A Character Type in the Plays of Edward Bond

Dissertation

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Abstract

To evaluate a young firebrand later in his career, as this dissertation attempts in regard to British playwright Edward Bond, is to see not the end of fireworks, but the fireworks no longer creating the same provocative results. Pursuing a career as a playwright and theorist in the theatre since the early 1960s, Bond has been the exciting new star of the Royal Court Theatre and, more recently, the predictable producer of plays displaying the same themes and strategies that once brought unsettling theatre to the audience in the decades past. The dissertation is an attempt to evaluate Bond, noting his influences, such as Beckett, Brecht, Shakespeare, and the postmodern, and charting the course of his career alongside other dramatists when it seems appropriate.

Edward Bond’s characters of Len in Saved, the Gravedigger’s Boy in Lear, Leonard in In the Company of Men, and the character in a number of other Bond plays provide a means to understand Bond’s aesthetic and political purposes. Len is a jumpy young man incapable of bravery; the Gravedigger’s Boy is the earnest young man destroyed too early by total war; Leonard is a needy, spoiled youth destroyed by big business. There is a sense in these young people that they are just starting out, inexperienced in the social situation Bond dramatizes in his work, and that they are doomed to be failures. Richard Scharine early on in Bond’s career dubbed such characters Bond Innocents. They are optimistic and inquisitive souls, identifiable in art and life.
A difficulty in the characterization occurs in how Bond utilizes the character type politically. In some cases, the character is deemed heroic by Bond when he is not. In other cases, he is the example of someone not following the right path, unnecessary for the socialist future, or he is just unnecessary for those onstage, who consider him, after he is used, a creature of insignificance. Bond’s political ardor is intense. Characters, such as innocent bystanders during war, may be eliminated with only some regret. The political cause, the ends, justifies the means. The ethical mistake of destroying innocent characters, the dissertation suggests, is what makes Bond’s theatre not the most engaging example of late 20th century political art. The man who is famous for showing situations of torture on stage becomes, through his continuing disregard for the naïve character, notorious for his misuse of the naïve and fledgling.
Dedication

For Dennis Torma
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Vita

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Chapter One: “I was in the trees.”

1.1 Len

In Edward Bond’s Saved, the audience learns that Len, previously considered free of any entanglement in an infant’s horrific death, actually witnessed the killing of the baby in the park. “I juss saw,” is Len’s statement of involvement, “I was in the trees” (Bond, Saved 86). “In the trees” is a rather poetic turn of phrase in a play noted for its blunt language. Perhaps Len was “in the trees” in that he was in the treed section of the park, hiding behind a tree trunk as the men bashed the baby to death. Perhaps Len was “in the trees” by truly climbing a tree, watching the baby’s torture between the branches. Len offers the information not as a confession of guilt. If there is regret in Len’s voice, it is based on his concern for the man who has been jailed for the crime. If Len had acted, perhaps the man would not be where he is.

Len tells of his passive witnessing of the event to Fred, now in prison for the baby’s murder. It is an ironic situation: Fred is the only one caught of the entire group that tortured the baby to death. The other murderers have got off scot-free. Scapegoat justice suffices in this world of dysfunctional law and order. Society, in the form of a wrathful mob of women, roars ineffectively in anger on the streets as Len, Fred, and the baby’s mother, Pam, talk in the jail. Fred takes no blame for the death. He hides the truth of his group’s involvement from the police – it was a bunch of toughs he never saw before who killed the child. He blames the fact that he is young as the reason the police
will not believe him. He also blames the baby’s mother, Pam. She should never have had a baby; she should never have brought the baby to the park. Ultimately, it really does not matter anyway, he reasons: “It was only a kid” (Bond, Saved 85). If Fred shrugs off responsibility, similarly irresponsible is Len, who does not seem to think too much about his participation in the crime. He just didn’t know what to do, he tells Fred.

