

edward **BOND** **LETTERS**

selected and edited by **ian stuart**

4

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EDWARD BOND

LETTERS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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

Franc Chamberlain



Edward Bond in rehearsal for *In the Company of Men*,
Royal Shakespeare Company, Barbican, UK, October 1996.
Photo: John Haynes.

PREFACE

Edward Bond Letters 4 focuses on four significant areas of Edward Bond's work: Education, Imagination and the Child, Theatre-in-Education, *At the Inland Sea*, and Language and Imagery. As with other volumes in this series of letters, the correspondence represents a coruscating attack on our present society as well as offering insights into how the situation might be improved.

Readers of the *Edward Bond Letters* volumes will appreciate what a formidable and ultimately fruitless task it is attempting to group this writer's correspondence into specific areas. (For example, some of the letters which appear in "Education, Imagination and the Child" could also be included in "Language and Imagery" and vice-versa.) However, for both the specialized student and general reader, I feel that these divisions, as artificial as they are, provide a useful way of chronicling Bond's thinking on aspects of his plays and society in general. Consequently I have provided a selection of what I consider to be the most helpful letters in understanding these key areas of Edward Bond's philosophy.

I have included in *Edward Bond Letters 4* a few notes and lectures Bond has prepared for presentation at conferences and meetings. These documents may seem out of place in such a volume but I argue for their inclusion as I feel they accompany and amplify themes in the letters.

"Education, Imagination and the Child" is the largest section in this volume, containing some twenty letters covering much of Bond's thinking on these issues during the period May 1989 to November 1995. In the letter to John Hind, Bond attacks modern education arguing that "children are being educated to sell themselves." And in Bond's correspondence with Dic Edwards, a playwright, he develops this philosophy

towards education, stating that “education becomes a deliberate effort to deny people the ability to judge: I want to paraphrase the military adage, you’re not in school to ask questions or understand, you’re here to learn the facts that we’re here to teach you.”

Edward Bond suggests that social problems are caused by an oppression of the imagination; the imagination is the force “at the centre of our self and society” (Letter to Bernard Samuels). Bond maintains that it is the corruption of the imagination, its restriction, which allows the imagination to become less creative and more violent. “Imagination is, then, the search, the expression of the need, for justice.” This search for justice is critical as, Bond believes, our future depends on an understanding of our imagination. (Bond’s concept of Justice will be explored further in *Edward Bond Letters* 5.)

“For the child, Imagination created facts and meaning together, for the adult Imagination is used to create the meaning of facts” (Letter to Odile Quiro). As he contemplates children and the use of their imagination, Edward Bond clearly states that it is the lessons which are taught, the stories which are told, that create the social lies that prevent the responsible development of the child’s imagination. In Bond’s opinion, a child’s world has “moral truth...but the adult world has political lies.”

In discussing the function of the child’s imagination Edward Bond focuses on a play which, at its centre, offers an assessment of the many difficulties faced by our present society: *Tuesday*, written by Edward Bond for BBC Schools Television. Some of Bond’s views about this initial production were included in Chapter Seven of *Edward Bond Letters* 3. My rationale, therefore, for including additional letters on this play — to Richard Knapp of Swansea Institute, to Jérôme Hankins, the French translator of *Tuesday*, and to Richard Langridge, the producer of *Tuesday* for BBC Schools — is that they discuss the corruption of the imagination and make helpful connections between imagination and the child both within the context of this work and outside it.

Edward Bond's commitment to Theatre-in-Education (TIE) is reflected in Chapter Two. In this section I have attempted to group both the general and the specific letters and notes about TIE. After an opening statement written in support of theatre-in-education, and a letter to Susanna Dunne about the importance of TIE, this chapter documents the importance, through letters and notes, of two groups — the Belgrade Theatre-in-Education Company and the Dukes Theatre-in-Education Company — as they fight extinction. Two further documents are in the form of proposals to extend the work of Cambridge Youth Theatre (CYT) although the statements' use resides outside the confines of that particular company. According to Bond, "values are not facts, in the way that science and say, perhaps, history may be facts. Values are acquired only in creative involvement."

Chapter Three focuses on Edward Bond's 1995 play for young people, *At the Inland Sea*. The section begins with a note to the Arts Council in which Bond develops ideas for the play and then, in "Waiting at Auschwitz", examines a speech commenting on "how and why the lines came to be written as they are." The letters which follow are to Geoff Gillham, the play's director and organizer of Big Brum, the Birmingham Theatre-in-Education group which toured *At the Inland Sea* to local schools. Beginning with an anecdote about a stranded bird found by Gillham, which has surprising links with the play, the four letters are a useful guide to the play's interpretation in this initial production and also contain *The Face* — a poem written by Bond for the Hamburg Schauspielhaus when they celebrated the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

The final section contains four letters that deal with both the language and imagery found in Bond's *Lear* and *In the Company of Men*, although connections to imagery in some of Bond's other plays are also made. These letters remind us of the uses of imagery in Bond's plays and in the theatre generally. Bond reminds us in a final description that "the good image is always absent, because it is present in the mind" (Letter to Pierre Bernard).

