakespeare, King Lear.

³ John Holmstrom, "Lear," Plays and Players, 19 (November 1971), 42.

⁴ Bond, "A Poem," "The Worlds," with "The Activists Papers" (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 148.

⁵ All parenthetical part, scene and page references are to Bond, Bond: Two.

⁶ Bond, "Author's Preface," Bond: Two, p. 12.

⁷ With his choice of the name "Bodice," Bond intends perhaps an ironic echo to Boadecia, the fierce Celtic queen who drove in her spike-wheeled chariot among her warriors urging them to wreak terrible vengeance against the Romans. The name "Fontanelle" suggests the realm of Restoration comedy with its allusion to the membranous space of an infant's skull, and the clichéd expression, "soft in the head".

⁸ Lear: tape of Royal Court production (September 1971), British Institute of Recorded Sound.

⁹ Theatre Quarterly, 2 (Jan.-Mar. 1972), 20-31: 'Production Casebook No. 5: Bond's Lear at the Royal Court' (rehearsal log by Gaskill's assistant director), p. 24.

¹⁰ Bond, Theatre Poems and Songs (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 5.

¹¹ Interview with William Gaskill in Steve Gooch, "Gaskill in Germany," Plays and Players, 20 (April 1973), 32.

¹² Herbert Blau, "Comedy Since the Absurd," Modern Drama, 25 (December 1982), 566.

¹³ Leslie Smith, "Edward Bond's Lear," Comparative Drama, 13 (Spring 1979), 76.

¹⁴ "Lear Log," p. 26.

¹⁵ "Lear's Song," Theatre Poems and Songs, p. 7.

¹⁶ Gaskill, quoted in "Lear Log," p. 28.

¹⁷ Katherine Worth, Revolutions in Modern English Drama (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1972), p. 180.

¹⁸ Walter Kerr, "The Audience Simply Rose and Fled," New York Times, 13 May 1973, Sec. II, p. 1, cols. 1-6; p. 3, cols. 5-7.

19 The image of the Gravedigger's Boy was the starting image for the play. It represents for Bond a vision of a past golden age which man must forego if he is to move forward. See "Drama and the Dialectics of Violence," Theatre Quarterly, 2 (Jan.-Mar. 1972), 8.

20 See William Empson's application of the term "Pastoral" in his discussion of the proletarian novel, The Beggar's Opera, Alice in Wonderland, amongst other works, in Some Versions of the Pastoral (1950).

21 Bond, "The Worlds," with "The Activists Papers," p. 141. Also quoted in Philip Roberts, "The Search for Epic Drama: Edward Bond's Recent Work," Modern Drama, 24 (December 1981), 462-3. Roberts expands upon Bond's intent with this device, first experimented with in The Worlds.

22 All parenthetical, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, Restoration and The Cat (London: Methuen, 1981).

23 Robert Cushman, "Impaled on a Rapier," The Observer Review (26, July, 1981).

24 Katherine Worth, "Bond's 'Restoration'," Modern Drama, 24 (December 1981), 490.

25 Cushman, "Impaled on a Rapier."

26 Edward Bond, quoted in Philip Roberts, "Edward Bond's Summer," Modern Drama, 26 (June 1983), 136.

Chapter Seven:

No Woman is an Island:

Towards a New Notion of Character in The Woman and Summer

When Bond turns his hand once again from serious comedy to tragedy, he continues to experiment with new combinations of distancing components, matching a rigorous form to an equally tough content. He characterizes his more recent plays (The Woman, The Bundle, The Worlds, Restoration, and Summer) as "answer plays": "We mustn't write only problem plays, we must write answer plays - or at least plays which make answers clearer and more practical."¹

Both The Woman (1978) and Summer (1982) represent modulations of a pattern of distancing which Bond deems crucial to his new epic-lyric drama or, a "poetic drama which impersonates history":

In epic the lyric becomes objective....lyric is the daily appearance, the commonplace dress, of reason. It shows us the rational. It makes the epic pattern human....we'd show the power of historical forces by showing the individuality, ordinariness and human vulnerability and strength of the characters who live in it.²

The selection of historically-based events, ancient and modern, are transmuted to carry implications for our present and future world in a manner different from the surrealistic Early Morning and the period histories, Bingo and The Fool. Both The Woman and Summer have to do with war. Bond's fresh view of history seen through the eyes of female protagonists allows him a measure of distance from his own male viewpoint. At the same time, this device allows Bond to subvert the traditional response to a woman's role in history, and present her rather as an active agent equally responsible for her actions in society. Thus,

his female characters come to embody a state of mind, spirit and emotions, together with the political consequences of such, in order to convey a new notion of mankind's role in the evolution of a socialist consciousness. Of paramount concern is the handling of "character" to bring the right judgement to bear:

The most revealing remarks I hear from actors in my plays is represented by this: one of the murderers in SAVED said that his character was a nice guy and wouldn't do that sort of thing. This suggests that no nice guys fought for Hitler or helped to run Auschwitz. Really, that is a starting point of theatre for me. How do you show the irrelevance of the traditional, character-rooted concepts of good and evil? That's what concerns me at the present. We need a sort of positive V-effect, something less abstract than V-effect--if V-effect becomes merely the removing of emotional tension so that the object or situation being inspected just, as it were, floats loose.

The Woman: 'Scenes of War and Freedom' is Bond's re-fashioning of Euripides' The Trojan Women. It concludes his historical trilogy and is grounded, like Bingo and The Fool, in economic and historical reality; yet it rises from its concrete basis to yield its larger metaphorical significance. But it incorporates as well the principal distancing strategy in Lear--the departure from known literary material and a known mode. Thus, it combines something of the history plays, and something of the counter-text plays.