In an interview with Christopher Innes, Edward Bond gives an assessment of his approach to playwriting. “I don’t think in categories. . . . It’s totally inappropriate to what I try to do, which is strictly analytical. If it [a play] is fantastic then it seems to be because reality is fantastic, and I’m merely recording the absurd or the fantasy which is sometimes present in life . . .” (Innes, “Rationalism” 109). The recording of the absurd and the fantastic can be easily seen in Bond plays like Early Morning, with its lampooned characterizations of the royal family and other Victorian icons, as well as in the grotesque situation of the conjoined twins, Princes Arthur and George. The absurd can pop up in a Bond play occasionally, as it does in the last moments of The Pope’s Wedding. The absurd also can be seen in Saved, with its character of Len, someone “in the trees,” someone whose feet are not fully on the ground.

W. B. Worthen parallels Bond’s work with Brecht’s, where “‘realistic’ and experimental attitudes are tried out . . .” (qtd. in Worthen 90). Published notebooks show the young playwright shaping his ideas on Saved’s composition. “For a long time one sees shapes of moving figures bulging behind a canvas, and then a hand, a whole arm, a shoulder and even a head, break through” (Bond, Notebook I, 71). Bond the experimenting dramatist places Len on the edge of things. Affably Len leans forward to
be accommodating. Neurotically he hangs back in fear and contempt. Unlike other main characters in the play, Len is given no exposition, no background. He is an example of what Georg Lukacs ascribes, via Heidegger, to modernist fictional characters. Len is “thrown-into-being” (Lukacs, “Ideology” 20). Len comes to Pam’s house like any anonymous one night stand and he stays for the rest of the play in a state bordering someone who has just arrived.

Bond develops Len in the first scene as an insecure, easily distracted man who cannot focus on Pam, what with his need of constant surveillance of the environment. It is up to Pam to get things going, even if just out of habit. Len, on guard, would rather eat Pam’s chocolates and make jokes. The momentary appearance in the room of Pam’s father, Harry, shows the disturbing side of Len. He is more than bothered by the brief appearance of the old man; he is noticeably threatened. He jumps up to listen at the door to see if Harry is about. As Harry appears to leave the home, Len is comfortable enough to yell disparaging remarks in Harry’s direction in a humorous way. It is a childish person that is seen onstage, an unattractive but identifiable portrait of a nervous young man.

With an almost non sequitur directness that cuts off at a moment’s notice, Len sets the tone for the play, providing a communication style that cannot develop beyond simple introductory remarks that end in evasion. Len is a man who never talks about himself, but rather seems to discuss what he assumes is occurring in other people’s minds. When Fred is released from prison in Scene Ten of the play, Len is his usual thoughtful self, aiding Pam in her suggestion that Fred move in with them, even though he is Fred’s rival for Pam’s attention. After being cordial, he asks Fred, “What was it
like” (Bond, Saved, 113)? Fred responds reasonably, thinking Len is asking about his stay in prison. “Wass it feel like when yer killed it?” (Bond, Saved, 113) is how Len clarifies his question. It is difficult to ascertain why Len is asking Fred the question. Is he needling Fred? Or does he really want to know more about torturing a child? Or is he in some way just projecting what Fred is thinking now that he is face to face with Pam?

As the play’s protagonist, Len does not appear strong enough to either perform the traditional dramatic role of an outsider bringing new perspective to the social situation or perform the role of an anti-hero who will disturb others with his personal, disruptive energy. In the house of Harry and Mary, there is minimal interpersonal contact. Len, the outsider, even with his easygoing ways, is in such a stagnant situation that he threatens the environment just in asking any question. Any remark he makes disturbs; any movement he makes provokes. Not much is needed to agitate these damaged people, who react, as Bond notes, like “cornered, wounded animal[s]” (qtd. in Hay 46).

