

EDWARD BOND'S THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE :
ITS DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO A BRECHTIAN STANDARD.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is primarily concerned with Edward Bond's attempt to use the theatre to change society. Bertolt Brecht attempted to use the theatre in the same way and, indeed, to many observers, Bond's work appears to resemble that of Brecht. Therefore as a critical device to understand Bond better, Brecht, with the qualifications outlined in the introduction, is set up as a kind of standard against which Bond's development can be measured.

In attempting to use the theatre to change society, Brecht and Bond are obliged to write plays which achieve at least three basic theatrical goals. First, the plays must engage the spectator. To do this, Brecht and Bond rely on techniques familiar to all playwrights. Thus the plays have characters with whom the spectator can feel empathy, a growing sense of aesthetic wholeness, and a wide range of sensuous stimulation. In engaging the spectator, however, Brecht and Bond are always aware that engagement itself is not an end. It is a means of getting the spectator's attention in order to guide him towards something more. All of this material constitutes chapter one.

Chapter two concentrates on the second theatrical goal. The plays must expose the fundamental problem of society in such a way as to convince the spectator that social change is necessary and possible. Brecht and Bond agree on the fundamental problem of society : it is the class structure.

Their plays are intended as a accurate characterization of society, stressing both its evilness and its changeability.

The third chapter, and the most important in an appreciation of Brecht and Bond, deals with the third goal. The plays must provide behavioural models the spectator can use in working for social change. Brecht and Bond work with "attitude models" and "action models". The proper functioning of the attitude model results in the ideal response both playwrights want: Brecht calls his a critical attitude, Bond, a rational understanding. This response begins to develop in the theatre and is expected to carry over into the life situation when the performance is over. Action models are intended to influence the spectator's life behaviour more directly, providing him with actual models he can imitate or reject. Both Brecht and Bond try to encourage the transfer of these models from the theatre to the life situation by considerably modifying the conventional resolution.

In the conclusion the influence of Brecht and Bond on the development of dramatic literature and the theatre is discussed. Finally, some effort is made to evaluate the success of their attempt to use the theatre to change society.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the dramatic theories and some of the main dramatic techniques of Edward Bond. In order, however, to avoid the vagaries that can occur when a new playwright is examined in a vacuum, some sort of control or standard of measurement is needed.

To many observers Bond's work appears in some important ways to resemble that of Bertolt Brecht in his four great plays - Mother Courage and Her Children, The Good Woman of Setzuan, The Life of Galileo and The Caucasian Chalk Circle. For this reason, I decided to make these plays and Brecht's dramatic theories which relate to them my standard of measurement. I am aware that such a restriction hardly does justice to the exciting, evolving complexity that is Brecht. Since my primary interest is in Bond's work, however, I have had to simplify and exploit Brecht, as it were, to gain a better understanding of Bond.

The specific aspect of their work I wish to examine is best expressed in comments made by each of the playwrights. Brecht, near the end of his life, summed up the primary purpose of his career : "I wanted to take the principle that it was not just a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it and apply that to the theatre." ¹ Bond, in the preface to his play The Bundle, explains his purpose in working for the theatre: "... theatre can co-operate

with all those who are in any way involved in rationally changing society and evolving a new consciousness."² This common aim is my subject and is what leads me to call the particular kind of theatre Brecht and Bond envisage and work toward a theatre for social change.

In attempting to use the theatre as an instrument for social change, Brecht and Bond are obliged to write plays which achieve at least three basic theatrical goals. First, the plays must engage the spectator, get his attention, prepare him for more than the usual kind of theatre experience. Second, they must expose the fundamental problem of society in such a way as to convince the spectator that social change is necessary and possible. Third, they must provide the spectator with behavioural models useful to him in changing society. Accordingly, this thesis is organized into three chapters, each chapter concentrating on how Brecht and Bond try to achieve one of the goals. It is important to note that some of the techniques which are analyzed simultaneously achieve more than one goal. When this occurs I have arbitrarily assigned the analysis of that technique to the chapter where it seems to contribute most significantly.

¹ John Willett, ed. and trans., Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic (New York : Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 89.

² Edward Bond, The Bundle or New Narrow Road to the Deep North (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1978), p. xiii.

CHAPTER 1

ENGAGING THE SPECTATOR

All playwrights must engage the spectator and the techniques they use to do this are basically the same. There is, however, a difference in the purpose various playwrights want this engagement to serve. For some, engagement itself is the only purpose. For others, like Brecht and Bond, engagement is a means to an end, a way of getting the spectator's attention in order to guide him towards something more.

(i) empathy.

One of the oldest rules of the theatre is that the playwright create characters with whom the spectator can identify, with whom he can feel empathy. To the young Brecht, however, a theatre experience which allowed the spectator only to empathize was "an enervating, because unproductive, act of enjoyment." ¹ Consequently, Brecht attempted to reduce empathic responses with techniques designed to encourage the spectator's reason. Indeed, it seemed at first he intended to eliminate empathy completely. His remarks on the topic were strident and without compromise:

Nowadays the play's meaning is usually blurred by the fact that the actor plays to the audience's hearts. The figures portrayed are foisted on the audience and are falsified in the process. Contrary to present custom they ought to be presented quite coldly, classically and objectively. For they are not matter for empathy; they are there to be understood. ²

Over the years, however, Brecht gradually modified his earlier position, eventually agreeing that empathy was a necessary and

acceptable practice for both actors and spectator. In an appendix to the Short Organum he explained:

The contradiction between acting (demonstration) and experience (empathy) often leads the uninstructed to suppose that only one or the other can be manifest in the work of the actor ... In reality it is a matter of two mutually hostile processes which fuse in the actor's work ... ³

Similarly in a footnote to the Mother Courage Model he commented favourably, but with a significant qualification, on the spectator's empathy with Kattrin during the drum scene:

Members of the audience may identify themselves with dumb Kattrin in this scene; they may get into her skin by empathy and enjoy feeling that they themselves have the same latent strength. But they will not have experienced empathy throughout the whole play, hardly in the opening scenes for instance.⁴

There is no doubt Brecht's characters can arouse empathy. Eric Bentley has described Kattrin's death as "the most moving scene in twentieth-century drama."⁵ Still, Brecht believed that creating such characters was only part of his job. In his notes on Erwin Strittmatter's play, Kratzgraben, he discussed the idea of a positive hero and the proper way for empathy to develop in relation to him:

Empathy alone may stimulate a wish to imitate the hero, but it can hardly create the capacity. If a feeling is to be an effective one, it must be acquired not merely impulsively but through the understanding. Before a correct attitude can be imitated it must first have been understood that the principle is applicable to situations that are not exactly like those portrayed. It is the theatre's job to present the hero in such a way that he stimulates conscious rather than blind imitation.⁶

Brecht's awareness of empathy as a means rather than an end

is clear.

Bond tends to use a positive hero in his plays and, like Brecht, wants to stimulate "conscious rather than blind imitation." Therefore he carefully shapes and guides the development of empathy towards this end.

In order to block immediate, unthinking empathy, Bond usually attempts to make the initial appearance of the hero decidedly flat. Other characters may even overshadow him. Often the hero seems ineffectual, worn out, or inexplicably preoccupied. Gradually, however, he begins to reveal something of the special quality common to all Bond's heroes: the "restless curiosity".⁷ Such curiosity, as Bond states, "may seem a minor thing, but it amounts to the search for truth ..." - a traditional quest which firmly establishes the hero as a good man and, further, imbues him with romantic connotations. Nevertheless, the stage activity of the hero remains essentially unattractive. As the horrors of society become more obvious to him, he becomes increasingly distracted and withdrawn. He is tormented by the suffering around him, he broods, sometimes he is driven mad. Thus Arthur in Early Morning talks to Len's corpse:

... Sh, I gave it {George's foot} to a dog. I woke up and this brute was slinking off with its tail down and its ears back and his foot in its mouth. I threw a stone and it dropped it ... Then I thought no. So I called it back and gave it to him. 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 go near rivers when the bridges are burned. They look like the bones of charred hippopotamuses. I don't like maimed cows, dead horses, and wounded sheep. I'm limited. ...⁹

Lear stares into a mirror and then cries to the assembled court:

... Who shut that animal in that cage? Let it out. Have you seen its face behind the bars? There's a poor animal with blood on its head and tears running down its face. Who did that to it? Is it a bird or a horse? It's lying in the dust and its wings are broken. Who broke its wings? Who cut off its hands so that it can't shake the bars? It's pressing its snout on the glass. Who shut that animal in a glass cage? O God, there's no pity in this world. You let it lick the blood from its hair in the corner of a cage with nowhere to hide from its tormentors. No shadow, no hole! Let that animal out of its cage! ...¹⁰

Wang holding the child he has just bought asks:

How many babies are left to die by the river? How many? For how many centuries? Left! - Rot! Eaten! Drowned! Sold! All waste! How many? Till when? All men are torn from their mother's womb: that is the law of nature. All men are torn from their mother's arms: that is the law of men! Is this all? - one little gush of sweetness and I pick up a child? Who picks up the rest? How can I hold my arms wide enough to hold them all? Feed them? Care for them? All of them? Must the whole world lie by this river like a corpse? ...¹¹

Ultimately all Bond's heroes, with the exception of Scopey in The Pope's Wedding and Len in Saved, discover the same truth: the highest good is social justice. Moreover, the moment a Bond hero commits himself to social action in order to attain social justice, Bond allows him his most attractive activities. For example, Arthur in Early Morning is given a tender love scene, a Last Supper and a resurrection. Lear becomes a recognized folk hero who preaches parables to crowds of strangers. Willy in The Sea wins the love of Rose and the approval of Evens, the raisonneur of the play. It would seem

from this point on Bond wants the most intense empathy and, considering the careful preparation, it is quite probable the empathy will be conscious rather than blind.

To some extent Wang in The Bundle is an exception to the usual Bond pattern. Here, even after Wang begins to work for social change, some of his actions are unattractive. In fact, Wang is responsible for a number of atrocities such as drowning a baby and standing by while his father, the old ferryman, is tortured and killed. To empathize with Wang, the spectator must accept these atrocities. To accept these, however, the spectator is forced to a new understanding of moral behaviour. Bond admits the lesson is not an easy one:

It is a hard lesson but we need to learn that moral behaviour depends more on social practice than individual action. In a society structurally unjust - as is ours - good deeds may in the end only support injustice. ¹²

Perhaps this is why Wang is Bond's most positive hero to date.

(ii) organic wholeness

During the performance of a play the spectator gets aesthetic pleasure from perceiving the overall movement of the dramatic action towards wholeness. He gets it too from being able to relate a multiplicity of seemingly separate factors to each other. Playwrights can increase these aesthetic pleasures and the engagement they imply by using a variety of unifying techniques.

Much has been written about Brecht's and Bond's episodic plot structure. This characteristic of their work is

important and will be discussed in a later section. At this point, however, it is also important to realize that their plays are more than a "revue-like sequence of sketches." ¹³

Brecht acknowledged that his organic plot structure was largely the result of emphasizing the story.

Everything hangs on the 'story'; it is the heart of the theatrical performance. ... {it} is the theatre's great operation, the complete fitting together of all the gestic incidents, embracing the communications and impulses that must now go to make up the audience's entertainment. ¹⁴

But Brecht also used other unifying techniques. Besides the strong central characters, he developed a rich connecting symbolism¹⁵ and a whole series of internal rhythms such as occur when fast moving scenes are followed by more static ones,¹⁶ humour is juxtaposed with pathos, or language forms - dramatic poetry, more lyrical poetry, songs - are alternated with each other. In performance, unity was strengthened by techniques such as the evolving colour scheme in Galileo or the continuous presence of a dominating prop like Mother Courage's wagon. Even sound effects could provide a connection - Kattrin appears playing a harmonica and dies beating a drum.

In fact, Brecht's plot structure is a balance of two contradictory principles of construction: one stresses the episodic plot; the other stresses the organic plot. The result is a dialectical structure, a phenomenon which is not new.

Bernard Beckerman observes it in Shakespeare:

In the advancement of the classical drama, all the scenes are integrated into a single line of action. In the progression of the Shakespearean play, scenes may be regarded as clust-

ering around the storyline. If this suggests an image of a grapevine, perhaps it is apt, for the scenes often appear to be hanging from a thread of narrative. ¹⁷

Brecht himself recognized and used the dialectics of the Elizabethan plot structure:

In primitive critiques it is often described as the picturebook technique. One picture appears after the other, without the plot being pulled together or the suspense being directed. Naturally this is a stupid lack of appreciation of the great dramaturgical constructs of our classical authors and the art of the Elizabethan playwrights. The plot (storyline) of these plays is rich, but the individual situations and incidents, as picturesque as they may be, are in no way simply loosely linked together, but each demands the other. Every scene, long or short, pushes the plot along. There is atmosphere in this, but it is not that of milieu; there is also suspense here, but it is not that of a cat and mouse game with the audience. ¹⁸

Bond's plot structure is a complication on Brecht's. It will be argued later that Bond's episodic structure is more multifaceted than episodic. Further, his organic structure results only in part from his emphasis on the story. Bond appreciates the organic quality of the story and claims the playwright

will still have to present the story coherently, just as the painter must achieve a likeness, because that represents the experience, the anecdotal autobiography the audience brings to the theatre. ... ¹⁹

However, Bond no longer trusts the ability of the spectator to interpret the meaning of a story correctly. Modern society has been too corrosive.

Stories cannot present their own interpretation, can no longer teach us how they should be

understood. The dramatist cannot confront the audience with truth by telling a story. The interpretation is counterfeited by society.²⁰

Therefore Bond undertakes to dramatize the analysis²¹ of the story.