The structure is much tighter than in The Fool, dividing neatly into two parts in accordance with the dialectical argument: 'Scenes of War and Freedom'. In thematic terms, Bond's re-fashioning of the Greek and Trojan struggle is full of surprises. The war is fought not over a woman's beauty, but over a dehumanized idol, the statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune. When we finally see the statue carried on the shoulders of the Trojan poor, it is "a plain, grey, schematized female

shape, of worn but not smooth stone, [...] exaggerated in length not thickness" (Part One, Sc. 12, p. 49).⁴ It is thus a symbol of sterility and death, embodying the futility of war and mocking the illusory pretensions of its leaders whose blind hunger for power wreaks its own revenge. The Greek hero, ironically named Heros, is obsessed with recovering the statue in order to sanctify his political survival via the re-building of Athens (or to grant him immortality). In returning us to the cradle of democracy, Bond shows our Western civilization to have insidious roots which trail back to the harsh reality of an imperialistic, individualistic and militaristic ethic which determined its aggrandizement on the spoils of war and the slavery of silver mines and which produced an Athens, ironically hailed as a republic, shimmering in its cruelly reflected light. The events in Part One show the consequences of this ethic, climaxing in the carnage of the sacking of Troy.

Bond's new hero is "the woman" of the title who is, in part, Hecuba, Troy's aging but shrewdly intelligent queen who suffers the brutal destruction of her city and the murder of her grandson, and who finds within herself the strength and purpose to defeat the merciless Greek. But the title also connotes the humane impulses which both Hecuba and Ismene personify in contrast to the blood-thirsty war-mongering Greeks. Sexism forms part of the larger political violence which is motivated by a lust for power. When Ismene learns that Hecuba is not the "painted whore" which her husband Heros had depicted, but a forbidding lady determined to work for peace, she offers herself as a Trojan hostage and attempts to break the deadlock fueled by mutual suspicion and fear. Her moral act is deemed by Greek custom and law

not only an act of treason, but an act which would shame the noble Greek woman who would dare to defy her husband: her punishment is immurement in a wall, a wall which, as usual with Bond, is both very real and symbolic.

Part Two finds the two women, one blind, the other mentally unstable since her release from the wall, sharing in the communal life of a fishing island. An escaped miner, deformed, blackened and scarcely human, finds refuge with the women. It is this new triad which ultimately suggests a future synthesis effected through proletarian suffering, the wisdom of experience and faith in man's moral being.

In theatrical terms, Bond's grand conception is impressive. The huge Olivier stage at the National Theatre was used in its entirety including the back fire-wall which was encased in metallic sheets symbolically representing the "glory" of Athens. Against this back-drop, the numerous public scenes were enacted in the open-air in a manner suggestive of the classical amphitheatre outdoors where critical events and crucial issues affecting public life were passionately debated. This manner of grand "epic" staging contributes to distancing: the stage becomes a public platform opening out onto the world. Ruby Cohn describes the scenic effect of Ismene's treason trial as "striking--the Greek men glisten in their white togas whereas Ismene wears midnight blue." Cohn further notes how the "deployment of geometric forms... reinforce the morality":

Essentially, war was rectangular and freedom circular.... [the] fire-curtain [was] in rectangular steel panels. Greek uniforms consisted of copper-coloured rectangles.... Greek generals sat on camp-stools with rectangular seats. In contrast, Hecuba, scheming for peace, wore a vast black circular cape that bore evidence of her past through the colored rectangles in its design; the other Trojan women echoed this

costume. The Greeks were often blocked parallel to the rectangular wall panels, whereas the Trojans circled the stage --Hecuba herself, the Poor after they Kill the Son, the captive women after the death of Astyanax. Ismene calling for Greek desertion crosses the stage-field in a wide arc.⁵

The cold mathematical precision of the scenic symbolism also, of course, serves the distancing process. The emphasis is upon clear visual signs which are both coldly sensual and sufficiently abstract to be intellectually exciting. At the same time the style of prose combines emotional force and yet considerable restraint. Bond has said that he wanted to capture the quality of 'passionate thought' which he found in classical drama:

What I wanted...was a certain classical loquacity....to get that feeling of people in extreme situations of danger and so on, but at the same time, always thinking, and always talking, always commenting about them.⁶

To this end, Bond, now in the director's seat himself, stresses the importance of an epic acting style which rigorously denounces the appeal to empathy. In a first run through of The Woman, Bond was amazed how "the acting forced the play into the ground, buried it in irrelevant subjectivity":

The company were acting emotions, hugging feelings to themselves, speaking to themselves even when they shouted....They were private performers on a public stage, still part of the bourgeois theatre....You cannot act an emotion, you can only act an idea. You reproduce an emotion....An emotion reproduces itself and changes nothing....A concept, an interpretation (of the situation, not the character) must be applied to an emotion, and it is this...that is acted. This relates the character to the social event so that he becomes its story teller. When this is done emotions are transferred to the surface. Instead of being hidden in the heart or the gut (or other corners of the bourgeois soul) they go to the hands, feet, face, head, and become living creative energy. Then the actor is freed to interpret the situation....He should think of his voice as a commentary on an action; or of his actions

as movements in a silent film on which he dubs his voice.... The new public stage needs broad, unfidgety acting that moves from image to image, each image graphically analysing the story. When the audience's attention has been won in this way it's possible to do very small, subtle things. This combination of large and small, far and near, is a visual language of politics.⁷

Our acting does not recreate. It recollects. Its energy is intellectual. It makes the particular general and the general particular. It finds the law in the incidental. Thus it restores moral importance to human behavior.⁸

It is important to grasp what Bond is trying to do with his Brechtian theory of epic acting since he now insists on directing the first productions in England of all his plays. The key words for Bond's political drama--public situation, idea, intellectual energy, graphic illustration, change--argue for a much more concentrated conceptual approach to theatre.

