EDWARD BOND

LETTERS

III

SELECTED AND EDITED BY

IAN STUART

EDWARD BOND

LETTERS

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LETTERS

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Selected and edited
by
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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Contemporary Theatre Studies is a book series of special interest to everyone involved in theatre. It consists of monographs on influential figures, studies of movements and ideas in theatre, as well as primary material consisting of theatre-related documents, performing editions of plays in English, and English translations of plays from various vital theatre traditions worldwide.

Franc Chamberlain

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PREFACE

Edward Bond Letters I features Edward Bond's approach to acting and directing, his translation of these philosophies onto the stage with TEs (Theatre Events), and his response to productions of his work. *Edward Bond Letters II* focuses on seven specific plays by Edward Bond — *The Worlds, Summer, Human Cannon, War Plays, Restoration, Jackets,* and *Olly's Prison. Edward Bond Letters III,* demonstrates the difficulties Bond has had with our present leading theatre institutions and with the approach of television companies, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation. As the letters indicate, perhaps Bond's difficulties with established theatres are inevitable, as the plays he writes are uncompromising about our social situation. His letters are also valuable documents which explore issues connected with the present political climate.

Many writers submit plays to Edward Bond asking for his comments. Often his response is not simply confined to their work but enriches our own understanding of Bond's outlook on society. Some of these letters comprise the first chapter which is dedicated to a selection of correspondence that uses other writers' texts as the basis for exploring Bond's own views. Letters to Terry Hands (4 December 1986) and Cicely Berry (24 October 1987) of the Royal Shakespeare Company discuss Bond's own situation as a writer.

The complexities of translating Bond's *War Plays, Jackets, In the Company of Men,* as well as the short play *Derek,* into French and German are to be found in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three provides a general selection of letters dealing with matters such as the reluctance Bond has to having his plays produced by leading national theatre companies (David Thacker, 4 March 1994) as well as two very important letters (K. Ingold and Kate Macbeth, both dated 24 October 1993) which concentrate on the child's imagination — an area to be studied extensively in *Edward Bond Letters IV* — and institutional violence. Edward Bond's writings on the child's imagination are also found in "Notes on Post-Modernism" (*Two Post-Modern Plays,* London: Methuen, 1990), "The Dramatic Child" (*Tuesday,* London: Methuen, 1993) and "Notes on Imagination" (*Coffee,* London: Methuen, 1995).

The Royal Court Theatre's revivals of *The Pope's Wedding* and *Saved*, directed by Max Stafford-Clark and Danny Boyle respectively in 1984, and Nick Philippou's 1993 production of *The Pope's Wedding* at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, are the subjects covered in the selection of letters in Chapter Four. Edward Bond did not like the Royal Court revivals of *The Pope's Wedding* and *Saved* and in a letter to the directors as well as to critics (such as Jenny Sue Spencer) Bond explains his reasons, in addition to discussing the need for an arena to explore the new approach to character that he is creating.

The Fool, directed by Penny Gold, was broadcast on BBC Radio in 1990. Whilst most of Bond's letters in Chapter Five refer specifically to this production, Bond's letters to Robin Tebutt (23 May 1986) and Richard Hand (3 July 1988) answer specific questions about the fight scene in Hyde Park and John Clare's laughter in the cell.

Chapter Six deals exclusively with Edward Bond's 1990 play *In the Company of Men*, staged by Alain Françon, in an award-winning 1992 production for the Centre Dramatique National de Savoie.[1] Through his concept of the Central Speech (CS) and Central Line (CL), Bond explains to Françon, widely recognized as the best director of his plays abroad, how all his writing exhibits this structure: "it is as if the play unpacked the centre; so the actor will use all his skills and creative imagination to show the effects that understanding or misunderstanding the centre has on people and society."

The television plays — *Olly's Prison* and *Tuesday* — are the subject of the final chapter. Along with Bond's frustrations caused by working within a structure such as the BBC, the letters in this section feature correspondence with Georges Bas (26 March 1993), currently editing a complete edition of Bond's plays in French, which identifies "the arbitration between the imagination and the 'real' in plays such as *Jackets* and *Tuesday*."