Dramatizing the analysis, of course, involves its own unifying techniques. Bond describes his as embodying "cause and effect in a coherent way"²² - not to be confused with the cause and effect construction of the story in a well-made play. Bond's cause and effect is thematic. Occasionally the thematic unity intrudes on the story unity but Bond seems remarkably successful at balancing the two. Thus he writes of The Bundle:

The play is not best understood as a story of hero Wang but as a demonstration of how the words 'good' and 'bad', and moral concepts in general, work in society and how they ought to work if men are to live rationally with their technology, with nature and with one another.²³

(iii) sensuous stimulation

Another means of engaging the spectator in the theatre is to provide a wide range of sensuous stimulation. Consequently, playwrights make use of a number of techniques which are specifically designed to please or pain the spectator's senses.

Brecht's approach, especially in his later work, was to use techniques which tended to please the senses. At the beginning of the Short Organum he wrote that the theatre would "run the risk of being debased ... if it failed to make its moral lesson enjoyable, and enjoyable to the senses at that."²⁴

To increase visual pleasure, Brecht invited stage

designers, mask-makers, costumiers and choreographers to "unite their various arts for the joint operation ... to entertain the children of the scientific age, and to do so with sensuousness and humour."²⁵ Science was brought into the theatre "not to make it 'scientific' but in order to provide new theatrical pleasures for man"²⁶ - pleasures like the demonstration of the Ptolemaic model in Galileo or the use of the revolving stage in Mother Courage and The Caucasian Chalk Circle. Props were carefully built to show the beauty of usage. Some of Brecht's favourites were

The copper vessels with the bumps and dented edges,
The knives and forks whose wooden handles are
Worn down by many hands ...²⁷

Colour was an important aspect of a Brecht production, frequently suggesting the palette of the Elder Breughel. For Galileo,

Each scene had to have its basic tone: the first, e.g., a delicate morning one of white, yellow and gray ... The silver and pearl-gray of the fourth (court) scene led into a nocturne in brown and black ... then on to the seventh, the cardinals' ball with the delicate and fantastic individual masks ... moving about the cardinals' crimson figures ... Then came the descent into dull and somber colors ...²⁸

Unique gestures were encouraged and praised by Brecht.

In one of the later performances {of Mother Courage} Weigel, when starting off again, tossed her head and shook it like a tired draft horse getting back to work. It is doubtful whether this gesture can be imitated.²⁹

For auditory pleasure Brecht included music in his productions. Some of the songs were especially appealing: John Feugi comments on the "bitter yet achingly lovely "Song

of St. Nevercome's Day'"³⁰ and the "moving song" in Mother Courage which "formally opens, links, and closes the play."³¹ Brecht's dialogue was constructed with the sound of its delivery always in mind.³² As Martin Esslin claims, "Brecht was a poet, first and foremost."³³ His dramatic poetry had no rhyme or regular rhythm but it did maintain an irregular rhythm.³⁴ Sometimes it even moved into the purely lyrical as when Grusha pledges her love to Simon:

Simon Shashava, I shall wait for you.
 Go calmly into battle, soldier
 The bloody battle, the bitter battle
 From which not everyone returns:
 When you return I shall be there.
 I shall be waiting for you under the green elm
 I shall be waiting for you under the bare elm
 I shall wait until the last soldier has returned
 And longer.
 When you come back from the battle
 No boots will stand at my door
 The pillow beside mine will be empty
 And my mouth will be unknissed
 When you return, when you return
 You will be able to say: It is just as it was.³⁵

In 1952 one of Brecht's co-workers concluded - "On Brecht's stage everything must be beautiful." The remark is an appropriate summary of Brecht's stated intention of making the theatre "enjoyable to the senses."³⁶

Bond's approach in attempting to stimulate the spectator's senses is to use both pleasure and pain inducing techniques. His purpose is to present the spectator with things that he "would normally run from in fear, turn from in embarrassment, prevent in anger, or pass by because they are hidden."³⁷

A Bond play in production often appears visually cold.

Director William Gaskill observes:

Bond has an extraordinary visual sense. When you actually put on the stage the things that he has said you must do in the stage directions you do get fantastic pictures. Jack Shepherd once said about Early Morning that it was pure Magritte (the Magritte exhibition was on at that time); and 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.³⁸

The predominate colour on stage is usually grey - the grey cyclorama in Lear, the canvas snowfield in Bingo, the numerous characters who end up wrapped in white sheets. Occasionally, however, Bond permits an explosion of vivid colour. A good example of this occurs in The Sea when Hatch, the draper, madly cuts up yards and yards of blue velvet cloth. While Bond's sets tend to be rudimentary, the objects on stage are always very real. This mode of staging is established in the preface to his first play, The Pope's Wedding:

In these sixteen scenes the stage is dark and bare to the wings and the back. Places are indicated by a few objects and these objects are described in the text. The objects are very real, but there must be no attempt to create the illusion of a 'real scene'.³⁹

Seeing the violence of a Bond play can be physically upsetting. During Saved, Penelope Gilliatt, a favourable critic, reported, "I spent a lot of the first act shaking with claustrophobia and thinking I was going to be sick."⁴⁰ Yet there are moments in Bond's plays which are almost idyllic: the carpenter giving Cordelia the cradle in Lear, Joan and Jerome sharing a picnic lunch in Bingo, John and Mary meeting in the

woods for the first time in The Fool. Indeed these moments often seem more profound just because they arise out of what is sensuously tormenting.

Sound is used at times to shattering effect. A baby cries incessantly through an entire scene in Saved. Pig squeals reinforce the visual horror of the Gravedigger's Boy's death in Lear. Continual laughter which finally "becomes hysterical - like sobbing"⁴¹ lasts through most of the prison scene in The Fool. But sound is also used to create some of Bond's most enjoyable effects. Esslin claims that Bond also is a poet having "the glorious power, conciseness, pith, and poetic impact ... {which} is the first hallmark of quality, the most infallible indicator of greatness in any art form employing the spoken word."⁴² Bond agrees that he writes poetry.

... I think my plays are poetry. You see this is what I dislike about the poetic drama that one gets nowadays; it's added something to prose. Poetry is what you have left when you take the prose away. Poetry is a simplified form of prose. And that's the other way round you see, because most people try to make their prose clever poetically, and I hate that.⁴³

His poetry, like Brecht's, has no rhyme and, as Harry Andrews discovered in learning his lines for the role of Lear, "no metre to help you along."⁴⁴ There is, however, a rhythm which Bond develops by skilfully using what in essence are Biblical constructions: "the juxtaposition of contrasted half-sentences, parallelism, repetition, and inversion."⁴⁵ This technique of Bond's is perhaps most obvious when he chooses to parody it, as

he does with the Son's sermon in Bingo, emphasizing the underlying rhythm with stage directions to the actor to rock slightly.

Rich thieves plunderin' the earth. Think on the poor trees an' grass an' beasts, all neglect an' stood in the absence a god. One year no harvest'll come, no seed'll grow in the plants, no green, no cattle yont leave their stall, stand huddled- to in the hovel, no hand'll turn water in their trough, the earth'll die an' be covered with scars : the mark a dust where a beast rot in the sand. Where there's no lord god there's a wilderness. ⁴⁶

Like Brecht, Bond periodically moves his dialogue into lyrical poetry. Lear, just before his death, is given these haunting lines:

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. ⁴⁷

Bond's use of dialect, a feature of all his plays, adds an important depth and fullness to his dialogue. Characters such as the Old Woman in Bingo gain a special dignity when they speak.

We had seven good year first off. Then the press men come t' church one Sunday mornin' an' hid back a the tomb stones. ... He were gone three year. Then two men bot him hwome. He'd bin hit top the yead with an axe. ... Now he hev the mind of a twelve year ol' an' the needs on a man. I'm mother an' wife to him. ... He's a boy that remember what's like t'be a man. He still hev a proper feelin' for his pride, that yont gone. Hard, that is - like bein' tied up to a clown. Some nights he come hwome an' cry all hours. I git on with my work now. You hear him all over the house. Every room. An' the garden. ⁴⁸

Bond's approach to the senses, his use of both pleasure and pain inducing techniques, demonstrates one of his beliefs about art: "Art is beautiful only in the broadest sense because it can include death and ugliness." ⁴⁹

Despite the innovations Brecht and Bond make in creating a theatre for social change, both playwrights continue to appreciate and observe many of the traditional rules of theatre. Brecht admitted all his changes were "within the framework of the theatre, so that of course a whole mass of old rules remained wholly unaltered." ⁵⁰ Bond, writing to Peter Holland, points out the need for "aggro-effects" or "positive V-effects" ⁵¹ - his new words for the old techniques theatre has always used to engage the spectator.

- ¹ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 89.
- ² Ibid., p. 15.
- ³ Ibid., pp. 277-8.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 221.
- ⁵ John Fuegi, The Essential Brecht (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1972), fig. 40.
- ⁶ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 247.
- ⁷ Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Edward Bond: A Companion to the Plays (London: TQ Publications, 1978), p. 43.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Edward Bond, Early Morning (London: Calder and Boyars Ltd., 1968), pp. 67-8.
- ¹⁰ Edward Bond, Lear (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1972), p. 35.
- ¹¹ Edward Bond, The Bundle, p. 29.
- ¹² Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 25.
- ¹³ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 46.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 200.
- ¹⁵ Fuegi, Essential Brecht, pp. 136-7.
- ¹⁶ F.N. Mennemeier, "Mother Courage and Her Children," in Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 148.
- ¹⁷ Bernard Beckerman, Shakespeare at the Globe: 1599-1609 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 46.
- ¹⁸ Fuegi, Essential Brecht, p. 23.
- ¹⁹ Bond, The Bundle, pp. xiv-xv.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. xv.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. xviii.

- ²² Ibid., p. xx.
- ²³ Ibid., p. xviii.
- ²⁴ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 180.
- ²⁵ Ibid., pp. 202-4.
- ²⁶ Herbert Witt, ed., Brecht As They Knew Him, trans. John Peet (New York: International Publishers, 1974), p. 240.
- ²⁷ Peter Holland, "Brecht, Bond, Gaskill and the Practice of Political Theatre." Theatre Quarterly 8 (January 1978): 26.
- ²⁸ Bertolt Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose. The Collected Plays, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim, vol. 5 (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1970), p. 235.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 377.
- ³⁰ Fuegi, Essential Brecht, p. 137.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 86.
- ³² Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 116.
- ³³ Martin Esslin, "Brecht's Language and Its Sources," in Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 171.
- ³⁴ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 120.
- ³⁵ Bertolt Parables for the Theatre: The Good Woman of Sezuán and The Caucasian Chalk Circle, revised English versions by Eric Bentley (Harmondsworth, Hiddlesex: Penquin Books Ltd., 1966), p. 133.
- ³⁶ Witt, ed., Brecht, p. 127.
- ³⁷ Bond, The Bundle, p. xiii.
- ³⁸ I. Wardle, "Interview with William Gaskill, "Gambit 17 (October 1970): 41.
- ³⁹ Edward Bond, The Pope's Wedding (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1971), introduction.
- ⁴⁰ Richard Scharine, The Plays of Edward Bond (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1976), p. 48.

- ⁴¹ Edward Bond, The Fool: Scenes of Bread and Love and We Come to the River (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1976), p. 34.
- ⁴² Martin Esslin, "Nor Yet a 'Fool' to Fame," Theatre Quarterly 6 (Spring 1976): p. 44.
- ⁴³ Edward Bond, "A Discussion with Edward Bond," Gambit 17 (October 1970): pp. 34-5.
- ⁴⁴ Gregory Dark, "Edward Bond's Lear at the Royal Court: a Production Casebook," Theatre Quarterly 2 (January 1972): p. 28.
- ⁴⁵ Esslin, "Brecht's Language," p. 173.
- ⁴⁶ Edward Bond, Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1974), p. 35.
- ⁴⁷ Bond, Lear, p. 86.
- ⁴⁸ Bond, Bingo, p. 11.
- ⁴⁹ Bond, The Fool, p. xvi.
- ⁵⁰ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 248.
- ⁵¹ Edward Bond, "On Brecht: a Letter to Peter Holland," Theatre Quarterly 8 (January 1978): p. 35.

CHAPTER 2

EXPOSING THE PROBLEM IN ORDER TO CONVINCE THE
SPECTATOR SOCIAL CHANGE IS NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE.

(i) the problem

Both Brecht and Bond dedicate their theatre for social change to the elimination of the same social problem: the class structure of society. More specifically they want to eliminate the exploitation inherent in that class structure and the subsequent loss of what Brecht calls human productivity¹ and Bond calls personal self-knowledge and self-consciousness.² Characters in their plays voice these sentiments repeatedly. Galileo in conversation with the Little Monk condemns a class society:

Why is the orderliness in this country merely the order of an empty cupboard, and the necessity merely that of working oneself to death? Among bursting vineyards, beside the ripening cornfields! ... Virtues are not linked with misery, my friend. If your people were prosperous and happy, they could develop the virtues derived of prosperity and happiness. But now these virtues come from exhausted men on exhausted acres, and I reject them. ...³

In Early Morning, Arthur, almost mad with despair, describes his society using a horrific metaphor:

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 dressings 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.⁴

One of the major concerns of Brecht and Bond is to find the most effective way of exposing this social problem to the spectator. From the early eighteenth century, drama began increasingly to concentrate on the individual and to view society from an individual's perspective. For a short time, this perspective remained broad enough to include a comprehensive overview of society. In Schiller's William Tell, for example, the individual as Romantic hero could survey the social scene from his mountain, descend to direct the movement for social reform and then return to his lofty retreat. Gradually, however, playwrights began to incorporate the Romantic hero into society. This process jeopardized the hero's comprehensive overview of society and further encouraged him to see his own social situation as a kind of fate, inescapable and unchangeable. Eventually all the hero was expected to do was suffer; he had become a helpless victim.