One brilliant example, it seems to me, of the desired tension in expressing passionate understanding is Hecuba's speech in the climactic scene of Part One when she asks Heros for justice. Her words are fierce and regal:

HECUBA. Teach me. Not how to herd women through the streets and goad them with your swords so you can chase them, or how to jeer when the old run and fall down, or how to mock when you lean over them with your sword, or kill a woman and wipe the knife in her husband's grey beard, or throw a man's blood down on his own doorstep - not all these skills of violence -

HEROS. The Trojans owe all this to you.

HEBUCA. - but how to tell between right and wrong.

.....

HEBUCA. [.] No, teach me more! You great destroyer - now be Troy's benefactor! Teach us the meaning of justice! I've come from the ruins of my city to ask. [.] (Part One, Sc. 14, pp. 57-58)

This penultimate scene is for Bond his 'epiphany' in a theatre

which combines intense emotional involvement with conceptual understanding. One can appreciate the purpose of a cool, formalized acting approach in a speech such as the one above. But whether the dispassionate approach helps further to contain the impact of the horrific action in the scene as a whole is questionable. In one riveting scene early on in Part One when the Greek soldiers are suddenly set upon by three veiled women who have the plague, where the action is swift and revolting, Bond does hold the horror without milking it for a repulsive sensationalism. The facts speak for themselves. The climactic scene of Part One, however, builds to a fearful intensity. Both the violent acts of the murder of Hecuba's grandson, and Hecuba's self-blinding occur off-stage. And specific distancing elements which Bond uses to control the scene are again the splitting of focus (and hence, of emotion and action), and a certain choric quality to the chorus of women's voices. But these elements are so integral to the action, they seem almost to reinforce the horror or live more powerfully in the imagination. I doubt if one saw the child impaled on the spears, or Hecuba actually draw the knife to her eye that it would lessen the sickening feeling one bit. The chorus of women narrate the atrocities which are happening in the streets below. But they also sit with their "refugee bundles" awaiting deportation or whatever their lot is to be. The focus is split between the image of Cassandra clutching the boy and desperately pleading with Heros, the chorus of women wailing, Hecuba's anguished plea, and the haunting plea from Ismene who is bricked in the wall. When Hecuba re-emerges having blinded herself, she gropes towards Heros and continuously "rubs her eyes with her hair." Heros and his men back away shouting, "Bitch! Bitch!" (Part One, Sc. 14, p.

61) while Hecuba screams for her knife to blind her other eye. The sight is almost unbearable. Bond caps the scene with an element of the comic-grotesque, appropriate in the context, and ostensibly intended to defuse somewhat the stark horror. The old clown Nestor who doubted he still had it in him, shouts with glee:

[.] Wasn't I brave lads! I skipped like a goat. Blood on my sword at my age! [.]

.....
Chopped chap's head off - then shook it out the helmet. I've got a thirst on me boys. I could drink the sea and piss out salt!

.....
[.] O lads let us remember the solemnity of the world and the awfulness of war. (Part One, Sc. 14, p. 63)

Judging by appearance, Hecuba's act of self-mutilation has to be seen as a gesture of utter despair and a closing-off to the world, an echo of the closed form of Greek tragedy. And yet Bond intends that we also perceive her action from an entirely different angle--as an "extraordinary heroic act of defiance...in pitting her will against that social force."⁹ (Bond likens this gesture to his own feeling of indignation which arose upon hearing a British judge sentence a thief to imprisonment, and in the same breath, extol the virtues of classical democracy as the model for present day justice. This incident was one of the catalysts for the play.)

There are equally dark contradictions in Hecuba's final action in Part Two. Heros has found the women on the island and is determined to find the statue which was lost at sea during a storm. Her cunning plan to rig a foot-race between Heros and the crippled miner in order to have the miner kill Heros is cruel. Hecuba pretends to uncover her "good eye" (in fact she is totally blind) and declares she saw (from the

hill top) Heros stop at one point, and sleep under a tree. The miner appears, then, to have finished first; the prize the loser's death. Bond gives the following argument:

She rewards us by disposing of that menace and pointing out a conceptual understanding of history which could become part of human practice....She showed great determination doing this, and therefore part of her character she must have sacrificed in order to have achieved that. I applaud her for doing that. I think she's a woman of courage and determination, but then I can't say that she is a complete human being. I have to say that she lived in a time when it wasn't possible to be completely human, and what she is doing is building the possibility of a further humanity.¹⁰

Given the particular causal situation, Ismene's moral act was ineffectual, as were the combined efforts of all the women united against the Greeks. Still, the cost of change must be equally understood. The poignant coupling of Ismene and the miner who accept each others' failings and commit themselves to caring for each other is juxtaposed with Hecuba's grotesque death, the distorted final portrait suggestive of a Picasso Cubist painting:

MAN. The waterspout picked her up from the beach and carried her into the fields. She was caught in a fence like a piece of sheep's wool. When the spout passed over her it ripped out her hair and eyes. Her tits were sticking up like knives. Her face was screwed up and her tongue - a long thin tongue - was poking out. (Part Two, Sc. 9, p. 108)

The problem with Part Two is really its dramatic credibility. The child-like simplicity and naturalness of the islanders reinforced by the joining of Ismene and the Dark Man seems stagy. (The "joyful" tickling scene between Hecuba, Ismene and the Man seems particularly contrived.) The foot-race is too obviously intended as a model for analysis. More interestingly, albeit somewhat veiled, is the central

image of the storm which is intended to enhance the dialectic. In a manner that parallels the storm of change at the close of Lear, and the sea/storm symbolism in The Sea, The Woman advances the argument of the necessity of revolutionary change. Hecuba's prophetic vision tells of the giant waterspout which hit their ship and drew it inside the circle of its wall:

I saw the waterspout come out of the grey clouds. It was spinning and shafts of lightning flashed from the sides. It was white and twisting - and ran towards us over the water like a dancer or someone drunk. [...] Then the wall of water hit us. It seized the ship and jerked us inside and halfway round the circle and suddenly dropped us out inside, yes, inside the waterspout. It was calm there. The white wall was spinning round us. I looked up and...saw the stars. [...] The sea was flat and smooth, [...] As clear as a mirror. I stuck out my hands and saw them chained and roped together in the water. [...] The white screaming wall was a foot away. We went into it and shot up to the sky. We came through the top and tobogganned down outside on the slope of water. (Part Two, sc. 1, p. 67)

Bond's "still point" approaches that of metaphysical Marxism, a philosophical notion which is rather difficult to translate into the concrete medium of the theatre. Bond attempts this nonetheless in several ways. The islander's life observes the rituals of the seasons in accordance with the tides which are analogous to the march of history. Their periodic calm is disrupted with the arrival of Heros who is fanatically obsessed with combing the sea for the lost statue. Events move inexorably towards the storm season (The October Revolution?). And yet within the seeming chaos of the storm of history, there is equally the possibility of a new resolve, a conscious design towards effecting change. Hecuba's vision is literally re-enacted by the real storm on stage which in theatrical terms is a stunning spectacle. And this coincides with Hecuba's decision to run the race and the confron-

tation between Heros and the Man (The miner):

HEROS. Who are you?

MAN (shrugs). I've never been asked before. I don't know. [..]

HEROS. That's why the goddess made me save your life: for this!

MAN. When you built your new city our hell grew with it. [..]

(Part Two, Sc. 6, p. 97)

Bond gives the Man the most moving speech in Part Two. But the most interesting dramatic feature of Bond's attempt at a global epic theatre which would fuse both his artistic and political purpose is his handling of the crowd scenes.

In Scene Twelve, Part One, the angry, desperate Trojan poor, some with plague, others "starved, wounded, sick, lame, crazed" (Part One, Sc. 12, p. 48) force Hecuba's Son up the temple steps. The moment he is stabbed from behind, the mob screams out of the temple bearing the statue high:

CROWD. Out! Out! Out! Throw her out! Chuck her out! Get rid of her! Out! Out! Out! Bitch! Bitch! Bitch! No more bitch! Out!

The BEGGARS spin, stamp, shout, chant, laugh, cry - but above all dance and sing. [..]

Wait! Wait! Listen! (Noise subsides for a moment.) Let the Greeks have her! They deserve her! To the Greeks! [..]
(Part One, Sc. 12, p. 49)

In Bond's production, careful attention was paid to very specific gestural movement:

I tried to show their common purpose through their hands. First their hands are flat and extended, the hands of beggars; when they come closer to their enemies their hands become fists; when they carry out the statue their hands are weapons,

claws and flails; and when they're united in one moment of choice...their hands swing in the direction of the harbour like the leaves of a tree turning in the wind.¹¹

As with Brecht, it is the "social gestus" of the scene which is paramount. And it is again the theatricalization of gesture which we have seen in all Bond's major group scenes, where more than one thing is happening at the same time, that breaks the illusion and encourages a multi-conscious apprehension of the stage events.

The gesture of the crowd looking out to the harbour is taken one significant step further at the close of Part Two. The moment Heros is slain, Nestor calls for the swords. Hecuba stops him shouting, "Wait!... Remember Troy!... The cost!" The group is ringed around Hecuba and as she reminds Nestor that Heros' mad search was for nothing but "a little stone in the sea," the crowd "all turn to face the sea" (Part Two, Sc. 9, p. 106). Bond had them not only "move in one united movement to face the sea" but "then back to face the audience."¹²

Bond was taken to task because he had neither "differentiated" the crowd in Part One nor "controlled" the crowd in Part Two. He had this to say:

Some critics don't like the crowd when it's united in a common purpose....They don't want the poor or oppressed to have a common purpose. It's nicer, safer, when they're picturesque individuals. But when the crowd is a group of reflecting individuals--showing that they can think--they want them to be passive spear carriers. I ask: isn't a spear the last thing that should be carried passively?¹³

The crowd's final gesture is really Evens', Lear's and Rose's gesture writ large, unsettling the audience with a serious challenge, and thereby forcing it to apply the political insights to its own reality.

To do otherwise is to court the disaster of a world of "passive spear carriers." Bond's own double-edged sword combines a passionate appeal to the audience's understanding and activism, and the sober realization of the inevitability of revolutionary violence in the face of stasis, incomprehension and gross injustice.