In addition to providing the general reader and more specialized student with an insight into the work and minds of a writer increasingly recognized as Britain's most challenging and important living dramatist, *Edward Bond Letters III* provides the actor and director with useful ways in which they can address the new forms of play that Bond is now writing.

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[1] Edward Bond directed the first English production of *In the Company of Men* in 1996 for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

A word about punctuation: Edward Bond has his own unique style of punctuation which I have tried to preserve. I have chosen not to provide a commentary on the letters, the intention being to allow the letters to speak for themselves. However, I have provided footnotes which will refer the reader to published texts and which will I hope clarify references.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Edward Bond and Elisabeth Bond-Pablé for granting me permission to publish these letters and for correcting my typographical errors. My thanks to Tom Erhardt of Casarotto Ramsay Limited for his help. The School of Theatre at the University of Southern California has continued its generosity in providing research assistance. My gratitude to Robert R. Scales, Dean, and Suzanne Helen Kim. I have also received excellent publication advice from the staff of Gordon and Breach. Finally, I would like to express appreciation to my parents who have followed my work with enthusiasm.

Ian Stuart
Los Angeles, California
August, 1996

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LIST OF PRINCIPAL CORRESPONDENTS

Bill Alexander, director
Georges Bas, professor (retired), Sorbonne University, Paris and the editor of the French editions of Edward Bond's writings.
Cicely Berry, Director of Voice, Royal Shakespeare Company
Danny Boyle, a director of *Saved*, 1984/5
John Clemo, writer
Maria Corcobado, director
David Davis, teacher
Hans-Jürgen Drescher, Head of Theatre, Suhrkamp Verlag
Dic Edwards, playwright
Alain Françon, director
Cassandra Fusco, teacher
Penny Gold, a director of *The Fool*, BBC Radio, 1990
Terry Hands, a former artistic director, Royal Shakespeare Company
Hanny van der Harst, student
Mats Holmberg, translator
Jane Howell, director
Garry Hynes, Druid Theatre Company
K. Ingold, student
Hartwig Lahrmann, translator
Kate Macbeth, student
Mr. McCarthy, teacher
Sharon Miller, co-director of *Tuesday*, BBC Television 1993
Jim Mulligan, writer
Nick Philippou, director
Rudolf Rach, publisher
Margaret Ramsay, literary agent
Roland Rees, Foco Novo
David Spencer, playwright
Jenny Sue Spencer, professor, University of Massachusetts

Max Stafford-Clark, a director of *The Pope's Wedding* and former artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre
Robin Tebbutt, a director of *The Fool*
David Thacker, director
Loretta Vishomirskis, teacher
Rainer Weiss, former Head of Theatre, Suhrkamp Verlag
Katharine Worth, professor

1

WRITING

Geoff Gillham
Canton, Cardiff

5 December 1985

Dear Geoff,

I see Pinter's discovered politics. His anti-torture play is an insult.[1] It says: torture is nasty. It doesnt say why people torture other people — what the biological, social and political causes are. The implication, given the weight of public prejudice, will be that his torturers are left-wing — though he'd claim they were Turkish, I suppose. Well, they're as good as wops. And if its the yanks, its because they dont have the benefit of our traditions ...

My difficulty isnt not knowing what to write. I've never felt more capable of writing or attracted to so many themes. The difficulty is finding the circumstances in which I can work fully. I write directly agitprop plays — but I also need to write more complex plays, to do really with the way consciousness is created and the way in which we experience ourselves. These are usually regarded as subjective matters. Yet they are the way everyone experiences themselves and if you dont contact that self-experiencing area then there are matters that you cant deal with. But the human subjectivity is intensely political — you dont have to deny it, you have to understand it and understand its malleability. It seems to me that Marxism, because it is a complete philosophy, opens up again the whole of human experience to aesthetics, creative reinterpretation — in a way which just wasnt possible for most writers in the last century, no matter how much they wished to create a socialist art (think of William Morris' utopia, so far away from the life-giving cities of his time).