Outside the home, social damage is visible. Contact among the disenfranchised angry young men and their occasional interactions with the indifferent women are a series of slight, transitory skirmishes. Humiliation is what happens to those who lose the social game; not being humiliated is the prize, the chance to show bravado. Len carrying his landlady’s groceries is not the performance of a simple, practical act in this social environment. It is a picture ripe for humiliation; it becomes a great topic for the men who are watching. Len is objectified by the men as the really sad case of a loser chasing after an old woman’s skirt. Len is not angry at their derision. He is amused. He sees their side of things. “They’re juss ‘avin’ a laugh” (Bond, Saved 43).
Len’s lack of personal response and his carefree attitude at being sexually humiliated in front of others throws him into the light of being a crawler, a weak drone who does not seem to want to defend himself. Bond does an excellent job with Len in showing how society strongly creates the individual, rather than the individual creating the social situation. Bond’s approach is not to show the hurt soul of Len, why for instance he has become such a chameleon, but to show the real Len as developed by his actions, absurd and disappointing as they may be. “Never play the character, always play the situation” (qtd. in Cohn, “Fabulous” 194) is William Gaskill’s suggestion to the actors in another Bond play, but his words apply to Saved as well.

Because Bond sees “[g]oodness, kindness, restraint, magnanimity, perseverance” (Notebook I 212) as traits just as possible in a Nazi general as a pedestrian on the street, he finds the portraying of character traits in drama suspect. What is important is not character traits or character motivation but “the nature of the act,” how the act “interacts with others in society” (Bond, Notebook I 212). In his essay, “The Rothbury Papers,” Bond offers the breadshop as a metaphor of the dramatic stage. The drama’s task is to compare morality with manners, “the art of social relationships” (Bond, Notebook I 205). “The whole person is engaged in the world of manners, one takes one’s soul to the breadshop” (Bond, Notebook I 206). It is at the breadshop that one’s manners are analyzed – they can be as good as those that “can work in utopia” (Bond, Notebook I 206) or as wanting as those of the characters in Saved. The breadshop is a place of social analysis, in which a person finds his or her character in social interaction, in his or her “collection of relationships” (Bond, Notebook I 212).
1.2 Len and Pam

The bobbing and weaving, neurotic Len meets his match in Pam, who is sullen, despairing, and wounded. She clunks down in each scene, even when she is standing. The complementary pair talks to each other as if they are improvising dialogue, the strategy of which is to never settle on any specific topic but to hover briefly over the topics of sex, family, trivial needs, and people’s shortcomings. “Dramatic discourse must be avoided” (Notebook I 71), Bond states in his notes regarding the composition of Saved. “Use unfinished sentences” (Bond, Notebook I 74). The cross talk pattern Esslin mentions in absurdist plays like Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (47) is Len and Pam’s pattern of dialogue:

Len: Livin’ like that must ‘a got yer down.

Pam: Used to it.

Len: They ought to be shot.

Pam: Why?

Len: Don’t it every worry yer?

Pam: ‘Ow?

Len: Supposed you turned out like that?

Pam: No.

Len: ‘Ow’d it start?

Pam: Never arst (Bond, Saved 34).

Pam’s evasions have a clear psychological origin, as will be explained as the play proceeds. For Len, short spans of curiosity are a way of life. It is the ability of Len and
Pam to carry on in such a manner that engages the audience in the play in its earliest scenes. While the dramatic plot will soon continue Pam on her progress to unhappiness and Len on his to ethical decline, for at least a brief while the plot shows two overgrown, dysfunctional children at play.

Len and Pam’s dialogue recalls the exchanges of Beckett’s two characters in *Waiting for Godot*:

Estragon: What’s wrong with you?
Vladmir: Nothing.
Estragon: I’m going.
Vladmir: So am I.
Estragon: Was I long asleep?
Vladmir: I don’t know.
Silence.
Estragon: Where shall we go?
Vladmir: Not far (107).