Bond's Summer explores yet another means to combine the private and public dimensions of experience. He returns to the more psychologically real and domestic world of his early plays. The characters are portrayed as fully rounded individuals living ordinary, recognizable lives, but who convey equally how their "character" is shaped by their thinking, class function, and their involvement in a wider historical and political pattern. And yet the subject is living history. The successful interplay of these two realms is not only difficult but crucial in the creation of a new socialist theatre.

Summer, like The Woman, has an island setting. The action takes place on a terrace overlooking the sea, somewhere in Eastern Europe. Opposite the terrace are two islands "called the eyes of the sea" (Sc. 3, p. 27).¹⁴ Bond weaves the various strands of his story around this image which is at once real and symbolic of both private conscience and the conscience of history, and which connects back to the specific island/sea symbolism in The Woman, the sea/storm allusions in The Sea, and the wider ramifications of the storm metaphor in Lear.

Zenia and her daughter Ann return to Zenia's childhood home for their annual holiday. The once private mansion is now a block of flats. Zenia learns that Marthe, her ex-servant, and present caretaker of the flats, is dying of cancer. In the course of the exchanges between the two women, the islands act as a catalyst, reviving memories

of the horrors of war. Before the war, Zenia's childhood summers were spent camping and picnicking on the islands. During the war, the islands were used as concentration camps; the island's rock wall was the execution site. Marthe was interned in a hut, together with other women; men and children were forced into separate huts. Zenia was able to save Marthe from being shot since she was her servant and since Zenia's father entertained the Germans. In a further ironic twist, Zenia's father was finally imprisoned by the partisans (aided by Marthe's evidence against him), whom he had secretly helped. Zenia revisits the islands and encounters a German tourist who was garrisoned on the island. This incident ignites the final confrontation between the two women. A sub-plot concerns the love affair between Ann and Marthe's son David, now a doctor. Ann is progressively drawn into the wider conflict and comes finally to represent the continuum of living history.

The American critic Michael Feingold who reviewed the Manhattan Theatre Club's production (1983), described Bond's method as "cold hands, warm heart."¹⁵ He was referring specifically to the shocking moment where Marthe launches a huge spit at Zenia. Marthe's act of aggression, in Mr. Feingold's opinion, would seem to indicate a deep ambivalence in Bond as though he had to steel himself in order to condemn a character who, for much of the play, is well-meaning, and who presents a strong case on behalf of her aristocratic family's behaviour during the war. Furthermore, Marthe's "vindictiveness" would seem to cast a disparaging light on the revolutionary cause of socialism as though it had degenerated into "a game of reverse snobbism, perpetually retroactive in its pettiness."¹⁶ The spit is central to the meaning

of the play, linking back to Zenia's act of kindness in saving Marthe's life. Bond's "cold gesture" is intended to bring into sharper focus how each of the characters judges that act, and in turn, invite the audience to judge it. Whether one interprets the incident in strictly personal terms--Marthe's "blunt hostility" towards Zenia climaxing in a moment of personal revenge--or whether the larger historical and political ramifications are understood, is, in part, dependent upon the production approach given to Bond's text and, in particular, the manner of presenting the two central characters.

The New York production which I saw employed an essentially naturalistic reading. The set was realistic, depicting in the first part the house with terrace looking out on the sea, and, in the second, the island wall as a backdrop. The pace of events was steadily maintained with no deliberate demarcation between the action, for example, of Zenia coming and going, the reflective passages where the two women recall the past, and Marthe's significantly pointed speeches to Ann, Zenia's daughter. Our attention was primarily drawn to Zenia whose stage presence seemed to dwarf the other characters. Partly, this was due to the fact that in physical terms, she was an attractive woman, every inch the haughty owner of a chic London boutique. Her liveliness and even humour made Marthe seem by comparison drab, somber, low-keyed, even tired--a manner which is psychologically credible for a woman dying of cancer, but completely at odds with the persona of a woman whose inner resolve is strengthened by her political experience and convictions. Sympathy flowed towards Zenia in the strict, bourgeois sense. One could easily identify with a woman who needed to return each summer to her childhood roots and cling to a world that was gone, a woman torn

by contradictions, arrogant and disdainful of the new world, and yet wanting to help Marthe. The final portrait of her is that of a confused, lonely woman who realizes only that it was her last summer and that she in some way hastened Marthe's death by reviving the past:

The director, Douglas Hughes, discussed with me some of the reasons behind his approach. His main concern was to soften the didactic pill, as it were, and bring out instead the warmth of fuller characterization. He felt that Bond, in *Zenia*, had written a beautifully rounded character and this should be emphasized. On the other hand, he and the actress playing Marthe had difficulty with her role. The actress, who in real life, is a very warm person and not political, found the political rhetoric tough and preferred to play it down. It came across in production in rather the manner of a general conversation one might have, but with no sense of any deep, passionate conviction, let alone the tone of severity which Bond asks for in the text:

MARTHE. When you have so much power you might as well be nobody. Necessity takes over. Factories and banks aren't run by kindness. They run on their own laws. [.] The kindness of one person to another can't change that. [.] If it could the world would be a better place. After all, we all mean well. [.] Your family made the people who loved and respected them confuse kindness with justice. That is corrupting. You can live without kindness, you can't live without justice - or fighting to get it. If you try to you're mad. [.] Whole generations bleed for it. The state of injustice is always a state of madness.

ANN. You're severe.