The idea of man as a helpless victim always angered Brecht. As late as 1955, in the essay Can the Present-day World be Reproduced by Means of Theatre? he wrote:

In an age whose science is in a position to change nature to such an extent as to make the world seem almost habitable, man can no longer describe man as a victim, the object of a fixed but unknown environment. It is scarcely possible to conceive of the laws of motion if one looks at them from a tennis ball point of view.⁵

Clearly in his theatre Brecht intended to focus on the "laws of motion" of society. To do this he was forced to give up the usual dramatic and theatrical focus on the individual.

Edward Bond is as insistent as Brecht on the need for a social focus. He explains why in a letter to Tony Coult:

... I feel I must deal with problems always more and more from a social point of view. The burdens of ego and introspection, which seem so overwhelming when you're twenty, are really aspects of social problems. Our most private experiences are intermingled with our social life - and in the end an individual can only resolve his own conflicts by helping to solve those of society. Human nature is an abstraction that has an existential reality only in a social context. It's only when an individual understands the nature of his society that he begins to understand himself and is able to make judgements about himself...⁶

(ii) the nature of society

What do Brecht and Bond mean by society? Brecht's definition is accurately summed up by his student, Werner Mittenzwei: "Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of the connections and relations in which these individuals stand to one another."⁷ Bond implies a similar definition in a verse from his poem, Culture:

No man eats sleeps or loves for himself alone
Harvest and dreams and teaching the young
Don't take place in a small room
But in the spaces of other men's lives⁸

Generally, then, when Brecht and Bond refer to society, they refer to the relationships between individuals. It is these relationships, the society itself, that they attempt to put

on stage.

This task is not an easy one. First it commits both playwrights to writing large scale plays. Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle has over one hundred parts. Bond's Lear has some eighty speaking parts - parts which include a king, other members of royalty, church, judiciary and military as well as various public officials, an engineer, craftsmen, farmers and labourers. Moreover, although Brecht and Bond sympathize with the working class, they agree it is essential to depict the members of the other classes without prejudice. Brecht stressed this point in his notes on Galileo:

For the theatre it is important to understand that this play must lose a great part of its effect if its performance is directed chiefly against the Catholic Church.

Of the dramatis personel, many wear the church's garb. Actors who, because of that, try to portray these characters as odious would be doing wrong. But neither, on the other hand, has the church the right to have the human weaknesses of its members glossed over. It has all too often encouraged these weaknesses and suppressed their exposure. But in this play there is also no question of the church being admonished ... the church functions, even when it opposes free investigation, simply as authority.⁹

Further evidence of Brecht's honesty is given in an anecdote which Martin Esslin recounts:

While rehearsing the play {The Life of Galileo} in East Germany shortly before he died, Brecht argued so passionately for getting his actors to put the Church's standpoint with such total conviction that he suddenly stopped himself and smilingly remarked: 'I seem to be the only person in this country still arguing for the Pope.'¹⁰

Still some critics see serious flaws in Brecht's characterization of society. Robert Brustein claims that "no

wealthy bourgeois ever appears on stage ... the capitalist is merely a lumpenproletariat or petit bourgeois with money." ¹¹ F.N. Mennemeier observes that in Mother Courage "the much-maligned instigators of the catastrophe in the play never become dramatically tangible themselves." ¹² Even Bond criticizes Brecht for his portrayal of the ruling class in The Caucasian Chalk Circle. In Bond's opinion characters which are created as caricatures capable of being masked during a performance distort reality. Instead he believes

We have to show the mask under the face not the mask on it. Perhaps we should show members of the ruling class in the way they see themselves: it is this good light which is so corrupting ... ¹³

Bond attempts a more accurate portrayal of the ruling class in his play The Fool. Certainly the actors during rehearsals for the original production notice his attempt at impartiality. Nicholas Selby (playing Lord Milton) comments that "Bond has been very kind to the aristos. He's not made them into villains ... He's not set them up as targets." ¹⁴ Isabel Dean (playing Mrs. Emerson) adds:

Years ago when I did Sugar in the Morning by Donald Howarth, I realized that from that time onward I was going to play parts where upper and upper middle class people were poked fun at. But the difference with this play is that Edward Bond shows you the reasons why the middle and upper classes appear unsympathetic to the lower classes. Even though he makes you say things that are unsympathetic, he has so written the play that the audience understands why you behave like that ... ¹⁵

As it happens, however, Bond's characterization of society is also considered flawed. Actor Peter Myers points out

... there's an interesting gap in the play. I mean the tenant farmers. They're the only class you never see. People like Farmer Fab are mentioned, but you never see them - these people - in - between. ¹⁶

Since Brecht and Bond intend to characterize society accurately, these omissions and over-simplifications which others remark on probably result from the difficulty of the job at hand; nevertheless, both men remain convinced the job can be done, indeed must be done. They are encouraged by new scientific advances in fields like behavioural psychology which make social relationships increasingly accessible. Their own research becomes consciously more specific. Mittenzwei reports the extent to which Brecht was prepared to go:

Man was not sufficiently informative for him either as an individual or as a social character, a type. How people behave to each other under different circumstances appeared to him to be much more interesting; how they speak about politics, how they handle their tools, how they react to new ideas, how they assess actions, how they master life. In this manner Brecht developed a high degree of realism in details, produced a contradictory many-layered individuality ... He liked to have this sort of individuality imparted even to the gestures and the rhythm of speech of his characters. ... He demanded the artistic creation of complicated reactions and movements of the individual produced by the movements of social forces; and this in the smallest detail, gesture, nuance. No amount of work, no amount of observation was too much for him in catching the individual in the multiplicity of his relationships. ... ¹⁷

Bond implies the same careful study in a note concerning his observations during a writers' seminar he gave in 1977:

I wanted to make the participants look at the stage in a different way. To see it as an area that has the characteristics of society, and doesn't merely represent it. ... I create difficulties for the participants - just as society creates difficulties for individuals. I make a girl tell about the loss of her child while she is preparing the cooking, or while she is working in a factory: it is necessary that she works, it's also necessary that she speaks honestly about her bereavement. Society does not regard her as an actress who can take ten minutes off for a dramatic solo. The situation must be made concrete in its social setting. I also make people argue over money while they are cutting bread: we stop listening so much to their words; instead the way the bread is cut, the knife held, the crumbs collected - analyse the words for us. They¹⁸ tell us the true significance of what is being said.

They demand actors do similar research - to interpret their roles

as social roles or social functions, to ask not 'Who am I?' but 'What am I?' not 'Who does this action?' but 'What is this action?,' to define themselves in relation to other characters, to consider the nature of the action rather than the nature of the self. ¹⁹

In these ways Brecht and Bond expect to present an increasingly accurate characterization of society.

Because of the care taken to present society accurately, it is not surprising that the societies Brecht and Bond succeed in putting on stage reflect some of the differences between Germany and England over twenty years apart. One of the most important of these involves their respective portrayals of violence. Brecht included violence in his plays but he never allowed it to become the centre of attention. Unconsciously he was reflecting a violent society which had yet to recognize the problem of violence itself. Bond, on

the other hand, believes, "Violence just is the big problem of our society."²⁰ As a result every Bond play contains main scenes which are physically violent: Scopey forcing Alen to sing in The Pope's Wedding, the stoning of the baby in Saved, the beating of Len in Early Morning, the slaughtering of the children in Narrow Road, the torture of Warrington in Lear, the stabbing of Colin's corpse in The Sea, the gibbeting of the Young Woman in Bingo, the stripping of the parson in The Fool, the killing of the old ferryman in The Bundle, the bricking up of Ismene in The Woman. Bond is unrelenting about the need for this portrayal of violence:

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 times. It would be immoral not to write about violence.²¹

(iii) changeability

A society which is presented as changing can be more easily understood as changeable. Accordingly, both Brecht and Bond choose their subject matter from changing life situations. Bond explains:

Art often turns to the street, battlefield, market, modern architect-designed slum, factory, because these are places where social relationships, shared responsibilities, are breaking down and have to be re-created: places where the remedies of the past can't heal the wounds of the present, and there has to be something new.²²

At first the two playwrights attempt to present the life situations as accurately as possible. An older Brecht recalled with wry amusement his own youthful efforts to cram into a production as much authentic data pertaining to the

situation as he could.²³ The situations in Bond's first two plays seemed so realistic the critics complained that they were too life-like and, consequently, boring.²⁴

Gradually, however, Brecht and Bond discover situations can be presented more abstractly but just as effectively. Bond writes of The Bundle:

The people in The Bundle live by a river. Directly or indirectly, they all live from it. From time to time it floods and destroys them. If, as the play invites, you substitute factories and offices - all industrialism - for the river, then my purpose is plain.²⁵

It is the discovery and developing of this technique of abstracting the situation (while maintaining the realism of the social relationships) which allows Brecht and Bond to challenge those critics who argue modern society is too complicated to be put on stage.

Brecht and Bond also try to stimulate change by presenting change in their dramatic action, in their play situations. Brecht, according to Walter Benjamin, was delighted that "man can be changed by his surroundings and can himself change the surrounding world, i.e. can treat it with consequence."²⁶

Brecht, however, was also of the opinion that "man" was more effective in a group. As he expressed it, "To depend only upon your own strength means usually to depend also and mainly upon the sudden emergent strength of strangers."²⁷

Presumably this is one of the reasons Brecht stressed collaboration in his theatre. It may also account for the way individuals are presented in his plays. Generally (there are

qualifications which will be discussed later), his individuals on their own prove incapable of changing society. Consequently, change in Brecht's dramatic action more often involves the individual being changed by society.

Bond, on the other hand, puts considerable faith in the strength of the individual, so much so that critics remark on feeling a "kind of strained romanticism" ²⁸ in his work. Bond, however, maintains that there is nothing romantic in his dramatic action. His heroes are practical heroes, arising from within the social structure and created out of their own suffering. Using Willy in The Sea as an example, he explains:

The ideal hero, the man too good for this world, is drowned. The limited man, who has, in fact, to recreate the world survives. ... Willy has to lose the illusions of simplicity, and learn the difficulties of living, and of changing the world. He has to come to terms with the limitations of the possible, and with other people's fantasies and madnnesses. But he is not destroyed by recognizing his limitations. He is strengthened by it, because then he becomes truly practical. ... ²⁹

Bond's concentration on the individual must not be seen as a contradiction of his primary decision to focus on society. In fact, Bond's presentation of the individual comes surprisingly close to fulfilling a prediction made by Mittenzwei in 1973 as to the way new playwrights would proceed "beyond Brecht".

There is nothing disquieting in this tendency {of seeking to go beyond Brecht}; this is the unrest needed by every art searching for new paths. ... {Today}, however, the main thing is to give

stronger expression to the individuality of a figure, without forgetting that every figure lives amidst a society which influences him to a greater or lesser degree. In this way contemporary socialist art practice, within the framework of the dialectic, guides interest away from the individual and the social, and more towards the other side of the dialectical process: the presentation of individuality.³⁰

In conclusion it is important to understand that despite their dedication to social change and their own personal politics, which support the working class and the eventual goal of a classless society, Brecht and Bond seek to keep social change in their theatre non-political. They consciously reject overt political propaganda along with the suggestion of a detailed Utopia. Bond gives his reasons in the preface to Lear.

I have not tried to say what the future should be like, because that is a mistake. If your plan of the future is too rigid you start to coerce people to fit into it. We do not need a plan of the future, we need a method of change.³¹

It would appear that in their theatre for social change both men subscribe to the idea of change expressed in Brecht's poem:

Real progress
Is not to have progressed
But progression.
Real progress is
What makes progression possible³²
Or enforces it.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 7, p. 301.
- ² Bond, The Bundle, p. xiii.
- ³ Bertolt Brecht, The Life of Galileo, trans. by Desmond I. Vesey (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1974), pp. 77-8.
- ⁴ Bond, Early Morning, p. 68.
- ⁵ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 275.
- ⁶ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 74.
- ⁷ Witt, ed., Brecht, p. 237.
- ⁸ Edward Bond, Theatre Poems and Songs, ed. Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1978), p. 59.
- ⁹ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Play, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, p. 216.
- ¹⁰ Martin Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), p. 99.
- ¹¹ Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), p. 266.
- ¹² Mennemeier, "Mother Courage", p. 140.
- ¹³ Bond, The Bundle, p. xvii.
- ¹⁴ Walter Donohue, "Edward Bond's The Fool at the Royal Court Theatre," Theatre Quarterly 6 (Spring 1976): p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 15-16.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 14-15.
- ¹⁷ Witt, Ed., Brecht, p. 238.
- ¹⁸ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 49.
- ¹⁹ Bond, "On Brecht", p. 35.
- ²⁰ Edward Bond, "Drama and the Dialectics of Violence," Theatre Quarterly 2 (January 1972): p. 9.
- ²¹ Bond, Lear, p. v.

- ²² Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 69.
- ²³ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 66.
- ²⁴ Scharine, The Plays of Edward Bond, p. 59.
- ²⁵ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 26.
- ²⁶ Walter Benjamin, Understanding Brecht, trans. Anna Bostock (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 13.
- ²⁷ Witt, ed., Brecht, pp. 233-4.
- ²⁸ Donohue, "The Fool," p. 25.
- ²⁹ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 54.
- ³⁰ Witt, ed., Brecht, p. 235.
- ³¹ Bond, Lear, p. xiii.
- ³² Witt, ed., Brecht, p. 104.