Richard Scharine in *The Plays of Edward Bond* sees Bond doing overall the better job in creation of characters than Beckett:

Beckett’s heroes are condemned to hope, a pain from which they would be gladly released. They continue to live because their humanity allows them no other choice. Bond’s heroes cling stubbornly to their humanity, accepting even their pain as a sign of life (58).
Scharine’s comment, however, works just as well, perhaps better, if the playwrights’ names are reversed. The characters in Saved express hopes that never are fulfilled, Pam for a life with Fred, Len for a life with Pam. Each character expresses a desire to leave their painful, frustrating home life, yet they all remain. Sadly, they cannot accept pain; they are even in denial about the death of the child that lived with them. Didi and Gogo in Godot are more able, in fact, to cling to their humanity than Pam and Len are able to do. It is not just that they don’t abuse a baby and so their humanity is of a higher kind; it is that they maintain camaraderie between themselves, even when things unravel and become disorienting.

If the most basic social unit is two people, as Brecht has said (On Theatre 197), then Didi and Gogo maintain an active unit whereas Pam and Len cannot. The appearance of a true confidante is rare in modern drama, Lukacs notes, gone are the days when Hamlet has a Horatio (“Sociology,” 442). In Beckett’s drama, at least, Didi and Gogo do have each other. Scharine compares the two sets of characters from the perspective of Beckett’s characters’ continuous games that seem to go on and on and their apparent lack of self-direction. Others, Herbert Blau for one, would argue that the real subject of Beckett’s Waiting for Godot is found not in the characters’ exhaustion but in their inexhaustibility: “Beckett didn’t invent despair, neither does he rest in it” (Blau 230).

Rather than label Beckett as decadent and politically without merit, as Bond, Lukacs and others do - and as Scharine’s comment seems to suggest - perhaps a better tact to take is to consider plays like Godot as tonic in an age often drunk with politicizing
rhetoric. Jon Erickson’s essay, “Is Nothing to Be Done?” supports an idea of Herbert Blau, that *Godot* is, in fact, not just a major work of the 20th century, but an important *political* play – a notion that would shock Bond. Bond is so attached to the politicization of all human events and to the function of historicity that he cannot think Beckett’s work in any means political. Bond’s political viewpoint holds the same “utopian premise of Communism” (260) that Erickson mentions in Lenin’s goals for the Soviet Union. The politicized utopian drive can go too far, however, confusing real, extant “questions of social justice with those of cosmic justice” (Erickson 268). As Erickson notes, there is a problem in the wide sweep of the political Weltanschauung: “[T]he demand for justice and fairness can reach such utopian proportions that we become blind to its limits, which are the limits of chance and time and our radically finite understanding and of mortality” (261). Bond exemplifies this overreach in his viewing everything in the current historical situation that is unjust, dysfunctional, or violent as being due to capitalism. Bond’s disgust of capitalism has no limits. “It is a truism that in our present society no one can afford to be human and no act is purely good” (Bond, *Notebook II* 196). When, it can be asked, does political critique stop and see its limits, when is justice better served by withholding a response, rather than attaching an easily accessible, negative label?

In *Waiting for Godot*, the space the two characters occupy does not provide any evidence that the misfortunes they face are injustices to be righted or not. It is a dramatic site where conclusive judgment is absent. As Erickson suggests, rather than too hastily and politically sanitizing every environment or preparing everything for a social report, moderation needs to seize the day. A moderate position allows for reasonable
deliberation that takes into account the challenges of political action: “We are left with
the ongoing injustice of misfortune while trying to alter what is arguably unjust. And we
are left to live and act and wait within the space of their difference” (Erickson 271-272).
Beckett’s play, Godot, operates within the space of the difference.

Pam and Len, of course, occupy a dramatic space much different from that of Didi
and Gogo. There are clear cases of injustices in Pam and Len’s world. Their treatment of
the baby is more than just unjust; it is pathetic and tragic. In a sense, Len’s very staying
in Pam’s home when he is not wanted is an injustice also, a disregard for Pam that makes
Len seem like an obsessive stalker. In Saved, the characters may not see the injustices
clearly, but the author does. He withholds the characters taking action for political
reasons. He wants to critique the two characters’ situation in order to show as clearly as
plausible the sad state of life under capitalism. Like Brecht’s Mother Courage, Pam and
Len cannot learn the lesson that is in their front of their faces. History for the two is in
lower case, personal histories devoid of large framework historical thinking. Possible
future actions are based on romantic dreams. After one night, Len is ready to move out
with Pam, marry her and find a house. Pam and Len do not discuss their personal
histories, but the past is there, in the form of Harry and Mary’s pact of silence, the
onerous act of never dealing with one’s history.