MARTHE. Some things require such severity. (Sc. 3, p. 20)

The quality of "warmth" carried through even to the moment of her spitting at *Zenia*. (As critic Michael Feingold noted, with appreciation, her behaviour was "warmly vindictive.") In discussing the poss-

ibility of a more Brechtian approach in order that the political and hopefully the historical breadth to the play might be expanded, Mr. Hughes admitted that he is neither knowledgeable in nor particularly a supporter of "Brechtian" theatre. He was not certain how this dimension could be handled, and even if he knew, he did not feel he was interested in exploring this avenue. He was in touch with Bond throughout the rehearsals, and Bond was apparently extremely helpful but concluded that, "You use theatre differently over there." The issue, then, becomes one of the use to which theatre is put and the cohesion of the entire ensemble if the drama is to be essentially political.

Bond directed the original production of Summer himself. The setting was non-realistic "suspended between history and fable."¹⁷ Since Summer is essentially a naturalistic play of the talky drawing-room type characteristic of much English drama, this approach would lend the desired air of strangeness in order to hear the argument. The actress playing Zenia gave her, according to one reviewer, "a mosquito-like attack."¹⁸ Another reviewer found her "too withdrawn and remote."¹⁹ Both characterizations would enhance Bond's intent. In his working notes to the play, Bond writes, "I want the Visitor to seem like a creature from another world - some strange survivor from the past..."²⁰ One might add that her name seems to be connected with xenophobia (derived from the Greek "xenos" meaning "stranger.") As the play progresses, she becomes the persona of the destructive force which put Marthe in the camp and which continues to live in the present, doing battle with all that Marthe represents. Yvonne Bryceland, a South African actress, and very political, played the role of Marthe.

Presumably, she would lend to the role the initial quality of personal indifference towards Zenia which Bond desired:

Zenia is allowed to return because Marthe would say she [Marthe] is not vindictive. Once Zenia had no political and cultural power she was not dangerous.²¹

The general tenor of the play according to the critic, Irving Wardle, was, apparently, "cool, objective...explaining the sad facts of the world as if to a group of children."²² There is a certain icy calm to Summer and if this tone were conveyed in the first, long passages where both women tell Ann their experiences during the war, the sense of the women also embodying the voice of history might come through. The very length of the speeches alerts one to parabolic significance. And if told in the manner of an epic chronicle, this distanced mode would balance the dramatic conflict between the two women, and serve to objectify the emotional content of Marthe's relived horror.

In turn, this would affect how the audience would react to Zenia's encounter with the German on the island and, finally, to the confrontation between the women leading up to the act of spitting. During Marthe's recounting of her experience in the hut, Zenia is visibly confused and on the defensive. This state is reinforced on the island. The link which the German unwittingly makes between the "girl in white," whose Father wined and dined the Nazis and in whose cause the Germans fought in order to preserve the "civilization" and values of the old world, should traumatize Zenia. Bond dramatically heightens the incident with nightmarish images:

GERMAN. [The bodies] had been sealed up in caves and pushed down cracks. [.] Now we must open the graves. Dig the bodies out of the rocks. It is an order. [.] The bodies were thrown

into the sea. [...] They floated round the island. Only a few were skeletons. Sand had preserved the skin of the rest. [...] Some of them held hands - that's how they died. [...] A dead woman clutched a child in the crook of her arm and floated on top of the sea as if she held the child up out of the water to see us. (Sc. 4, p. 33).

In Bond's production, the German was portrayed with sensitivity: a very ordinary man who, in Wardle's words, is "plaintively scanning the sea for his children and saying how terrible it would be to go home alone."²³ In the New York production, he was presented as a gross fool, voraciously mousing down Zenia's sandwiches. The audience responded with great laughter and applause. (He literally, stole the scene!). Humour is offered. But the weight of Bond's interpretation would deliberately unnerve the too familiar response that only "evil" men were responsible for such atrocities. And in this way, the frightening link would be forged with Zenia's refusal to accept responsibility.

Zenia's disturbed state should be the strongest factor. Otherwise her frenzied need to seek Marthe out in order to establish her innocence will not come through. The spitting scene begins with Zenia projecting onto Marthe her own sense of guilt, rationalizing that Marthe had to feel guilty for giving evidence against Zenia's father who had in fact collaborated with the partisans and made it possible for Marthe to live. But Zenia's vindication would destroy the revolutionary order:

MARTHE. The foundations of your world were crooked and so everything was crooked. [...] All the good you did was meaningless. In your world the good did evil. [...] Most of us spent our life swimming out to the open sea. [...] The soldiers on the island didn't have much excuse for not seeing the blood they shed. But your state was worse. You had every excuse for what you did: your hands were clean! Your world was a puppet show. [...]

.....

[.] It seems to me people like you live backwards. You learn nothing. You spend your life burrowing through the ground to your grave. [.]

.....

ZENIA (to herself): The world was taken away from me. They threw the furniture out of the house and left me in the emptiness. I can't begin again. I've spent years pointing at my dead body - and no one sees it.

MARTHE. Yes, you can't begin. You belong to a family who die in prisons. The old woman beside me. Gripped the bench with both hands. Her knuckles shone like a child's. 'If I could live to spit in her face.' (MARTHE heaves herself out of her chair, spits in ZENIA's face and falls back on the floor.) It's gone. (Sc. 5, pp. 42-45)

Bond has written in one of the poems ("What Sort of Morality Is That!") which preface the play:

When someone spits at another a spit is a spit
Or is it?

The dead are still unburied
(In this century wherever you turn the spade to bury them
You unearth others)

You want to forgive the crimes that have not yet been
committed
What sort of morality is that!