My usual word about punctuation. Edward Bond has his own unique style of punctuation (and initial capital letters for names) which I have tried to preserve. Any additional errors are my responsibility. Other than this preface, I have chosen not to provide a commentary on the letters, the intention being to allow the letters to speak for themselves. However, I have provided footnotes which refer the reader to published texts and will, I hope, clarify references. Throughout the volume I have arranged Bond's correspondence chronologically, except in Chapter Two. In this chapter I have placed the letters in date-sequence within the various appeals that Bond has made on behalf of the three Theatre-in-Education companies: the Belgrade; the Cambridge Youth Theatre; and the Dukes.

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Ian Stuart
Los Angeles, California
January 1998

LIST OF PRINCIPAL CORRESPONDENTS

Simon Atkins, teacher
Georges Bas, professor (retired), Sorbonne University, Paris
Pierre Bernard, Théâtre de Quat'sous
Georgina Brown, critic, *The Independent*
Katuscia Corrente, writer
Phil Davey, teacher
John Doona, teacher
Dic Edwards, playwright
Mandy Finney, Big Brum TIE
Geoff Gillham, Big Brum TIE
Jérôme Hankins, translator
Steve Harrison, teacher
Ruth Henig, The Dukes Theatre
Richard Knapp, teacher
Richard Langridge, producer, BBC Schools
Petronilla Lucente, student
Benjamin May, former student, Lancaster University
Hilde Rapp, writer
Bernard Samuels, Plymouth Arts Centre
Peter Smith, teacher
Stephan Wetzl, dramaturg, Berliner Ensemble

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1

EDUCATION, IMAGINATION AND THE CHILD

Phil Davey
Bedford

26 May 1989

Dear Phil,

Thanks for your letter and the drawings by the children you teach, for some of my short stories. The account you give of the stories in the last paragraph seems to be an extremely informed, in fact a classic, statement of what stories (and for that matter plays and a great deal of education) ought to try to achieve. I only hope some of it is true of my own stories. Its a great satisfaction to know that I can be of some use to teachers such as you. The present reforms in education are potentially very dangerous. Children are going to be educated into being adroit and disciplined at taking instructions in school — and that means, in later life, orders — without the sensitivity to ask themselves if they ought to follow their orders and without the understanding of society and psychology to enable them to give a human answer. Really its preparing the mentality which makes it possible to use people as apparatuses of government. That is what Nazi education was about. People say that we dont (yet) have fascism — but that isnt the point: we can prepare for it, and then when the crisis occurs the preparations have been laid. I dont think English people have any idea of how reactionary our society is when compared with much of Europe. The hysteria over the Falklands made that clear — it was supposed to be in defense of freedom but really it put our own freedom in greater danger than it has been since the prewar National government.

The pictures are very interesting — and not what I'd expected. They seem very analytic — almost like drawings of things seen under a microscope (drawings on a slide). They don't have any aesthetic cushioning but seem direct. It's as if the children wanted to pin down certain events. The clarity has really surprised me — and it shows how observant and reflective, how thinking and listening, children can be. They're the sort of images one puts away in the back of one's mind and they come out on you suddenly — perhaps to ambush any evasions or lies we might resort to? Yet there is an aesthetic presence there too — it's almost in the blank spaces, almost a code in the blankness — as if the children were taking the stories into that world of their own experience and evaluating them. I feel very much — I was going to say *challenged*, by the drawings. But that isn't quite right. It's as if the drawings insisted on a certain standard of telling the truth, that gives them a strength such that you can't look at any of them without immediately realising how vulnerable the children are.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Bond

Benjamin May
Lancaster

4 September 1992

Dear Benjamin,

Your letter is crammed with ideas and reflections and I cant comment or respond to them all. I find them stimulating. Im sending you copies of some letters that touch on some of your concerns.

I'd also like to comment on what you say about Freud and Oedipus. Freud saw his ideas as bombshells — and didnt propose a sterile accommodation to society. His vision was basically tragic — and its worth recalling that his octogenarian sisters were gassed. His ideas were debased by American psychoanalysts — how to succeed in the rat race, really, and still remain spiritually aloof? But Freud was pointing to important things about the human mind.

I dont see how the Oedipus-and-Antigone myths could be anything other than true. Nor are they obscene — they are the child's reading of the world and children are never obscene. Obscenity is something children are taught when they stop creating a mythic response to their situation and learn society's interpretation of it. When society fragments the psyche by imposing its own interpretations on the child's experience. The child (as is Sophocles' Oedipus) is caught in power relations beyond its control, it is faced with its ignorance (the blankness of the sphinx) and its vulnerability. This experience becomes the foundation of its later life because it gives it the symbology with which it must work: we dont learn a completely new language at each critical stage of our life: if we did, how would the later language converse with the former...? We would be faced with a language we could not learn...and so we each of us talk many languages and are more than one "I". We interpret the Oedipus situation from the adult's language (and you use the word "obscene") but the child understands it in its own language: my point is that this isnt the language we talk but is still one