CHAPTER 3

PROVIDING MODELS WHICH THE SPECTATOR CAN USE
IN WORKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Since their intention is to activate the spectator both in the theatre and in society, Brecht and Bond are concerned with the spectator's behaviour during and after the performance. For this reason, the behavioural models they provide in their drama are of two kinds: "attitude models", intended to influence the spectator's attitude and response both in the theatre and in life, and "action models", intended more specifically to influence the spectator's actual life behaviour.

PART I: ATTITUDE MODELS

It is impossible for the playwright to provide the spectator with an ideal model of theatre behaviour. At best the playwright imagines a sort of desired response and constructs his play using techniques which he thinks will cause this response to occur.

Both Brecht and Bond are very specific about the kind of theatre response they want. Brecht described his as a "critical attitude" and over and over again in his later writing explained that such an attitude was achieved by the integration of the spectator's reason and emotion. His defence of Mother Courage against Friedrich Wolf's charge that the play was objective is one example of his attempt to establish this position:

The chronicle play Mother Courage and her Children... does not of course represent any kind of attempt to persuade anybody of anything by setting forth bare facts. Facts can very seldom be caught without their clothes on, and, as you rightly say, they are hardly seductive. It is however necessary that chronicles should include a factual element, i.e. should be realistic. ... I don't believe that it [Mother Courage] leaves the audience in a state of objectivity (i.e. dispassionately balancing pros and cons). I believe rather - or let's say I hope - that it makes them critical.¹

In general, Brecht tried to achieve his critical attitude by introducing an element of reason into the overly emotional theatre of his day. His essay Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction is helpful in illustrating the difference he imagined the reason would make. First, Brecht mimicked the usual emotional response:

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.

Then, more importantly, he presented a response integrating reason and emotion - a critical attitude:

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.³

The problem with Brecht's approach was that, initially, he overstated the case for reason. Early remarks such as "I aim at an extremely classical, cold, intellectual style of performance. I'm not writing for the scum who want the cockles of their hearts warmed"⁴ seemed to leave little

room for emotion. As Brecht explained later in the prologue to the Short Organum, opposition from the press made this exaggeration necessary.

The battle was for a theatre fit for the scientific age, and where its planners found it too hard to borrow or steal from the armoury of aesthetic concepts enough weapons to defend themselves against the aesthetics of the Press they simply threatened 'to transform the means of enjoyment into an instrument of instruction, and to convert certain amusement establishments into organs of mass communication' ...⁵

However, confusion over the role of emotion in his theatre persisted and towards the end of his career Brecht made several further efforts to clarify the situation. The following candid discussion was typical:

... our mistakes are different from those of other theatres. Their actors are liable to display too much spurious temperament; ours often show too little of the real thing. Aiming to avoid artificial heat, we fall short in natural warmth. We make no attempt to share the emotions of the characters we portray, but these emotions must none the less be fully and movingly represented, nor must they be treated with coldness but likewise with emotion of some force.⁶

To summarize, Brecht wanted his spectator to develop a critical attitude in the theatre, an attitude which was an integration of reason and emotion.

It is not true, though it is sometimes suggested, that epic theatre ... proclaims the slogan: 'Reason this side, Emotion (feeling) that.' It by no means renounces emotion, least of all the sense of justice, the urge to freedom, and righteous anger; it is so far from renouncing them that it does not even assume their presence, but tries to arouse or to reinforce them. The 'attitude of criticism' which it tries to awaken in its audience cannot be passionate enough for it.⁷

Bond describes the theatre response which he wants the spectator to develop as a "rational understanding". Like Brecht's critical attitude, it is achieved by the integration of the spectator's reason and emotion. Significantly, the emotions Bond tries to arouse or reinforce are very similar to Brecht's "sense of justice, the urge to freedom, and righteous anger" - they are the emotions of social relationships. In a program note to The Sea, Bond writes:

What gives living a meaning and stops it being absurd? : our happiness and pain, the happiness we feel when others are happy, the pain we feel when others despair. It's a natural human reflex to smile when others smile. It's also naturally human to shudder when they suffer... we, who live with other men and women, never get away from moral involvement with them. ⁸

He summarizes his position in a letter to one of his German translators: "... my theatre isn't emotional or intellectual - it is both, at one and the same time, which is why it is a rational theatre." ⁹

Bond gives a more detailed explanation of "rational theatre" when he discusses an ideal response to his play Saved:

Well, if they {the spectators} come out saying, oh, what dreadful people, they all ought to be locked up, that's not what I'm after. Perhaps they should be asking, are these facts really so? And if they are, we must find out more about them, and do something about them. ...¹⁰

Unfortunately, the immediate response to Saved was not Bond's ideal one. In fact, its first performance inspired some of the most virulent comments in recent theatre history. J.C. Trewin's attack in The Illustrated London News reflected the

general critical reception:

It may not be the feeblest thing I have seen on any stage, but it is certainly the nastiest, and contains perhaps the most horrid scene in the contemporary theatre. (Even as I write that hedging "perhaps" I delete it: nobody can hedge about Saved).¹¹

Jane Howell, Bond's director for Narrow Road to the Deep North and Bingo, surmises it was the critic's immediate emotional responses to Saved that sent the young Bond searching for ways to stimulate more reason in the theatre response.

I think that Bond was upset about the hysterical attacks on Saved - particularly over the baby business. He thought that if he put the same problems into a cooler, more distant context then people might be ready to view those problems with much less immediate prejudice.¹²

Further, these initially unfavourable responses to his play (which were followed by later retractions and praise) may have convinced Bond that although the rational understanding begins in the theatre it does not have to be completely developed by the time the performance is over. Certainly he implies this in the preface to The Bundle.

What an audience says when it leaves a theatre is less important than what it thinks six months later. Some people angrily walk out of a theatre but six months later know that the play was voicing views they had already started to accept.¹³

This willingness of Bond's to let the rational understanding come to maturity outside the theatre underlines the final important aspect about the theatre responses both Brecht and Bond seek to arouse. They intend that the critical attitude or the rational understanding carry over into the life

situation and prove equally useful there. This idea is fundamental to the Short Organum.

What is that productive attitude in face of nature and of society which we children of a scientific age would like to take up pleasurably in our theatre? The attitude is a critical one. Faced with a river, it consists in regulating the river; faced with a fruit tree, in spraying the fruit tree; faced with movement, in constructing vehicles and aeroplanes; faced with society, in turning society upside down. Our representations of human social life are designed for river-dwellers, fruit farmers, builders of vehicles and upturners of society, whom we invite into our theatres and beg not to forget their cheerful occupations while we hand the world over to their minds and hearts, for them to change as they think fit.¹⁴

Similarly, Bond states:

... I would like people to have seen something {in the theatre} that they might have read about in a newspaper, or even have been involved in, but not really understood - because they see it from a partial point of view, or whatever - suddenly to be able to see it whole, and to be able to say, well, now I can understand all the pressures that went into the making of that tragedy. When I come to judge that situation, my judgement will be more accurate, and therefore the action I take more appropriate. And I would like them to be so strongly moved as to want to take action.

The techniques that Brecht used to encourage an element of reason in the spectator's response were eventually labelled alienation techniques or, after the German word Verfremdungseffekt, "V-effects". Many of them are well known today. In Brecht's productions they included the strong illumination of the stage, the use of a half curtain, placards, projections, masks, music, even actors walking off

the stage to order drinks at the bar in the auditorium.¹⁶ In his plays V-effects included the use of prologues and epilogues, a narrator, choruses, interpolated songs, characters providing exposition by direct address to the audience and devices (often a trial-scene) which summarized the dramatic action.

Interestingly, Bond in his search for V-effects rejects many of Brecht's. Bond also experiments with V-effects unused by Brecht. One of Bond's favourites involves the simultaneous presentation on stage of two or more points of focus¹⁷ - Kiro in Narrow Road committing ritual hara-kiri while the man from the river dries himself off or the prize-fight in The Fool occurring while John Clare is being introduced to London's literary society. For a similar purpose, time is often manipulated in Bond's plays to serve the argument rather than the story.¹⁸ Peter Holland observes that "Bingo divides into two acts at the very point at which a temporal liaison of scenes is possible for the first time."¹⁹ In The Fool characters are made to age at different rates. Director Peter Gill implies the distancing effect of this technique by pondering the production problems it causes:

... the ageing throughout the play is not realistic. By any realistic calculation, Lord Milton must be about 150 in the last scene. ... He {Bond} gives you these characters specifically drawn with a particular accent, who are quite clearly meant to represent actual personages, as opposed to aspects of personages and then you have the task of them ageing, some of them ageing to an incredible age, and one or two certainly not. And that's the style of the play.²⁰

Significantly, however, both Brecht and Bond use a number of the same V-effects. Four of the more basic ones are analyzed in the following pages. Similarities and differences between Brecht and Bond are noted in the set-up of the technique as well as in the specific way the technique is intended to work to produce the desired response.

(i) episodic plot structure.

Many playwrights remain biased towards the kind of "well-made" plot seen at its best, perhaps, in the plays of Ibsen. This structure is characterized by a linear development of the action beginning with a precipitating situation and including careful exposition. Succeeding incidents are arranged on the basis of cause and effect in a pattern of rising suspense. The action ends with a resolution which often involves a discovery and/or a startling reversal.

Brecht formally rejected this kind of a plot structure in the notes to Mahogany, 1930, advocating instead a more episodic structure. Eighteen years later in the Short Organum, he described his choice more fully:

As we cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried vaguely hither and thither, the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. ... The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within the play. ... ²¹

His remarks confirmed what had already become an obvious feature of both his dramatic writing and his productions.

Brecht wrote with a strong sense of scene composition: one scene was a Grundgestus. Martin Esslin translates:

... each scene ... should embody just one Grundgestus (basic gestus), no more and no less... The writing of a play ... would consist in evolving a sequence of scene-titles indicating the basic gestus of each scene (e.g., "Hamlet confronts his father's ghost" or "Three Witches foretell Macbeth's rise to the throne")...²²

The concept of the Grundgestus was also fundamental to Brecht's rehearsal procedure. As recorded in the Mother Courage Model, Brecht began by dividing a play into scenes, each scene being one Grundgestus. For example, the first scene of Mother Courage was determined as

The business woman Anna Fierling, known as Mother Courage, encounters the Swedish army.

This was followed by a more detailed account of the individual events making up the Grundgestus:

Recruiters are going about the country looking for cannon fodder. Mother Courage introduces her mixed family, acquired in various theatres of war, to a sergeant. The canteen woman defends her sons against the recruiters with a knife. She sees that her sons are listening to the recruiters and predicts that the sergeant will meet an early death. To make her children afraid of the war, she has them too draw black crosses. Because of a small business deal, she nevertheless loses her brave son. And the sergeant leaves her with a prophecy:

"If you want the war to work for you, you've got to give the war its due."²³

Brecht then concentrated on these individual events in rehearsal, perfecting each of them in the context of the scene. The result, as Brecht intended, was a scene which was almost

an autonomous play.

During a performance, Brecht used additional techniques to stress the separateness of the scenes. Some of these techniques have become famous - the introductory placards, songs, film clips, Helene Weigel clapping her hands "each time when things had to start up again."²⁴

Brecht's purpose in setting parts of the story "one against another" was, of course, to create interruptions in the overall flow of the dramatic action. The interruptions were important to him because, in theory, they encouraged the spectator to detach himself periodically and evaluate the progress of the dramatic action, thus developing a better critical attitude. As Brecht put it: "The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment."²⁵

Bond also rejects the structure of the well-made play. During an interview for Gambit magazine in 1979, he says:

... I think a well-made play is death anyway, simply because it tells lies, that sort of competent structure deforms the content so that you can't make a play well in that sense.²⁶

In its place he uses a "great fluidity of scenic structure."²⁷

His structure, like Brecht's, stresses each scene. Bond consciously writes this way:

... I know exactly what I'm going to say. I know exactly the order of the scenes and what's going to happen in them.²⁸

He does not admit to writing whole scenes which are later

discarded but he often finds that he has "to write one more scene to make the action clear, because... the audience needs some help." ²⁹

Directors of Bond's plays have discovered the need to emphasize each scene as a distinct unit. During the rehearsals for Lear, Bill Gaskill repeatedly advised his cast: "Never play the character, play the situation." ³⁰ In her production of Narrow Road to the Deep North, Jane Howell used the same approach:

... it was only when we played each scene for what we thought it was intended, just played the actions of the scene, just concentrated on what was done, it seemed to solve all our problems and in fact Narrow Road was one of the easiest plays, easy and most difficult, because it's very simple and therefore very difficult and when you get it, it's very easy. ³¹

Peter Gill would seem to agree with his fellow directors. Anticipating difficulty with the dual focus of the fight scene in The Fool, Gill learned the scene worked well when it was treated as a single unit.

I didn't know that the Hyde Park scene would work which it did. But my ego was taken with the idea of it - a scene with a split action, in which you have literary London downstage and a prize-fight upstage. ... We rehearsed them as two scenes to begin with, so that the starting of the destruction of Clare the poet in the literary London had a kind of continuum for the performers... then we had to do the boxing upstage, and people had to actually be seen to be knocked about since the boxer is an important element in the play. Then we found when we put it all together that one was not really going to be able to do that clever thing of - 'Now you shut up and now you do that, at that point.' I went through a whole

rather interesting process in which it suddenly dawned on me that all the actors in the scene (and that was quite a lot, but Edward can put a lot of characters on the stage and he'll usually bring it off, handle it) are in the scene together and one found that one had to play the whole scene as a scene, that everybody had to realize that they were in all the scene.³²

But Bond's plot structure is different from Brecht's structure in at least one primary aspect. Brecht arranged his scenes along a single horizontal axis; Bond arranges his scenes with more than one axis in mind. Simultaneously, he develops a story line and an analysis of the story line. The result, as he moves back and forth between them, is a kind of mosaic progression. During an interview with the editors of the Theatre Quarterly, Bond discusses his structural criteria:

I think I started by writing a three-acter - one would have done - but I soon discovered that I couldn't tell the truth in that long-winded sort of way anymore. It didn't relate to my experience at all, which was much more a series of sudden reverses and changes. And I felt it was important not only to know what was happening in the room I might happen to be in, but also what was happening in that room over there, that house down the road. So that in order to say something useful about experience now, one has to keep track of all these things. The plays keep an eye on what's going on, you know - I think that's what my structure does.³³

For this reason, Bond's plot structure is more multifaceted than episodic.