Zenia's self-comment on her "dead body" is doubly ironic. She is blind to the fact that her world is part of the dead hand of the past. In another sense, she still exists, as do the anachronistic and destructive values by which she lives. She, not Marthe, is part of the living dead. Marthe's spit at once acknowledges all the victims of the oppressed, connecting past with present and future. The struggle against power is finally the struggle of memory against forgetting.

Bond intended his "great peripeteia" as the turning from the death cell, guarded by monsters and preparing to face guns, to the sun-lit

balconies, with the meal laid on the clean table and the loving son."²⁴ It is the final image we have of Marthe who bequeaths to Ann her eulogy:

MARTHE. [.] Fight. But in the end death is a friend who brings a gift: life. Not for you but the others. I die so that you might live. (Sc. 6, p. 49)

Bond ends the play with a kind of Brechtian epilogue which he sub-titles "The Agreement" (Sc. 7, p. 53). Should there be a child, Ann will raise it alone, if need be, but once grown, will bring the child to David. If the dualistic tensions are maintained throughout the play, the final response is less an immersion in the emotional and psychological frame of the personal tragedy, and more a profoundly affecting response to the deeper questions and possible solutions that the play poses. If the world, as Bond grimly reminds us, seems to live as though Auschwitz had never happened, an alternative consciousness might yet be born.

Chapter Seven Endnotes

¹ Bond, quoted in Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Edward Bond: A Companion to the Plays (London: TQ Publications, 1978), p. 75.

² Bond, "The Worlds," with "The Activists Papers" (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 131 & 129.

³ Edward Bond, "On Brecht: A Letter to Peter Holland," Theatre Quarterly, 8 (Summer 1978), 35.

⁴ All parenthetical part, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, The Woman (London: Methuen, 1979).

⁵ Ruby Cohn, "The Fabulous Theatre of Edward Bond," in Essays on Contemporary British Drama, eds. Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim (Munich: Max Hueber, 1981), p. 202.

⁶ Bond, quoted in Tony Coult, "Bringing Light Back to the Earth: Edward Bond's The Woman," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 24 (Fall 1979), 101.

⁷ Edward Bond, "Us, Our Drama and the National Theatre," Plays and Players, 26 (October 1978), 8-9.

⁸ Bond, quoted in Coult, Canadian Theatre Review, p. 104.

⁹ Interview with Bond by Melvyn Bragg. British Recording London Film Catalogue, London Week-end Television and Reinart Mortiz Productions, 1980.

¹⁰ Bond, quoted in Coult, Canadian Theatre Review, p. 102.

¹¹ Bond, "Us, Our Drama and the National Theatre," p. 9.

¹² Ibid., p. 9.

¹³ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴ All parenthetical part, scene and page references are to Edward Bond, Summer and Fables (London: Methuen, 1982).

¹⁵ Michael Feingold, "Bond of Interest," Village Voice, 28 (February 22, 1983), 97.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁷ Irving Wardle, "Pressures of the Unforgiving Past," The Times (January 28, 1982), p. 10.

¹⁸ Wardle, The Times, p. 10.

19 Victoria Radin, "Hurtling to Destruction," The Observer Review (31 January, 1982), p. 30.

20 Bond, quoted in Philip Roberts, "Edward Bond's Summer," Modern Drama, 26 (June 1983), 130.

21 Ibid., p. 131.

22 Wardle, The Times, p. 10.

23 Ibid., p. 10.

24 Bond, quoted in Roberts, Modern Drama, p. 137.

Conclusion

Bond's aggressive polemical style of drama demands a sophisticated approach to the notion of political distancing if the extreme polarities of action and thought, emotional intensity and argument are to be reconciled and their energies harnessed towards effecting a radical transformation in the thinking and social behaviour of the audience. There is a danger that the frequent use of strong visceral and emotional shock effects might nullify all efforts at distancing. However this may be, Bond's attitude towards distancing, unlike Brecht's, attempts to incorporate the twin notions of control and the addition of a politically informed commentary onto the dramatization of strong emotional effects.

His early works live by the tensions he generates with the sharp juxtaposition of incongruent styles. Music-hall techniques jar uneasily with the convention of verisimilitude in the essentially naturalistic dramas of the working class in an unhealthy society. The crude popular humour is too 'real' in the context, and, rather than serve as a controlling mechanism, gathers its own vicious momentum until the savage action is complete.

Bond swings to the opposite pole from realism with the highly theatrical play, Early Morning. Like a tough teacher, he makes extraordinary demands on the audience, utilizing distancing weapons designed to shock and yet to keep aloof, to achieve startling dialectical effects. The build-up of his arsenal includes at this point a widening range of popular theatre techniques which are held in an uneasy conjunction with surrealism and the visionary mode. In addition, there

are the recurring distancing mechanisms of anachronism, and a "fill-in-the-blanks" technique which forms part of his episodic treatment of character and events. The use of comic distortion as an extreme distanced mode is partly successful in the savage attack against the ruling order and its perverted notions of morality and justice. But the use of macabre humour which borders on black farce is an insufficient means to control the repulsive sensationalism of literal cannibalism. Further, the energy of political farce is utterly at odds with the major visionary element whereby Bond attempts to project a vision of freedom born from the blackness of despair.