After the initial two scenes of the play, Pam and Len’s living together mocks their
individual needs; each one is the block to the other’s most simple considerations. Given
more freedom ostensibly than the two Beckett characters, they are more constrained,
more trapped onstage. The situation initially provides some sense of comedy but it is not
up to the style the *Godot* characters enjoy. The comedy in Beckett’s play engages the audience, not just through word play, but also from the understanding of how absurd life can be, especially life under pressure. As Erickson notes, Godot can be considered “reflective of the limits or even failure of politics in human affairs . . . Godot always seems to have a salience in war zones - for example, Susan Sontag’s production in Sarajevo or the play’s appreciation by Iraqi students “(259). People under the great duress of living in a war zone may find themselves surviving in a pattern similar to Didi and Gogo. People’s daily lives may have the general rhythm Blau ascribes to Beckett: “I can’t, I must” (229). The comedy between Pam and Len, compared to that of Didi and Gogo, is limited, based on nervous teasing and pathetic reactions to imagined threats. There are no jokes about the situation they are in, no laughs about their world they inhabit. The absurd comedy is dark and sadly negative. “Jokes indicate the victims, parody signals complicity, while humor reveals the predicament of the intellectual in a violent society” (267), Rademacher notes about Bond’s comic methods. Len absurdly being in the trees is one example. Pam pushing the pram with a dead baby inside is another.
1.3 The Absurd

Characters that are dramatic irritants rather than catalysts, that seem to thrive on stasis, that pursue information in a random, careless fashion, that participate in absurd micro-events alongside tragic macro-events – the character traits of the absurdist theatre could easily describe Pam, and, more especially, Len. Bond wants to write a play “out of nothing,” where this is to be an elimination of “dramatic confrontation” (Bond, Notebook I 71). The purpose of the approach, however, is not anywhere like the one Bond ascribes to Beckett, whom Bond sees as utterly apolitical and thus a useless artist. “I am made weary by the theatre of Beckett,” he writes, “because it is written with great care and artistry yet nothing comes of it except pity” (Bond, Letters III 23). Bond’s work is to be a rational art based on a coming socialist utopia:

What art conveys is that human beings envisage perfection, that their condition makes the search and creation of that perfection morally necessary, and that the often seemingly arbitrary and absurd events of history have meaning as part of this creation (“Rational” xiii).

Certainly, the absurd may participate in the current degraded stage of political development that Len and Pam face, but eventually Bond, the utopian artist, conceives the arrival of a perfect social state, where the absurd and irrational will be minimized.

What with his aversion towards absurdist art, Bond is rankled by an early critic of Saved who states, “[M]orally the production offers a blank cheque to the audience’s imagination” (Notebook I 92). Bond counters in his notes that “the moral involvement of the play is stressed” (Notebook I 92). Plays that write moral blank checks for the audience
travel a path not desirable to Bond, whose goal is for the political stimulation of the audience. Citing Beckett, as he often does as a negative example, Bond believes that plays without moral function only lead to artistic prostitution and the capitalist commoditization of art. “[T]he philosophy of the Absurd,” he tells Calum MacCrimmon, “claimed to be a moral statement about foundations. . . . It took political violence and separated it from any judgement [sic] . . . If you live in a society where a banknote has meaning . . . then everything else has meaning . . . derived from money” (Bond, *Letters I* 31). Bond wants art to have social purpose and moral strength. Anything else plays into the greedy, corrupting hands of capitalism. “[T]he philosophy of the Absurd is a philosophy of the rich which they require the poor to live. Beckett has . . . written . . . pages bought for a thousand pounds. . . . That is an act of violence,” Bond intones (*Letters I* 31).