I didnt work very closely on the dance piece — in fact I didnt go to any rehearsals and I havent seen any performances (not even a

[1] *One for the Road* by Harold Pinter. (New York: Grove Press, 1986).

dress rehearsal).[2] Anna Furse thought the script didnt deal with the subject of the play/dance from a feminist point of view. Well, she was right — I wouldnt have tried to do that because Im not qualified to. But I did try to write directly for young people of both sexes who were going into a militarised and grab-all society. However, I was more than happy to respect her interests — feminism is certainly in the political forefront. So I said she could do what she wished with the text, and I'd be at hand to make whatever alterations she'd ask for and would write poems and pieces for the "support file." I very much enjoyed the idea of handing over my contribution to others provided they are competent. Unfortunately it didnt completely work out and the performers refused to work with her towards the end. She left — and I refused to step in. It was too late, and better to leave it to those who were already involved. So Lesley took over.[3] I think its going okay — though I dont know how clear it is. If you write to her for the bits and pieces, I suppose she'd send you a copy.

Im going to Australia to look after sheep. The theatre is falling deeper and deeper into reaction. The young (younger of the) actors I wanted to work with at the RSC were frighteningly unaware of the possibilities of their craft, the young director who did *Saved* at the Court early in the year didnt know how plays worked (though he and Max Stafford-Clark actually pull pieces of writing to bits — and do the same to their writers — claiming to teach writing!) and the NT having tried to make cement out of porridge (Ayckbourn) is now making cement out of vapour (Shaffer).[4] I shall look after sheep. In Australia, as they wont have me in Wales, it seems. If I can help your Welsh group at all, they should let me know. But Im keeping a low-profile — at the moment — Im not up to facing the Jones's of this world.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Bond

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[2]Bond wrote *Burns* for the New Midlands Dance Company in 1985.
[3]Lesley Hutchinson, artistic director, New Midlands Dance Company.
[4]Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval* opened in the Lyttelton, National Theatre, 1 August, 1985. *Yonadab*, by Peter Shaffer, opened in the Olivier, National Theatre, 4 December, 1985.

Sharon Cooper
No address

4 March 1986

Dear Ms. Sharon Cooper,

My first views about Brecht were based largely on misinformation. Few of his works were translated or available. I was reacting to opinions of those who had a chance to be informed — they knew German — but were politically unable to understand Brecht. They seemed to be saying that Brecht discounted the importance — both as legitimate private experience and as an historical force — of human subjectivity. Actually, this idea is neither Marxist nor Brechtian — Brecht does not reduce people to an abstract objective force any more than Marx does. This idea frequently causes mistaken criticism: why is *Capital* written in a tone of high moral rage if historical forces are objective — why not merely point to the statistics and sums, the mathematics of history; if inevitable historical change must occur independently of human will and human subjective experience in general? And what would be the place of art in such abstractions? Well, I thought that Brecht was reducing people to historical abstractions — and I was mistaken in this. Hence my early criticisms of Brecht.

In fact history moves through human subjectivity and its objective forces have to be conveyed in subjective forms: we live and create our contemporary history — it isnt something that is "done to us." Objective forces in history create subjective forms, and these have their own existential values. This would be true even if they werent historically determining — but I think they are. In other words, if history moved independently of our will we would still have to suffer or enjoy the consequences of its actions — so there would be sense in trying to understand the patterns of history in order to accommodate ourselves to them in less painful and tragic ways than often our forebears were able to do. But in fact human subjectivity is far more significant than this: it is incorporated into the determining forces of history, not as an independent will, an arbitrary force (which would mean that a historical class could "commandeer" historical change and impose its own politics on eternity!) but nevertheless as a genuine free will, since human beings can make their own situations within history: if you inherit a fortune, or are imperilled in a shipwreck, you cant raise the sunken ship and sail on as before, or bring back the