The successful writing of social realism requires that we recognize our world on stage by means of the comic analogy, or by elements of realism which enable us to build up the stage metaphor, or by a distanced perspective which expands outwards onto our society and its problems. Bond experiments with varied combinations in the search for the right balance between the real and the unreal, the concrete and the abstract. A historically-based incident provides the catalyst for the tragi-comedy, The Swing, but the grotesque music-hall farce is an insufficient check to the savage treatment of events. Comic distancing in The Sea is refined and sharpened to the point where it becomes an effective satirical tool. Its elements, neither too caricatured nor too grotesque, are sufficiently abstract to comment on reality. As such, it provides a more consistent middle ground from which to view the elements of personal tragedy. The added device of a *raisonneur* attests to Bond's need to move towards a more explicit means of clarifying his comment. And by virtue of its open-ended 'epilogue', its orientation is towards the possibility of future change.

A free-wheeling historicization in Bingo and The Fool becomes the central feature of his epic mode as an artistic distancing strategy. Historical fact and issues become dramatic bed fellows with Bond's superb gift for story-telling. The way in which Bond works known facts and characters into the essence and significance of his own conflicts serves as its own commentary on our pressing problems. One has further the sense of a more consciously worked-out design in the overall dialectical structure to aid the argument rather than the plot. And by means of an objective description of history he can subsume his shock techniques into an objective accounting.

Distancing elements overlap and recombine in several plays. Horror and humour comeingle--uneasily in Lear, brilliantly in Restoration. Specific distancing techniques such as the ghost device, or Brechtian songs, take on a sophisticated and complex function and contribute to the overall distancing process. But the integration of the counter-text into the dramatic design provides the comprehensive framework by which to judge the characters and events.

An essential ingredient in Bond's theory of distancing is the approach to acting. Comic distancing implies a certain objective interpretation in the role if the humour is to get through. In serious roles, the problem is more complex. As a director himself, Bond stresses a maximum of objectivity in the portrayal in order to match the increased objectivity of content. An emphasis upon a certain coolness and intellectualism in the understanding of the ironies behind the lines enables the actor to bring the desired critical slant to the playing.

All Bond's plays deal in some form with the subject of class domin-

ation and the irrationality of its form of institutionalized injustice. Two of his most recent plays tackle this problem through the distanced perspective of women on martial history. In one sense, both The Woman and Summer refract the cause of revolutionary socialism through the metaphor of feminist psychology. His women battle to overcome the sense of inferiority, humiliation and degradation. In the process Bond shows how character is distorted by a mind rigidified by its environment. His new women stand as a paradigm for all the oppressed, but, in turn, suggest the possibility of a humanization of culture and political change.

One criticism of Bond's work is that he programmatically covers all the bases as far as oppression is concerned--the working classes, women, and blacks--in addition to the one play (Stone) written for "Gay Sweatshop." One may question whether he is able to do equal justice to all these causes. Further, there is the danger that the abstraction, "the oppressed," will obliterate the realistic presentation of the individuals concerned. A second criticism is that his work is somewhat "unrelenting," a criticism in Beckett, for example, which is countered by Beckett's success with humour. Although Bond gives evidence of a devastating wit which combines something of Swiftian satire with the cool, pointed wit of Voltaire, too often the humour collapses into a morbid or heavily sardonic vein, or it is too savagely unbelievable in its own right to function as a politically effective distancing weapon.

On the other hand, one is continually excited by Bond's range of technical inventiveness. In retrospect, one may discern a pattern of distancing whereby Bond tends to experiment with a particular form,

often with pairs of plays (two naturalistic plays, two oriental plays, two tragi-comedies, two historical epics based on the same issue, two counter-text works, two historical plays with female protagonists), before exhausting it and moving on.

One might note at this point certain indications that Bond may be moving towards a science-fictional mode. Darko Suvin calls the characteristic distancing device in science-fiction "cognitive-estrangement."¹ Science-fiction would be an appropriate form for the kind of truths that Bond seeks to convey. Firstly, by virtue of the intellectual rigour and attitudinal premise attendant upon its creative impulse, it would serve to contain the horror of Bond's shock effects. Secondly, it is a form which would allow Bond to ground events in empirical reality, and at the same time give him free rein to encompass not only a refracted view of the bleak present, but a future glance at alternative worlds. A new locus of thought was glimpsed on Hecuba's island, and further articulated in Marthe's (and henceforth Ann's) new island setting. Elements of science-fiction feature explicitly in Bond's most recent short works-- Derek, and Choruses from After The Assassinations (1983). In Derek, a desperate working-class man is tricked into selling his brain to an aristocrat deemed too stupid by the new town council to carry on the family tradition of local MP. In Bondian fashion, harsh ironies complicate the grotesque farce, whilst songs project an alternative consciousness. In the second play, the time is 2030. The "choruses" are really speeches spoken by individual characters ("The Munitions Worker Encourages his Child to Sing;" "The Teacher;" "Their Time to Fall;"), and read as episodic fragments of one continuous poem of history. Bond has chosen to call them choruses

"because of the reflective attitude [he hopes] they would encourage in an audience."² Short works are, for Bond, a means of 'sharpening the pencil'. One may anticipate then, with considerable interest, a forthcoming full-scale science-fiction drama:

Bond's "cold hands" may alienate some but others are energized by his work. His voice is an urgent one intent upon shaking the foundations of the golden and concrete towers which rule the skies and rob human kind of its rightful dignity, freedom, and the creative, rational impulse for change.

Conclusion Endnotes

¹ Darko Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Suvin (drawing on Brecht) characterizes science-fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is the imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (pp. 7-8).

² Edward Bond, "Author's Note," "Derek," and "Choruses from After the Assassinations" (London: Methuen New Theatrescript, 1983), p. 30.

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