

Propos d'Edward Bond en langue originale (extraits)

What I try to do is to set up situations, which an audience has to interpret, and half the craft of the actor is opening up situations, and I think this device I call the T.E. (Theatre Event) is to try to structure a scene or play so that it keeps creating situations that are full of meaning. Some of the things may seem insignificant but I think they can be used to show a great deal. I think the T.E. always has to be away from the conventional response to what's happening but not in an arbitrary way. I go to the theatre and I see lots of lights, lots of colours, lots of noise, music, and nothing is happening at all. Only arbitrary effects to convince you that something is happening, to persuade you that you don't have to bother really about what is happening, and this I think is a betrayal of theatre. A very destructive thing.

In the end, my theatre is about actors and actresses. Everything has to be placed onto the actor or the actress, because they are the interpreters and because their languages are infinitely subtle. One can write a line, with a certain meaning, a literal meaning, associations and connotations, but the greatest line I know in the English language is something that King Lear says: "Undo this button". It is extraordinary. It is a very simple line. I would say that undoing the button is a T.E., because does he struggle with the button? Does someone come to undo the button? Does he pull the button off? Does he cry over the button? The button is the centre of the world at that moment and I wouldn't say he rips the button off. I wouldn't say anything, I would leave that to the actor. Occasionally I do say: "You must say that line in this way". In a play I say: "She takes his hand and kisses it with infinite politeness". And the actress said: "That's a very strange instruction, Edward". She said: "I'll show you what you mean", and she said to the actor: "Give me your hand". She

bit his hand and threw it away. She was right. She was kissing his hand with infinite politeness as far as I'm concerned, because she'd found something. She knew the significance of the comment. She knew that it was a small thing but an enormous amount depended on it. She could use it, and that's the other watchword I have in the theatre: "use". It's not, "what is it?", but: "how can you use it?" Shakespeare can bring his army on and nobody objects. But if I say: "You put a glass on the floor", they say I'm a theatrical Mussolini, but it's not true.

What I try to do is open up the theatre in a new way. When Agamemnon is told by Aeschylus to walk on a red carpet, for me that is a T.E. The fascinating thing about T.E.s is that they reopen meanings, because I would use Aeschylus' T.E. differently. I would make it to have a meaning for our own time. If you are in prison I'll say: "Go through that door, then you can enter freedom, but please go through the door and don't break your head against the brick wall". That's all my instructions are.

I think I'm basically a comic writer. Humour can be dangerous. I don't set out to write tragic plays. I take a situation I think is important and try to find its logic. For instance, in *In the Company of Men*, the character of Leonard goes through various situations that I think in the past would have been a solution. In that sense he is a very modern character. He tries to be a sort of TV commercial businessman. He becomes an addict, a sort of Dostoevskian hero, a saint. He then turns into a gangster, he then, it seems to me, goes into very strange other worlds because his situations make different demands on him. In the end he does an act which I find I don't want really to talk about, because it appears to me he gets himself into this situation where he says: "The world is totally meaningless and therefore I must give it a meaning". And he gives it a meaning by action. What he does, as it often happens in my plays, is like Shakespeare in *Bingo*. He says: "There is no meaning in the world. The world is immoral. I must commit an act which is moral". He passes a judgement on himself. At the end of *In the Company of Men* Leonard does an act, which is apparently both evil and good, destructive and

creative, because he uses his suicide to commit murder but also to give a lot of money to somebody else. I don't particularly want to judge that. It's just a boundary situation. If somebody comes to me in the street and says: "Shall I murder that man?", I'll say "no", because I'm against killing. And if he says: "I have £ 1,000,000, shall I give it to that man?", I'll probably say: "Give it to me". It's a very ambiguous act, and it seems to me that it catches the ambiguity of our life at the moment. We are all the time putting people in prison, where people die of despair, and give heads of companies immense fortunes, and if you all do that, if you consent to that, in the eyes of God, if there is one, you'll all be criminals.

But the nice thing about theatre is that it can be totally real but allow you some privilege of distance because on one level, on one of these worlds, what happens at the end of the play is real, because people would get up and run out of plays or would get very angry, or they are so pleased. It's very stupid feeling pleased at what people are doing on the stage, or getting upset. It's just a play. But if you didn't, you wouldn't be human.

An ambiguous act like that can confront you with your humanity. Unless you're making a Hollywood film, in which you must say : "This man is evil", and then everybody's happy. I can't waste my life doing that sort of rubbish. Everything depends on the artistry of the actor or director, of being able to present that in those graphic images and movements, which clarify all the ambiguities gathered in a very simple act. It's not that I want to evade a decision. It's just that as audiences we must learn what is involved in decisions. We have to know what we are doing as people, and it seems to me the whole of our society is based on preventing us knowing what we are doing as people.