A multifaceted structure tends to interrupt the flow of the dramatic action even more strongly than the episodic structure. The interruptions are still intended to encourage

the spectator's rational understanding; yet, sometimes with this structure the juxtaposition of the scenes may be confusing. Bond acknowledges that in The Bundle "the decision to dramatize the preparation for the fight and the consequences of it and not the fight itself ... {left} some critics ... so confused by this that they thought the rifles were not used ... " ³⁴ However, as actress Bridget Turner warns, the confusion may have more serious repercussions:

The audience react in a very strange way to Edward Bond. You feel that very strongly. You get no help from the audience. No feedback in the normal sense. You never feel you're in control of them. It's an odd experience. They don't seem to know how to react to Bond. They seem to be in awe of him. ... ³⁵

Under such circumstances, Bond can only remain hopeful that the spectator will continue to develop his rational understanding after the performance is over. He writes:

Of course, the psychology of the audience is very complex, and the immediate response to a play is less important than the decision about it six months later. But there is a sense in which one often has to work for a 'bad' response, given the society we live in. The immediate approval of an audience is often no more important than the immediate approval of most critics. ³⁶

(ii) historicizing.

In the theatre past events are made present by the strong sense of immediacy that performing, the doing of something here and now, generates. Historicizing is the process by which present events are rendered past. At first glance it

would appear that historicizing is impossible in the theatre and, in a way, this observation is valid. Brecht discovered that to historicize he had to rely on non-dramatic techniques i.e. techniques more common to narrative than to drama. These techniques included plays with prologues and epilogues, narrators, other characters who spoke in the third person, directly to the audience.

When Brecht did set a play in the past, he wanted the historical detail presented as accurately as possible.

... we must drop our habit of taking the different social structures of past periods, then stripping them of everything that makes them different; so that they all look more or less like our own ... Instead we must leave them their distinguishing marks ... ³⁷

His notes on Building up a Part : Laughton's Galileo show the extent to which Brecht personally was prepared to go for historical realism:

For quite a while our work embraced everything we {Bertolt Brecht, Charles Laughton} could lay our hands on. If we discussed gardening it was only a digression from one of the scenes in Galileo; if we combed a New York museum for technical drawings by Leonardo to use as background pictures in the performance we would digress to Hokusai's graphic work ...
... we had to look through works on costume and old pictures in order to find costumes that were free of any element of fancy dress. We sighed with relief when we found a small sixteenth-century panel that showed long trousers. Then we had to distinguish the classes. There the elder Brueghel was of great service ...
{We agreed} furniture and props (including doors) should be realistic and above all be of social and historical interest ... The characters' groupings must have the quality of historical paintings. ... ³⁸

The result of Brecht's historicizing was to strengthen the sense of pastness in the theatre. At the same time, however, theatre being theatre, the strong sense of immediacy continued. Brecht anticipated this temporal contradiction and assumed it would stimulate the spectator's critical attitude. First, a sense of pastness inhibited impulsive empathy:

If we ensure that our characters on the stage are moved by social impulses and that these differ according to the period, then we make it harder for our spectator to identify himself with them. He cannot simply feel: that's how I would act, but at most can say: if I had lived under those circumstances. And if we play works dealing with our own times as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which he himself acts will strike him as equally odd ... ³⁹

Then, reason, thus encouraged, was introduced to two time periods and a "delight in comparisons" activated:

When our theatres perform plays of other periods they like to annihilate distance, fill in the gap, gloss over differences. But what comes then of our delight in comparisons, in distance, in dissimilarity - which is at the same time a delight in what is close and proper to ourselves. ⁴⁰

Finally, the critical attitude aroused, Brecht hoped that his theatre was the type

which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself. ⁴¹

Bond's method of historicizing is different - so much so it may merit another label. Like Brecht, he sets plays in the past as a simple V-effect.

The Bundle is set in a primitive Asian community. It will be said that this is another way of 'exporting your conscience' - just as it has been said I ignore the present when I sometimes write about the past. ... In art, {however,} distance sometimes lends clarity. ⁴²

Unlike Brecht, he makes no effort to intensify a sense of pastness by using narrative techniques. In fact, Bond purposely intrudes on the past with a number of anachronisms.

The anachronisms may be minor ones like the guns, light bulb or aerosol can in Lear. Often, however, they are major ones involving whole scenes. The Victorian world of Early Morning, for example, includes Len's very modern trial:

LEN. I swear to tell the truthwholetruthnothingbut-truth.
 CHAMBERLAIN. Amen.
 JOYCE. Go on
 LEN. We -
 JOYCE. Louder.
 (LEN. We was stood in the queue for the State -
 (JOYCE.
 LEN. T'see 'Buried Alive on 'Ampstead' Eath' -
 JOYCE. No, 'Policeman in Black Nylons'. 'Buried Alive' was the coming attraction.
 LEN. Fair enough. We was stood in the queue for -
 (LEN. 'Policeman in Black Nylons' -
 (JOYCE.
 JOYCE. an I'd like t'know why chair accommodation ain provided. They don't wan 'a know yer in this country. Thass 'ow yer get yer trouble. Yer pays enough ... ⁴³

In either case, Bond considers the anachronisms to be important. As he explains to Bill Gaskill,

I think we should keep the anachronisms. They're rather important and part of my style ... The anachronisms must increase and not lessen the seriousness. They are like a debt that has to be paid. Or as if a truth clutched at anything to save itself from drowning. So the anachronisms aren't careless or frivolous touches - they are like desperate facts. ⁴⁴

The result of Bond's historicizing is a kind of nagging time dislocation which is intended to upset the spectator and, like an unpleasant dream, cause him to wake up and sort things out, rationally. In this process the anachronisms become clues from the present which, hopefully, contribute to a rational understanding of the past - to Bond, a vital step in the progress towards social change. Understanding the past, the real past, exposes the way in which society distorts it, moralizes it and turns it into a weapon. Understanding the past frees the spectator from the social brainwashing Bond detests and describes in the following passage:

How can an American drop bombs on peasants in a jungle ... ? It takes a lot of effort, years of false education and lies ... before men will do that. The ruling morality teaches them they are violent, dirty and destructive ... and that men in jungles are even worse because they're as savage as animals and as cunning as men - history proves it. So he drops bombs because he believes if the peasant ever rowed a canoe across the Pacific and drove an ox cart over America till he came to his garden, he'd steal his vegetables and rape his grandmother - history proves it. And history like the Bible will prove anything. ⁴⁵

Thus Bond concludes:

... a dramatist need not always deal with the present. The past is also an institution owned by society. Our understanding of the past will change with our developing self-consciousness. This is not a partisan re-writing of history but a moral discovery of it. ⁴⁶

(iii) contradictory characters

Both Brecht and Bond create characters which are full of contradictions. Brecht's Shen Te is also Shui Ta. Mother Courage curses the war in one scene and praises it in the next. Galileo enjoys a warm fatherly relationship with his housekeeper's son Andrea while cruelly ignoring his own daughter. Bond's Arthur in Early Morning contradicts his other self, his Siamese twin, George. Cordelia in Lear, is so contradictory that casting her may prove difficult. Gregory Dark, the assistant director of the original production, remembers:

The part of Cordelia posed special problems - to find an actress sentimental and feminine enough to cry at the slightest provocation during her pregnancy, and yet hard and masculine enough to lead a revolution, overthrow the government and become the leader of a totalitarian state. The part required an actress of great skill as there are only four short scenes in which she has to establish a complex and ever-changing character. ⁴⁷

Wang in The Bundle first sells himself into slavery for his parents' sake and then lets his father be tortured and killed when the old man is caught helping Wang's revolutionaries.

Contradictions exist even in the minor characters. The Little Monk announces his decision to give up astronomy and almost simultaneously becomes Galileo's pupil. Mr. Shu Tu burns Wang's hand and later gives Shen Te a blank cheque so she may continue as the Angel of the Slums. Grusha's "spineless brother cannot say boo to his kulak of a wife,

but is overbearing with the peasant woman with whom he fixes up the marriage contract."⁴⁸ Bond's gentle carpenter in Lear kills a man with a cold chisel. Isabel Dean says of Mrs. Emerson in The Fool: "{She} is ludicrous... She wants to help Clare. She's twice as old as he is, she's potty about him, and yet she ends up being partly responsible for having him 'put away' in an asylum."⁴⁹ The greedy Water Sellers in The Bundle find themselves to their amazement giving water away.

Brecht and Bond attach considerable importance to the contradictions within their characters. First, as Brecht noted, they are realistic:

The bourgeois theatre's performances always aim at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization. Conditions are reported as if they could not be otherwise; characters as individuals, incapable by definition of being divided, cast in one block, manifesting themselves in the most various situations, likewise for that matter existing without any situation at all. If there is any development it is always steady, never by jerks; the developments always take place within a definite framework which cannot be broken through.

None of this is like reality, so a realistic theatre must give it up. ⁵⁰

Second, the character contradictions, like the obvious knotting of the scenes in the plot structure, are intended to block impulsive empathy and stimulate the spectator's reason. Why does Galileo hand over the Discorsi and then refuse to shake Andrea's hand? Why does Patty wait twenty-three years before visiting Clare in the asylum and then come bringing him a jar of jam?

In the theatre, answers to questions concerning character contradictions are made easier for the spectator by the presence of the actor who has already asked the same questions and shaped his character accordingly. Brecht explained the general process:

... the actor masters his character by first mastering the 'story'. It is only after walking all round the entire episode that he can, as it were by a single leap, seize and fix his character, complete with all its individual features. Once he has done his best to let himself be amazed by the inconsistencies in the various attitudes, knowing that he will in turn have to make them amaze the audience, then the story as a whole gives him a chance to pull the inconsistencies together...⁵¹

More specifically, the actor begins to shape his character by determining its motivation. Both Brecht and Bond are adamant that their characters are socially motivated. What is social motivation? How does it differ from the psychological motivation so common in drama today? Director Bill Gaskill answers these two questions in a detailed description of the first rehearsal for his production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle in 1962. The description deserves repeating at length.

And then I was faced with the problem of how to start rehearsing, if you like, the Brechtian method as opposed to the Stanislavski method. So I started with a quite simple example. I asked the company for a cigarette, I said 'I'm out of cigarettes, I want a cigarette.' And one of the actresses, Mavis Edwards, gave me one. Then I asked, 'Why was I given this cigarette?', and the actors all gave reasons. One of the first was, 'Mavis is a generous person', and someone else said, 'No, she's not. You are

the producer, and she's trying to get on your good side'. This went on, with various other suggestions, the interesting thing being that the first twenty or so answers were all based on emotional or psychological reasoning, involving the generosity of the actress and so on. The first, in fact the only, thing which went through the actors' minds was that it must be personally motivated. Eventually I got them to understand that this was only their way of looking at action in the theatre, that they automatically put an emotional stress on it. We discussed this ... and eventually they agreed that the giving of the cigarette was really a quite usual, habitual social action, that because we were director and an actress working together, there was nothing extraordinary in my asking for, or her giving of, a cigarette. I then pointed out that if we were to play this scene, and conveyed only the impression of generosity by the actress or of scrounging by me, we would not be truthful: because the giving of the cigarette was simply a social action, involving little or no emotion. ⁵²

Despite their insistence on social motivation, Brecht and Bond do not ignore the universally human. As H.E. Holthusen observes of Brecht's characters

... {they} know much more about themselves and their state of being in the world than is implicit in their sociological and historical situation. Death and love, nature and fellow-feeling, and the unfathomable mystery of the world as a whole: all this is immediately given to them. ⁵³

Indeed Brecht utilized the resulting contradiction between social determinism and the universally human to give his characters an extra richness. Mother Courage, Galileo, and Shen Te all know what they must do to survive in society but they all regret what it costs them in terms of their humanity. George Steiner vividly recalls one such poignant

moment in the Berliner Ensemble's production of Mother Courage:

As the body of her son was laid before her, she {Mother Courage} merely shook her head in mute denial. The soldiers compelled her to look again. Again she gave no sign of recognition, only a dead stare. As the body was carried off, Weigel looked the other way and tore her mouth wide open. The shape of the gesture was that of the screaming horse in Picasso's Guernica. The sound that came out was raw and terrible beyond any description I could give of it. But, in fact, there was no sound. Nothing. The sound was total silence. It was silence which screamed and screamed through the whole theatre so that the audience lowered its head as before a gust of wind. And the scream inside the silence seemed to me to be the same as Cassandra's when she divines the reek of the blood in the house of Atreus. It was the same wild cry with which the tragic imagination first marked our sense of life.⁵⁴

Perhaps it is Walter Benjamin who best understands Brecht's dialectical reasoning on the nature of mankind. In an essay, What is Epic Theatre?, Benjamin writes:

The simple fact that man can be recognized in a certain way creates a sense of triumph, and the fact, too, that he can never be recognized completely, never once and for all, that he is not so easily exhaustible, that he holds and conceals so many possibilities within himself (hence his capacity for development), is a pleasurable recognition.⁵⁵