dead and ask for the will to be changed — but you will individually have to experience and take part in your changed situation. Actually, the idea of shipwreck is a poetic licence! — because history isnt isolated events whose consequences we have to bear or utilise — it is a continuous process and makes no distinction (formally) between shipwreck and shipbuilding. So our actions do actually help to determine history: we build and sink ships. That is why we have art, to understand ourselves as shipmakers and shipwreckers, as agents of history: we are creators, who make plans and maps of our activities, but we also need plans and maps of ourselves so that we understand ourselves and the consequence of our actions. In this way human subjectivity is deeply political, since subjectivity is the way we participate in history — which we do as inevitably as a fish swims in water. And so if our subjectivity is our relationship to history, our subjectivity has a political form — it is created and expresses itself through political gestures. So, curiously, Brecht gives a new importance and value to human individuality. Had I at first understood that I wouldnt have made my early criticisms of Brecht — I would have seen that he was doing what art should do, or — *in fact* — *is*. In a sense human beings must always tend to lie to themselves, just as a child cannot know very much about its world — it thinks it ends at the front door and its parents are gods. Human subjectivity seems mysterious to itself and hidden to itself. I neednt describe the ways that this is so. The bourgeois ethic is that by the individual revealing to himself or herself his or her "self-secrets," understanding is achieved. This is because, religiously, subjectivity is seen as a relationship with god (not history) or, post-religiously, as a stoic or hedonistic relationship with a class of property or state etc. Actually our only common humanity lies in our shared participation in history. This refocuses morality because moral judgements have to be made in relation to the conflicts within history — and of course our roles within history often conflict: so to make moral, as well as artistic judgements, you need a philosophy of history: mine is Marxist (not, say, religious) and so I make judgements in terms of historical patterns. This doesnt mean that I incorporated into those judgements naive notions of right and wrong, by choosing a different set of heroes and heroines and villains than a religious or bourgeois person. I always attempt to see people in their best light and this is how I portray them — and the result is what you'd expect. Im accused of the opposite — of only describing people from my point of view! I dont think you can judge according to eternal verities — I judge more according to the scales of the marketplace, but I see in

them the humane tendency of our earthly life — I dont need a heaven to create human value.

It seems to me that bourgeois art has become lies because it denies the real substance of subjective experience — and so its subject becomes either neurotic or fantastical. But a Marxist art would be able to create subjective reality — and the forms that this would take have to be sought for. Aesthetic forms actually become part of the substance which they explore — which is an oddity about human beings. An age sees itself in a particular way. In our time that way of seeing could be purely mechanical, a result of technological skilfulness — but it wouldnt then include any humane judgement or general existential expression (each individual would experience their own life in isolation). I think its important to understand that there arent any "raw" objective experiences. We think of emotions such as hunger and eroticism as being "natural", but as they are given historical expressions, the form of these expressions must become part of the content. Its true that all societies eat — but this fact produces very different sorts of behaviour. All we retain permanently as a species is the form and not the content. The specific content is always an historical product: the necessity to eat is the form, but appetite is historical — not universal! You can think about the implications that this has for Brechtianism as its generally understood. It means that the highest moral and aesthetic insights in our age can only be expressed from the working-class point of view: indeed that's what morality now is, that point of view — because the working class has now become the guardian of the whole of humane expression — outside this there is only the ghetto, the gas chamber, the asylum and the nuclear silo.

I could add a final word about alienation — which has been reduced almost to a stylistic tic. Perhaps Brecht did tend to believe in a sort of 18th century human enlightenness: that if people discounted their passions they could think objectively and "coolly" — scientifically. But in fact scientific thought is based on theory (this doesnt mean that some theories — Marxism for example — cant be substantiated). So to objective thought there is an appropriate emotional persuasion. Involved in a time of fanaticism Brecht wanted to encourage "cool" thought. But his enemy Schiller also wanted a dispassionate art — the classical withdrawn idealism of (it was wrongly thought) the Greeks. So there is a tension in Brecht about this. His Diderot-ism is misleading. Diderot wanted the stage to be dark, aesthetically he was a romantic — a true bourgeois. Mother Courage has particular "things", "objects" — these arent generalisations. The generalisations