We've been talking about imagination, and that's for me the most important thing in the theatre, but there is a logic in the imagination. We think of a logic of reason. The idea that there could be a logic of imagination is foreign to us. We think of imagination as something fanciful, but imagination is really the

way we relate to reality, it's the way we create our reality. When imagination is corrupted it becomes fascistic. That is the dark theatre of fascism. So one is as a writer constantly trying to find reasons for human behaviour, one has to find new means of doing this. It's like when I was a young writer, I was very influenced by Brecht. A couple of years ago, I had a play produced by the Berliner Ensemble. I spent a certain amount of time there talking to directors. I was absolutely certain, when I came away, that what the Berliner Ensemble was doing, what Brechtian theatre is said to do, wasn't a help anymore. Not that we have to put Brecht in the dustbin, but it has to be understood in a new way and I don't think there are cultural barriers about this, because I think that if I take a line like: "Please undo this button", that is a very simple line, but in any culture it would have enormous ramifications, because it says something about an old man behaving like a child. It says something about political power, about learning, about reason and sanity.

Everything can be made critical in that way. Yesterday, when I was walking around Père-Lachaise, and there were all these stone actors standing on tombs, in rather theatrical settings, I knew what the sculptor meant and I also asked myself, "What does this tell me about death? Perhaps, I should just look at the earth between the stones". Theatre makes experience cogent in that way. And there aren't really cultural limitations about that. Cultures work in different ways, languages work in different ways. When my plays are translated into French, some things are lost, and other things are improved, and it's the total business that one has to relate to. For instance, when I saw the production here I learnt new things about my play. They were not contradictions, they just enlarged the meaning for me. They made it more graphic. And now, when I meet my plays in the street, I shall recognize them in new faces.

I want to present something so that you have to name it, and of course all our culture which we get from the past is against this. It constantly wants to label things and situations and not necessarily to identify what these things do. If I use devices like

the T.E., it is trying to take away the ideological misconceptions we have of things. About that scene, what I imagined is quite complex, because when I saw it here, I saw something about it which I had not thought before. But it's legitimately there: the father dies and so does the sky. I had never realized that before. The sky dies. It's a useful idea because it will have a meaning in these layers of words. What I intended originally was that the light would go away and you would just hear this voice and this voice would go on a long journey through various worlds and it does that quite structurally. It describes shooting somebody, and then it looks at that closer, then it looks at the sound and the whole geography gets turned upside down. And it becomes as if the wound is calling that bullet towards it. And then it seems to go beyond that into a world that seems more basic, a world that has to do with war and many people having been killed and bones crying in the mud. People come on old films, and go "bang bang I'm dead". I wanted to open that. There is a universal meaning there that cannot be got by saying: "Ah! I'm shot".

My plays are actually done a lot in schools. Very often young people find them easier to understand than adults. And I have had remarkable experiences of teachers talking to a young audience and saying, "In this play you have seen this happen here", and the child would say, "No it doesn't". And always the child is right. It's not that I have any romantic vision about children. If we all returned to the innocence of childhood we would kill each other, but there is that ability to be creative I want to create in the theatre.

If you talk about the state of the theatre in England, it changes very dramatically. There's the new drama, a whole wave of young writers about which I could talk at great length. I think that all I can do is to use those opportunities which are available. Last year I went back to the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed *In the Company of Men* there, and I couldn't do it because the actors and the people in the theatre spent all their time learning to lie about Shakespeare. So how could they tell the truth about me? But the situation changes. I might go back and

work again at the Royal Court. A new man has taken it over. He had the misfortune to be for a limited time one of my students, and they tell me he's all been influenced by me. So, perhaps I'll go back to the Royal Court Theatre.

The most rewarding work I do is working with the younger writers. There are enormous pressures in English theatre because they all talk American, and there is an enormous pressure to write stuff that will go to America. This is very destructive. On the other hand, in Los Angeles, there's a group of theatre workers who have something called "The Tuesday Laboratory". It's called "Tuesday" because there's a play of mine called *Tuesday*. They worked on that play and found it interesting, and they have a programme of about ten plays, some by me, some by other writers, a writer called Motton, whom I like very much and an amazingly brilliant young woman writer called Sarah Kane. One of the great happinesses of my life is to be able to be of some use to her. One has to relate to a situation and make it as useful as one can.

What I would like for a theatre like this is to become a stage for young French writers. If I feel I have a legitimate place here, it is to help make that happen, because theatre is always renewing itself, but it is something that one can learn. One can learn new skills, one must invent new forms of theatre. One of the annoying things about this new wave of theatre is that they all revert to Ibsen sets. All these plays happen in a drawing-room. They all castrate themselves in the drawing-room and other things like that. One wants to go out of the drawing-room.

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