Bond implies his acceptance of the universally human when he says, "My plays are about the quest for freedom of one man."⁵⁶ Unlike Brecht, however, Bond does not utilize the resulting contradiction between social determinism and the universally human in his characters as much as he tries to reconcile it. Thus the one man during his quest discovers

that he is free only when his fellow-man is free. In other words, as Bond says elsewhere, "our species always strives for justice and happiness. Justice, social justice, because without that there is no reliable happiness." ⁵⁷

Lear understands his struggle:

... I've suffered so much, I made all the mistakes in the world and I pay for each of them. I cannot be forgotten. I am in their minds. To kill me you must kill them all. Yes, that's who I am ... I'm old, but I'm as weak and clumsy as a child, too heavy for my legs. But I've learned this, and you must learn it or you'll die. Listen, Cordelia. 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 the man without pity is mad. ⁵⁸

The two playwrights refer to both kinds of motivation in their acting theories. Late in his career Brecht wrote:

However dogmatic it may seem to insist that self-identification with the character should be avoided in the performance, our generation can listen to this warning with advantage. However determinedly they obey it they can hardly carry it out to the letter, so the most likely result is that truly rending contradiction between experience and portrayal, empathy and demonstration, justification and criticism, which is what is aimed at. ⁵⁹

In a letter to one of his German translators, Bond states his position:

My plays won't work if they're acted in a 'method' style. The use of language must be realistic but controlled, entrances and exits need perfect timing. Skinner {a character} isn't all business men, he is a particular business man and the actor must create his business man out of his own ego, but only to authenticate the business man as a social mechanism. ⁶⁰

English actors, especially, have difficulty with social motivation. During the original production of The Fool there were problems. Mick Ford (playing Lawrence) complained:

But I feel that I can't develop the character. All I can do is get better at what I'm doing. All I can do is get better at crawling around the stage. And that's technique.⁶¹

Similarly, Roderick Smith (playing Bob) joined in:

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. Of course, I can invent reasons for the things I do, but they're only inventions. I feel like I'm a piece of moving scenery, doing its thing in the right place. I can do what's wanted, but it becomes hard work and nothing else. To do it night after night, it becomes technique.⁶²

These two young actors should be more familiar with the work of Helene Weigel. In the Mother Courage Model, Brecht continually praised his wife for her ability to play the character, complete with all its contradictions, as well as the situation. For example,

In giving the peasants the money for Katrin's burial, Weigel quite mechanically puts back one of the coins she has taken out of her purse. What does this gesture accomplish? It shows that in all her grief the business woman has not wholly forgotten how to reckon - money is hard to come by. This little gesture has the power and suddenness of a discovery - a discovery concerning human nature, which is molded by conditions. To dig out the truth from the rubble of the self-evident, to link the particular strikingly with the universal, to capture the particular that characterizes a general process, that is the art of the realist.⁶³

In this way, then, an actor with a critical attitude to his character, rationally understanding it, can provide the

spectator with a whole character which in turn helps the spectator to develop his own critical attitude or rational understanding.

(iv) the writing of comedy

Traditionally, comedy as compared to tragedy is the dramatic form which is more socially oriented, more objective in presenting its characters, and more practical in its effect. Thus, both Brecht and Bond, early in his career, attempt to write comedy, believing it is better suited to their theatre for social change.

As a young man Brecht rejected tragedy because it seemed impractical.

Let us assume I see {Hauptmann's} Rose Bernd or Ghosts in the theatre. Why do I find these plays boring and why do I feel nothing? ... because I am to see here as tragic something that could be immediately or easily dispatched by a few civilized methods or a measure of enlightenment. The distress of unmarried mothers could be resolved by a bit of enlightenment, and the consequences of clap eliminated by salvarsan. The presentation of Rose Bernd's suicide does not interest us, because we do not see the necessity for it ... ⁶⁴

By the time he wrote the Short Organum, however, Brecht's outlook had become more tolerant. He confessed that since pleasure was the "noblest function" ⁶⁵ of the theatre, tragedy was acceptable entertainment for the Greeks, catharsis being a purification performed "not only in a pleasurable way, but precisely for the purpose of pleasure." ⁶⁶ Nevertheless, as he quickly pointed out, the modern concept of pleasure was much different than the Greek one and that,

consequently, ancient tragedy provided pleasure now only in incidental ways. ⁶⁷

Brecht had a precise idea of "modern pleasure" and defined it in the forty-sixth section of the Short Organum:

Our own period, which is transforming nature in so many and different ways, takes pleasure in understanding things so that we can interfere. There is a great deal to man, we say; so a great deal can be made out of him. He does not have to stay the way he is now, nor does he have to be seen as he is now, but also as he might become. We must not start with him; we must start on him. ⁶⁸

Accordingly as late as 1955, Brecht continued to maintain

The problems of today can only be grasped by the theatre in so far as they are problems of comedy... Comedy allows of solutions; tragedy, if you still believe in its potentiality, does not. ⁶⁹

With his first plays, Bond also restricts himself to writing comedy because it "allows of solutions". He describes Saved as a comedy:

By not playing his traditional role in the tragic Oedipus pattern of the play, Len turns it into what is formally a comedy. The first scene is built on the young man's sexual insecurity - he either invents interruptions himself or is interrupted by the old man. Len has to challenge him, and get him out of the house, before he can continue. Later he helps the old man's wife, and this is given a sexual interpretation by the on-lookers. Later still the old man finds him with his wife in a more obviously sexual situation. The Oedipus outcome should be a row and death. There is a row, and even a struggle with a knife - but Len persists in trying to help. The next scene starts with him stretched on the floor with a knife in his hand, and the old man comes in dressed as a ghost - but neither of them is dead. They talk, and for once in the play someone apart from Len is as honest and friendly as it is possible for him to be. The old man can only give

a widow's mite, but in the context it is a victory - and a shared victory. It is trivial to talk of defeat in this context. ...⁷⁰

Gradually, however, as Bond becomes "more conscious of the strength of human beings to provide answers" ⁷¹ and as definite heroes begin to emerge in his plays, he realizes a need for a more tragic dramatic form. In a program note to The Sea, he makes his first theoretical statements:

We even need a sense of tragedy. No democracy can exist without that. But 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. ⁷²

The implications in Bond's redefining of tragedy are interesting and pertinent to an appreciation of his more mature work. First, he implies an understanding empathy with the hero; as the hero suffers, so should the spectator. Moreover, because the suffering of the hero is endured for the sake of others, to gain for them some measure of social justice, Bond believes the dramatic action is a moral action - social justice being an absolute good. Finally, Bond envisages a catharsis that leads to "knowledge and action." Today, most critics would agree that tragic catharsis leads to knowledge, even self-knowledge, which is socially useful. Humphry House explains:

A tragedy rouses the emotions from potentiality to activity by worthy and adequate stimuli; it controls them by directing them to the right objects in the right way; and exercises them within the limits of the play, as the emotions of the good man would be exercised. When they subside to potentiality again after the play is over, it is a more "trained" potentiality than before. This is what Aristotle calls catharsis. Our responses are brought nearer to those of the good man. ⁷³

The uniqueness of Bond's definition of tragedy is in the idea of a catharsis leading to social action. For this reason his most recent heroes remain alive, practical men by virtue of their terrible suffering and capable of directing effective social change. Bond sums up his artistic ideals in the preface to The Bundle.

All societies have used art. It is a biological requirement of the orderly functioning of human beings. But other societies have used art not in the way tired business-men want to use our theatre, to escape from labour which denies them self-respect and self-knowledge, but in order to learn how to live and work so that we may be happy and our moral concern for one another is not wasted. ⁷⁴

PART I ENDNOTES

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- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 14.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 179.
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- ⁸ Edward Bond, The Sea (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1973), pp. 66-7.
- ⁹ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 73.
- ¹⁰ Bond, "Drama and Violence," p. 13.
- ¹¹ Scharine, The Plays of Edward Bond, p. 48.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 154.
- ¹³ Bond, The Bundle, pp. xxiii-xiv.
- ¹⁴ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 185.
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- 43 Bond, Early Morning, pp. 20-1.
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⁷³ Gray, Brecht the Dramatist, pp. 83-4.

⁷⁴ Bond, The Bundle, p. xxi.

PART II : ACTION MODELS

On stage any event or any character is potentially an action model. The specific kind of action model that a character becomes is determined by the way the playwright chooses to present him. An attractive character which the playwright wants the spectator to imitate is a positive action model; an unattractive character which the playwright wants the spectator to reject is a negative action model. As well, the playwright may present characters singly or in groups as character models or as society models.

(i) society models

All of Brecht's great plays show vigorous, central characters being progressively destroyed by their societies. These characters, however, are not destroyed easily. They are tough fighters, quick witted, expedient - attractive because of their initial vitality. Yet, despite their many positive attributes, they are unable to save themselves. Thus, Mother Courage, who makes such a jaunty entrance seated on a full wagon and accompanied by her three children, exits slowly, dragging an empty wagon, alone. Lusty Galileo, who first appears as "a powerful physicist ... a vociferous, full-blooded man with a sense of humor ... earthy, a great teacher", ¹ becomes a blind, imprisoned glutton. Shen Te, who hates impersonating Shui Ta and begins by having to do it only occasionally, finishes by having to impersonate him

regularly for the rest of her life. Grusha, who starts out healthy, practical, happily in love, ends up miserably married and under arrest for kidnapping.

Brecht's purpose in concentrating on such situations was to provide negative society models which the spectator would reject. In Brecht's own words his plays disclosed

without trouble and without possibility of evasion how shabby and imperfect a society is in which a man can only be good and decent when he is regularly bad. Without it being stated, everybody is forced to the conclusion that this society deserves to be changed, indeed that it must be changed.²

Critic Ronald Woodland's review of a production of Mother Courage supports Brecht's prediction:

In each major episode of the narrative, Mother Courage, to assure her economic survival, has to deny some good instinct that threatens by ramification that survival. The narrative of her struggle for survival thus becomes also the narrative of the loss of whatever goodness Mother Courage might once have had within her. ... Physically she is reduced from the human being riding on the wagon to the animal pulling it ...

The thought behind this action is that the condition of human society makes necessary the sacrifice of innate human goodness to the exigencies of economic subsistence in the world ...

It is ... a condemnation of each of us who contributes to the society in which the requirement of such sacrifice becomes inevitable.³

Brecht hoped, of course, that because the society model was a representation of the spectator's real society, its rejection would lead to a rejection of the spectator's life society and, thereby, encourage action for social change.

Not all of Brecht's society models are negative. There

are glimpses of positive models: one in the prologue to The Caucasian Chalk Circle and one in the play itself during the "brief golden age" created by Azdak. Edward Bond, however, takes exception to Brecht's positive society modelling. Importantly, Bond does not argue with the idea of using such models. His objection is that Azdak's "brief golden age" is handed over by a deus ex machina - it is produced by magic. This short-circuits what in his opinion is one of the fundamental principles of art: to show "the desire, the possibility, the action necessary to achieve it {a Utopia}, and the practical standards that can be used to assess this action and the moral standards that can be used to judge it." ⁴

Bond attempts to remedy Brecht's "shortcomings" in his own play, The Bundle. Here Wang attains a utopian society, but there is nothing magical in the process. The play carefully demonstrates Wang's desire, the possibility of a Utopia and the painful actions necessary to achieve it. Further, Wang's actions are practical, given the society in which he lives. His actions are morally right, considering the social alternatives. It is the old ferryman who proves Wang's Utopia real by his decision to die for it.

Why are our lives wasted? We have minds to see how we suffer. Why don't we use them to change the world? A god would wipe us off the board with a cloud: a mistake. But as there is only ourselves shouldn't we change our lives so that we don't suffer. Or at least suffer only in changing them? ⁵

(ii) character models

In the final analysis all of Brecht's main characters - Mother Courage, Galileo, Shen Te, Grusha, even Azdak to some extent - are victims of society. As such their actions tend to be reactive rather than active and, in a theatre for social change, they are negative models rather than positive ones. However, there are varying degrees of negativity.

Mother Courage suffers and learns nothing. She "is reduced from the human being riding on the wagon to the animal pulling it"; yet, she is still "hoping to get back into business." ⁶ Her failure to do anything more positive bothered a number of critics. Friedrich Wolf's comments during a debate with Brecht were typical:

... I think Courage would have been even more effective if at the end the mother had given her curse on the war some visible expression in the action ... and drawn the logical conclusions from her change of mind.⁷

But Brecht knew exactly why he had written Mother Courage the way he did.

A number of people remarked at the time that Mother Courage learns nothing from her misery, that even at the end she does not understand. Few realized that this was the bitterest and most meaningful lesson of the play ... They did not see what the playwright was driving at: that war teaches people nothing.⁸

Brecht's other characters are more positive. Eventually Galileo and Shen Te come to understand their predicaments although they prove incapable of taking the necessary steps

to change it. This personal failure accounts for much of the self-loathing Galileo expresses near the end of the play:

Welcome to the gutter, brother in science and cousin in treachery! Do you eat fish? I've got fish. What stinks is not fish but me ... Can you bring yourself to take a hand such as mine? ⁹

Shen Te is forced to beg the gods for her rescue:

Oh, don't, illustrious ones! Don't go away! Don't leave me! How can I face the good old couple who've lost their store and the water seller with his stiff hand? And how can I defend myself from the barber whom I do not love and from Sun whom I do love? And I am with child. Soon there'll be a little son who'll want to eat. I can't stay here. ¹⁰

Walter Sokel points out the tragedy of Shen Te's situation:

"In her final despairing gesture she represents humanity in its tragic greatness: impotent, helplessly caught in the web of circumstances, in the perennial frustration of human aspirations, but honestly facing the truth instead of hiding behind make-believe, and therefore great." ¹¹ The same might be said of Galileo.

Grusha, after the most careful deliberation (it takes her part of a day and all night to decide), picks up the child and by her action challenges society. She is almost destroyed. Only the intervention of the "good, bad judge" Azdak - Brecht's equivocal hero - saves her.

Like Grusha, Azdak knows the kind of social action which is necessary and when his situation allows it, he acts accordingly.

And he broke the rules to save them.
 Broken law like bread he gave them,
 Brought them to shore upon his crooked back.
 At long last the poor and lowly
 Had someone who was not too holy
 To be bribed by empty hands: Azdak.

But Azdak is a victim too. Brecht makes this point very powerfully by having the character beaten up on stage. Thus, as Azdak is judge and prisoner by chance, so he is hero and victim. Moreover, Azdak disappears at the end of the play, an action Bond condemns as socially irresponsible:

Azdak the judge in The Caucasian Chalk Circle, vanishes like a deus ex machina after showing that it is possible for judgement to be wise. ... He does not stay to show that wisdom is practical. In Cymbeline a god descends so that we may understand (he tells us not to ask questions), and Azdak seems to vanish so that we may believe! For all his earthiness he is a voice shouting from an upper window, not someone we met in the street. ... ¹³

Generally, Brecht seems uneasy with the idea of a positive hero. Azdak is not one. Neither is Galileo. Even after he hands over the Discorsi and confesses, Brecht resists the impulse to create a hero. In his notes on the play, he compliments Laughton's acting of the moment:

Certainly nothing could have been more horrible than the moment when L. has finished his big speech and hastens to the table saying "I must eat now", as though in delivering his insights Galileo has done everything that can be expected of him. ¹⁴

At this point it is perhaps valuable to recall a remark of Brecht's quoted earlier: "To depend only upon your own strength means usually to depend also and mainly upon the

sudden emergent strength of strangers." ¹⁵ Possibly, for Brecht, an adequate positive hero was a collective hero, like the working class. In fact he experimented with this kind of a hero in his adaptation of Shakespeare's Coriolanus, but the adaptation was shelved. A conversation recorded by one of his students gives a probable reason:

... a great contemporary subject will necessarily include the working class element, either actively or passively. And there you immediately have an enormous difficulty. The workers, in contrast to the bourgeoisie, have never taken the stage as a type, but as a mass, and they will always remain a mass. ... But for the theatre you need types: quantity, that very particular form of quality, can only be shown with the greatest difficulty ... how can masses be shown except as a chorus?... The representatives of the working class must at least have a face, that is clear. I shall have to give more thought to this. ¹⁶

In conclusion, Brecht's position on the positive hero seems to be most accurately expressed by the contradiction in Galileo:

Unhappy the land that has no heroes!
Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes. ¹⁷

Bond's position on the positive hero is expressed by Wang's speech in The Bundle:

We live in a time of great change. It is easy to find monsters - and as easy to find heroes. To judge rightly what is good - to choose between good and evil - that is all that it is to be human. ¹⁸

Bond's main characters resemble Brecht's in their struggle against an overpowering society. Eventually, however, all of Bond's main characters come to understand their predicament and mankind's need for social justice. Willy in The

Sea consoles Rose with this understanding:

WILLY. If you look at life closely it is unbearable. What people suffer, what they do to each other, how they hate themselves, anything good is cut down and trodden on, the innocent and the victims are like dogs digging rats from a hole, or an owl starving to death in a city. It is all unbearable but that is where you have to find your strength. Where else is there?

ROSE. An owl starving in a city.

WILLY. To death. Yes. Wherever you turn. So you should never turn away. If you do you lose everything. Turn back and look into the fire. Listen to the howl of the flames. The rest is lies.

ROSE. How just. How sane. ¹⁹

From the understanding, most of Bond's characters go on to accomplish some form of positive social action. In fact Bond's characters from play to play have shown an increasing capacity for social action. Scopey in The Pope's Wedding, "can't see how he can act." ²⁰ Len in Saved begins to act positively by living "with people at their worst and most helpless." ²¹ Arthur in the last act of Early Morning "sees clearly what his position is and is then able to act. In other words, he wants to get out of heaven and escape from society." ²² Lear makes the first attack on society by starting to tear down his wall but he is quickly shot. Willy and Rose in The Sea, young, strong and united, go off determined to change the world. Wang in The Bundle actually manages to successfully change his society.

Bond admits the increasing capacity of his characters for social action is directly related to his own increasing

confidence in humanity's strength to effect change.

We mustn't write only problem plays, we must write answer plays - or at least plays which make answers clearer and more practical. When I wrote my first plays, I was, naturally conscious of the weight of the problems. Now I've become more conscious of the strength of human beings to provide answers. ²³

It is interesting to speculate whether Brecht might have worked out the problem of the working class as hero and if its "face" might have looked like one of Bond's practical heroes. Bond remains convinced:

The tragedy of twentieth century drama is that Brecht died before he could complete a last period of plays: the plays he would have written as a member and worker of a marxist society. The loss is very severe. But we have to write the plays he left unwritten. ²⁴

PART II ENDNOTES

- ¹ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, p. 218.
- ² Witt, ed., Brecht, p. 224.
- ³ Ronald Woodland, "The Danger of Empathy in Mother Courage," Modern Drama 15 (1972-3): p. 128.
- ⁴ Bond, The Bundle, p. xii.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 64. The paraphrase of Bond's comment in the introduction to Lear - "Act three shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove real by dying in it" - is intentional. There are many similarities between Lear and the old ferryman at this point.
- ⁶ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, p. 381.
- ⁷ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 229.
- ⁸ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, pp. 388-9.
- ⁹ Brecht, Galileo, pp. 116-119.
- ¹⁰ Brecht, The Good Woman, p. 107.
- ¹¹ Walter Sokel, "Brecht's Split Characters and His Sense of the Tragic," in Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), pp. 130-1.
- ¹² Brecht, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, p. 190.
- ¹³ Bond, The Bundle, pp. xix-xx.
- ¹⁴ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, p. 262.
- ¹⁵ Witt, ed., Brecht, pp. 233-34.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 221-2.
- ¹⁷ Brecht, Galileo, pp. 107-8.
- ¹⁸ Bond, The Bundle, p. 78.
- ¹⁹ Bond, The Sea, p. 44.
- ²⁰ Bond, "A Discussion," p. 14.

^{2 1} Bond, Saved, p. 5.

^{2 2} Bond, "A Discussion," p. 15.

^{2 3} Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 75.

^{2 4} Bond, "On Brecht", p. 34.

PART III: RESOLUTION

One of the most crucial moments in the theatre for social change occurs when the performance ends. At this point, if the theatre is to be successful, the spectator must begin to apply the critical attitude or rational understanding to his own society. He must begin to imitate or reject the action models. Both Brecht and Bond try to guide this vital movement from theatre to life by considerably modifying the conventional kind of resolution. They offer instead a resolution that seems incomplete: the main conflict is not quite settled. Indeed, given the problems presented, how could it be? In the struggle between man and his society, Brecht and Bond firmly believe that the final resolution must be the spectator's responsibility.

Both playwrights experiment with a variety of incomplete resolutions. Probably the simplest one is in Brecht's The Good Woman. The play concludes with an epilogue which comes right to the point:

How could a better ending be arranged?
 Could one change people? Can the world be
 changed?
 It is for you to find a way, my friends,
 To help good men arrive at happy ends.
 You write the happy ending to the play!
 There must, there must, there's got to be a way! ¹

Galileo concludes with a careful reconstruction of the beginning of the play. Andrea, himself a scientist, uses a young boy's question to initiate a lesson and introduce a

new age:

... You must learn to open your eyes. The milk is paid for and so is the jug. The old woman can have it. Yes, and I haven't yet answered your question, Giuseppe. One cannot fly through the air on a broomstick. It must at least have a machine on it. And as yet there is no such machine. Perhaps there never will be, for man is too heavy. But, of course, one cannot tell. We don't know nearly enough, Giuseppe. We are really only at the beginning.²

Evan when the Berliner Ensemble omitted the scene where the Discorsi crosses the border, the conclusion still recalled the beginning. The following chart from Brecht's notebook shows how carefully the symmetry was planned.

similia in 1) and 12).
 there is a morning in 1), and an evening in 12).
 there is a gift of an astronomical model in 1), of
 a goose in 12)
 There ist {sic} a lecture for Andrea, the boy in 1),
 and a lecture for Andrea, the man in 12)
 there is a woman going around watching in 1),
 and a woman going around watching in 12).³

This sense of a new beginning at the end of the play is important to Brecht. He believed that the sense of a new beginning stimulated work for social change. In the foreward to Galileo he wrote:

It is well known how beneficially people can be influenced by the conviction that they are poised on the threshold of a new age. At such a moment their environment appears to be still entirely unfinished, capable of the happiest improvements, full of dreamt-of and undreamt-of possibilities, like malleable raw material in their hands. They themselves feel as if they have awakened to a new day, rested, strong, resourceful. Old beliefs are dismissed as superstitions, what yesterday seemed a matter of course is today subject to fresh examination. We have been ruled, says mankind, but now we shall be the rulers.⁴

The conclusion of Mother Courage also recalls the beginning. Fuegi points out

... All the themes sounded in the opening scene are sounded once again. All the prophecies are fulfilled. The full wagon is now empty. The family is reduced to one... The wheel has come full circle.⁵

Moreover, in production Brecht intensified the continuous quality of the dramatic action by using the revolving stage. He explained the intended effect in the Mother Courage Model:

At the end as at the beginning the wagon must be seen rolling along. Of course the audience would understand if it were simply pulled away. When it goes on rolling there is a moment of irritation ("this has been going on long enough"). But when it goes on still longer, a deeper understanding sets in.⁶

The deeper understanding is, of course, that Mother Courage learns nothing by her ordeal - war teaches people nothing. It is unproductive and only changing the nature of society could eliminate it.

Brecht comes close to giving The Caucasian Chalk Circle a conventional resolution. Azdak saves Grusha; however, this settles the main conflict only temporarily. In order to recapture Azdak's "brief golden age", the spectator must find his own Azdak, his own solution to social problems. Possibly in his search he will refer back to the workers' society depicted in the prologue of the play.

Bond's plays offer more of a conventional resolution with the emergence of a positive hero who demonstrates a "method of change." Yet, Bond does not intend this action

to be conclusive. He says of Lear

My Lear (as opposed to Shakespeare's Lear) makes a gesture in which he accepts responsibility for his life and commits himself to action... My Lear's gesture mustn't be seen as final. That would make the play a part of the theatre of the absurd ... Lear is very old and has to die anyway. He makes his gesture only to those who are learning how to live. ⁷

Bond ends The Sea in mid-sentence because

the play can have no satisfactory solution at that stage. Rose and Willy have to go away and help to create a sane society - and it is for the audience to go away and complete the sentence in their own lives. ⁸

He calls Bingo and The Fool 'Scenes of Money and Death' and 'Scenes of Bread and Love' respectively. He explains his purpose:

... I see the play as a much more open-ended enterprise, presenting several possible outcomes or solutions. ... These scenes of something don't just tell a story, they also, I hope, make a statement to those watching, a statement the audience is invited to finish. ⁹

In The Bundle Bond experiments with a more complicated kind of conclusion. Simultaneously Basho exits through the auditorium while Wang addresses the audience. Both gestures violate the aesthetic distance set up between actor and spectator. In fact, it is Oscar Büdel's opinion that the gestures "elevate the audience to ... {the actor's} level." ¹⁰ Assuming Büdel to be correct, these moments of unity which are established seem especially appropriate for meaningful teaching. Accordingly Wang gives explicit instructions for behaviour outside the theatre:

We live in a time of great change. It is easy to
 find monsters - and as easy to find heroes. To
 judge rightly what is good - to choose between
 good and evil - that is all that it is to be
 human. ¹¹

The use of an incomplete resolution tends to make a play,
 in Bond's words, "a more open-ended enterprise." Raymond
 Williams observes that the play is a "process rather than a
 product." ¹² The relationship between theatre and life be-
 comes very close.

The mirror art holds to nature is cracked
 The glass-maker and quicksilver-painter can't
 mend it

But look closely at the broken mirror
 To see where nature is broken

Hopefully, it is this closeness which will encourage the
 spectator to move from the theatre "process" to the life
 process. Bond's poem continues:

Art that tells you only who you are
 Creates the past

It must tell you who you are
 So that you see what you must do ¹³

PART III ENDNOTES

- ¹ Brecht, The Good Woman, p. 109.
- ² Brecht, Galileo, p. 122.
- ³ Fuegi, Essential Brecht, p. 170.
- ⁴ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, p. 213.
- ⁵ Fuegi, Essential Brecht, p. 90.
- ⁶ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, pp. 383-4.
- ⁷ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 54.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 57.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 21.
- ¹⁰ Oscar Budel, "Contemporary Theatre and Aesthetic Distance," in Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 66.
- ¹¹ Bond, The Bundle, p. 78.
- ¹² Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 288-9.
- ¹³ Bond, Theatre Poems, pp. 84-5.

CONCLUSION

In their attempt to create a theatre for social change Brecht and Bond influence the development of dramatic literature, the theatre, and possibly even of society itself.

They influence dramatic literature by their conscious use of techniques designed to encourage the spectator's critical attitude or rational understanding. Unfortunately, the techniques do not always function as designed. Mother Courage, for example, seldom encouraged the response Brecht wanted. In the Mother Courage Model, he wrote:

... certain reviews and many discussions with persons who had seen the play showed that a good many people regarded Mother Courage merely as a representative of the "little people" who "become involved in the war in spite of themselves," who are "helpless victims of the war," and so on. ¹

Similarly a German critic, apparently aware of how Brecht wants him to respond to Galileo, cannot comply:

I see a man who has weakened his eyes at the telescope and who is now almost blind as a result of working, illegally, by moonlight, in order to make a copy of a work extremely useful to mankind. This is not merely spoken; this is demonstrated. I see further, a man ruined by the burden of thought and work that has driven him like an uncontrollable itch into ever more dangerous situations, while, all the time, he is being spied upon by his shrewish and stupid daughter. And I am supposed to hate this man? To condemn him? I don't care how many directives are issued demanding that I do so, I simply cannot! ²

Partly Brecht blamed this failure on "a deeply engrained habit {which} leads the theatre-goer to pick out the more

emotional utterances of the character and overlook everything else." ³ Partly he blamed himself. He rewrote parts of Mother Courage over and over again and as late as 1954 was still curious "to know how many of those who see Mother Courage and Her Children today understand its warning." ⁴ He added an epilogue to The Good Woman, a prologue to The Caucasian Chalk Circle and his death in 1956 interrupted the rehearsing of a new production of Galileo. ⁵

Bond seeks to avoid some of Brecht's problems by making his main characters less vital, less attractive at the beginning of the play. Usually they emerge as watchers - brooding, withdrawn, often mad and essentially passive. But Bond's approach has its problems too. First, it contradicts a generally accepted dramatic principle: "a passive central character does not work." ⁶ Second, and perhaps partially explaining the first point, actors find such characters difficult to play. During the Lear rehearsals Gaskill gives the following note to the cast:

Don't try and relate to everything that happens on stage. This affects everybody, but Lear especially. He lives for much of the play in his own world, much of the time he doesn't relate at all to people coming and going. This applies to everybody - if you relate too much you'll break up the scene. Just find your own identity. Now that's a very odd note to give an actor - you're usually told the opposite. But it is true that in this play you should live in your own world. ⁷

Tom Courtenay comments on playing John Clare:

One of the most important things is your voice. As an actor, you've got to try to put yourself

in situations where you stretch your voice, because if you don't stretch your voice, you don't grow. It's interesting that my voice is better in the second half than in the first. That's because it's difficult to get centred in the first half. There's really very little opportunity for the audience to get to know me until the scene with Patty in the garden. ...⁸

Of course once a main character begins to understand his predicament and to contemplate the social action necessary for his freedom, Bond intends him to be more attractive. Often, however, audiences fail to immediately appreciate the shift to hero. Certainly the critics found nothing heroic in the Lear premiere. Gregory Dark sums up the critical response:

Most of the company grim with hangovers, grimmer after seeing the reviews. We searched for a few intelligent remarks for our front-of-house quote-boards, but these were not all that forthcoming. On the whole, we felt that the critics were scared of giving an outright condemnation - they had been caught out that way with Saved - but obviously did not like the play, so they chose a middle road which satisfied nobody, and really meant nothing.⁹

The critics also failed to see the hero in mad John Clare. In fact, their reviews were so uniformly deprecating that Martin Esslin felt compelled to take them to task. He concludes his blistering article:

I have only come across one review which does justice to this aspect {Bond's language} as well as the many other beauties of what undoubtedly will, in due time, be regarded as a major work by one of the century's greatest playwrights. It is by John Lahr, and appears in the January 1976 issue of Plays and Players. Needless to say, that one really adequate appreciation of The Fool, which might have helped an audience to understand and appreciate

it, came out just after the play itself had closed.
The Fool will soon be seen all over Europe.
 When shall we have another chance to see a production in England? Our daily and weekly critics have done their best to delay that chance for God knows how long.¹⁰

Bond does not like theatre critics.

... Critics annoy me. If a house is on fire and I shout 'Fire! Fire!' I don't want people to commend my shouting ability, I want them to join in the firefighting.¹¹

He responds to audience confusion about his characters by giving patient explanations of his work. In The Bundle he experiments with a more consistently active hero, Wang. He also rewrites plays. Lear necessitates Bingo; The Bundle is sub-titled New Narrow Road to the Deep North.

Brecht cannot alienate his characters enough while Bond finds it easy to alienate his characters perhaps too much. It would seem that V-effects are harder to control in practice than in theory. Some critics even question the theory. For example, Peter Demetz thinks

... the audience will again and again try to overcome the most violent shocks of alienation; ironically, the audience's desire for theatrical illusion may well be more richly gratified by Brecht's ingenious "counter-actions" than by the mechanical illusions of the "realistic" stage. Resistance does not necessarily make enjoyment impossible; it may even add to its charms.¹²

Yet given that alienation shocks may work in the way anticipated by Brecht and Bond, there is still a problem. Any shock over time loses its potency. Brecht suspected that the power of his plays to stimulate reason would fade quickly.

... human nature knows how to adapt itself just as well as the rest of organic matter. Man is even capable of regarding atomic war as something normal, so why should he not be capable of dealing with an affair as small as the alienation effect so that he does not need to open his eyes. I can imagine that one day they will only be able to feel their old pleasure when the alienation effect is offered. ¹³

Bond confirms Brecht's suspicions.

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. ¹⁴

This means new alienation techniques must be discovered and used constantly - a demanding job. Moreover, there is the further complication that when an author establishes a reputation for shocking the audience, the audience will tend to react to his new plays with obstinate equanimity. Peter Gill hints at the phenomenon:

You tend to want to protect your actors, because you don't know how a new play's going to go. You just plough on and hope for the best. I don't know to what extent the audience that comes are Bond freaks, so to speak, who are not going to find certain things as odd, laughable, risible etc., as they might have done a few years ago. Anyway, one was prepared for quite a lot of things that didn't happen. ¹⁵

There is no doubt Brecht and Bond have influenced the development of the theatre. Bond writes that today, "We live in a time of theatrical vitality. One can see many younger writers emerging and developing now who could certainly change the nature of drama." ¹⁶ As Bond suggests, Brecht deserves credit as the pioneer who began the reviving process.

His vigorous exploration of the theatricality of the theatre, his encouragement of the sister arts - design, music, choreography - to again participate in the theatrical event, retired the confining middle-class drawing room from the stage. After 1949, the exceedingly liberal financial support of the East German government¹⁷ allowed Brecht and Helene Weigel to gather "the greatest assemblage of theatre talent in the world, to form the nucleus of the Berliner Ensemble."¹⁸ Through this vehicle, Brecht influenced many. A young Bond was deeply impressed.

I didn't get my 'Brechtianism' from the Court but from seeing the Berliner Ensemble in London in the late 'fifties. They were speaking a foreign language and I had no theatrical education, but I recognized his importance then as I'd only done with one other writer, Shakespeare. ...¹⁹

Bond, too, has contributed to the new vitality of the theatre. His fight, strongly supported by Bill Gaskill, against the Lord Chamberlain for his early plays Saved, Early Morning and Narrow Road, helped abolish theatre censorship. Since then Bond has continued to assist the Royal Court Theatre and its young writers. He is generous with advice to directors, translators and students. His own work keeps opening up new theatrical territory.

How effective, however, is theatrical vitality in advancing Brecht's and Bond's basic cause? Both playwrights appeal to the working class as "changers of society". In 1954 Brecht described his plays as "based on ... the aims

and outlook of the working class, which is trying to raise human productivity to an undreamt-of extent by transforming society and abolishing exploitation." ²⁰ Bond describes his working class focus in a poem, On Art 2 :

Shall I paint the dead?
No use, they made their will long ago
You weren't in it

Shall I write odes to a known beauty?
No, she rotted
She has no favours to give

Shall I write marches for the emperor's armies?
No use
Their dirges have been written

Write for a new age
Of a path that leads away from violence
And isn't guarded at every mile post
By a Class Garrison

Write for the working class
Which needs no chains
Which does not forge the world
To give currency to lies ²¹

But the theatre today, especially in England, is usually regarded as a middle and upper class institution. How can it be used to reach the working class?

Brecht considers some possibilities in the Short Organum:

... The bare wish, if nothing else, to evolve an art fit for the times must drive our theatre of the scientific age straight out into the suburbs {working class districts} ... They {the workers} may find it hard to pay for our art, and immediately to grasp the new method of entertainment, and we shall have to learn in many respects what they need and how they need it; but we can be sure of their interest. ²²

Significantly, Brecht's personal experience with working class theatres was not always as productive in practice as

his intentions sounded in theory. The New York production of The Mother is a case in point.²³ Eventually Brecht intended that his Model Books be used to encourage and improve working class theatres.

Bond depends on "people of good will" who do attend the theatre - teachers, social workers, etc. - to filter his message down to the working class.²⁴ Certainly at this stage in his career he has no desire to work in television - the recognized working class medium. In his opinion most television is

... a load of old rubbish, and if you're going to write a load of old rubbish you might just as well do it for films. Everything that goes out on the screen has to be infantile or innocuous writing. It's a time for very strenuous writing. I can imagine periods when it was possible for writing to serve as a kind of social lubricant, but it's certainly not so now. Television always deals with pseudo-problems, and tries to magnify small things into great issues, knowing that it can make a lot of noise without really treading on anybody's toes or upsetting anyone. The theatre ought always to be treading on people's toes.²⁵

Finally, how much have Brecht and Bond influenced the development of society? To what degree have they achieved a theatre for social change? Faithful supporters of Brecht claim a high degree of success. In 1973 Werner Mittenzwei reports that

Everywhere in the world where people are struggling for their liberation, to improve their lives, his writings bring aid and impulse. The conditions of struggle in the anti-imperialist liberation fight vary greatly in individual countries, but Brecht may always be found in the armoury. One of the main reasons for the

international function and effectiveness of this writer is the close connection between Brecht and the revolutionary party of the working class. ²⁶

Still in Brecht's later plays there is a growing sense of stoicism which could undermine the working for social change. Increasingly, "change is welcomed for its own sake." ²⁷ The world becomes "a very noble and admirable place in view of all the different changes and generations that constantly occur in it." ²⁸ At the same time there is the suggestion that man's ability to direct the processes of change has dwindled. Characters of the calibre of Galileo misjudge the times and lose their opportunity to act:

Moreover, I am now convinced, Sarti, that I never was in real danger. For a few years I was as strong as the authorities. ²⁹

In the face of continuous change, considering man's capacity for error, perhaps endurance is all that can be expected of man. Perhaps it is the inevitable conclusion of a man who served in World War I, fled Hitler's Germany where his books were burnt by the Nazis, lived fourteen years in political exile, was interrogated by the Committee on Un-American Activities and, in 1948, returned to East Germany to develop one of the most famous theatre companies in the world.

Bond has absolutely no faith in stoicism. Indeed it is because he rejects the idea so strongly that he writes Lear.

Shakespeare's Lear is usually seen as an image of high, academic culture. The play is seen as a sublime action and the audience

are expected to show the depth of their culture by the extent to which they penetrate its mysteries... But the social moral of Shakespeare's Lear is this: endure till in time the world will be made right. That's a dangerous moral for us. We have less time than Shakespeare. Time is running out. We have to have a culture that isn't an escape from the sordidness of society, the 'natural' sinfulness or violence of human nature, that isn't a way of learning how to endure our problems - but a way of solving them. ³⁰

How successful has Bond's work been in helping to change society? Simon Trussler offers the following estimation:

Since he {Bond} began writing 'technological advance' has been transformed in most minds from an election - winning slogan to a contributing cause of world crisis, and 'growth' is increasingly recognized as a polite euphemism for unchecked material greed, and wastage of precious resources. If men do recognize their dangers in time, it will not be directly due to Bond or, for that matter, to any artist: but it will be partly due to the climate of opinion his work has helped to create. ³¹

Such praise may be extravagant. It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate Edward Bond. His ability, his sincerity, his dedication are all impressive. His reputation increases steadily. Yet personal success does not seem to deter him from his original purpose of changing society. If anything, Bond has become more determined as he has become more aware of the strength of mankind.

The tree endures the changing seasons
We cannot wait for spring or live long in winter
We cannot
We must change. ³²

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, p. 341.
- ² Fuegi, Essential Brecht, p. 175.
- ³ Brecht, Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose, vol. 5, p. 341.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 389.
- ⁵ Fuegi, Essential Brecht, p. 331.
- ⁶ Esslin, "Nor Yet a 'Fool' to Fame," p. 44.
- ⁷ Dark, "Lear," p. 27.
- ⁸ Donohue, "The Fool," p. 24.
- ⁹ Dark, "Lear," p. 31.
- ¹⁰ Esslin, "Nor Yet a 'Fool' to Fame," p. 44.
- ¹¹ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 27.
- ¹² Demetz, ed., Brecht: A Collection of Essays, p. 4.
- ¹³ Witt, ed., Brecht, pp. 227-8.
- ¹⁴ Bond, "On Brecht," p. 34.
- ¹⁵ Donohue, "The Fool," p. 31.
- ¹⁶ Bond, "On Brecht," p. 34.
- ¹⁷ Fuegi, Essential Brecht, p. 82.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Bond, "On Brecht," p. 35.
- ²⁰ Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 269.
- ²¹ Bond, Theatre Poems, pp. 83-4.
- ²² Willett, Brecht on Theatre, p. 186.
- ²³ Jay Williams, Stage Left (New York: Scribner, 1974), pp. 179-182.
- ²⁴ Edward Bond, a morning seminar held at the Royal Court Theatre, 19 July 1977.

- ²⁵ Bond, "Drama and Violence," p. 14.
- ²⁶ Witt, ed., Brecht, p. 232.
- ²⁷ Gray, Brecht the Dramatist, p. 87.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Brecht, Galileo, p. 118.
- ³⁰ Hay, Roberts, A Companion, p. 53.
- ³¹ Simon Trussler, Edward Bond, ed. Ian Scott-Ilvert (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd., 1976), p. 34.
- ³² Bond, The Bundle, p. 79.

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