Bond’s continual denouncing of the Theatre of the Absurd presents several difficulties for him. As far as Len’s development as a character, it means that Bond is not fully aware of the interesting Frankenstein he is creating. Bond makes authorial comments in his writings outside of the play about Len’s ethical nature, yet an ethical nature is exactly what Len, as well as other characters in the play, lacks. It is, in fact, Len’s lack of character that is his most interesting dramatic trait. Overall, Bond’s dislike for the absurd is an issue of artistic development. Had Bond, for instance, followed the path of the absurd and discounted all exposition in *Saved*, his dramatic points would have been better made. Knowing why Pam’s family is dysfunctional overly explains the play, and, in a sense, asks for their forgiveness. Rather than walk a tight rope with the absurd,
Bond begins in proceeding works to tighten a didactic grip on his art, resulting in obviously preachy, sometimes clumsy “answer plays” (qtd. in Hay 75). Moments of broad farce, not any developed comedy of the absurd, will become his comic outlet. Certainly, many of the flexible tools of modern theatre come from absurdist theatre, as witnessed by their successful use by Harold Pinter and Caryl Churchill. Bond cannot forgive the absurd its refusal to explain itself, not remembering his own early ideas that explanations are not always necessary.

If Bond cannot acknowledge the Theatre of the Absurd in his work, it of course does not mean that others cannot. Worthen fits his description of a “drama of an undiscoverable interiority of character resisting an inscrutable, vaguely oppressive milieu” (81) to both the dramas of Beckett and Ionesco and to the early works of Pinter and Bond. In Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* and Bond’s *Saved*, the domestic environments onstage at first seem very shabby places of cold comfort, but by the plays’ ends, the homes are further made even more unwelcome by an external, oppressive terror. The families in *Saved* and *The Birthday Party* go back to their individual routines at the end of the plays. The absence of any response to the terrors that happened is deadening. Stanley and Len’s interiority in the two plays is mostly blank; the two men react to present stimuli given, but how they got to the present, why they are where they are, is not clearly known. Worthen is correct in suggesting that the Theatre of the Absurd is at work.

Bond’s reasons for disliking Beckett’s work often show a streak of hypocrisy, a closing of one’s eyes to one’s own faults, if faults they be. When Bond pronounces, “[T]here can be no good play which doesn’t praise life. (This is an argument against [sic]
Theatre of the Absurd)" (Notebook II 181), is he forgetting that many of his own plays are not in praise of life? Bond’s Coffee, which describes man’s indifference to the Holocaust, and Saved, which shows indifference to the death of a child, are not best described as vehicles in praise of life. What is different in the result of pity that Bond thinks proceeds from watching Godot and the pity Esslin, among others, is able to feel towards the characters in Saved? In fact, it is much more likely that the audience will feel more pity towards the damaged people in Saved than those in Godot. Bond’s rejection of Beckett is not tempered by enough detachment to see that what he dislikes in Beckett is present in some of his own plays, either in theatre-tool usage or audience response.

Adorno’s statement about Lukacs and other social realists’ wrongheaded dislike of the absurd, “They hate in Beckett what they have betrayed” (121), can be reshaped for Bond. “He hates in Beckett what he is in denial about in himself.”

It can be argued that what is best in plays like Coffee and Saved are the absurdist elements effectively mixed with Bond’s social concerns. Len and Pam’s continuous arguing and misbegotten attempts to fulfill similar but never matching needs play out well as a mixture of comedy and pathos; absurd, yet socially apropos to the situation. All the run-ins between characters, in the shorthand, condensed speech they employ, in the various scenes of park and lake, home and cafe, have the pace of an absurdist play. Even at the end of Saved, when the murder scene has passed, the silent tableau, with the character’s mimed performance of trivial acts, provides a powerful, absurd image of social stalemate. As Jenny Spencer has asked, what would have Bond become as an artist, had he followed the path taken in his first two plays? Bond’s The Pope’s Wedding
and *Saved*, “through ambiguity, elliptical dialogue, working-class subjects, sexual
innuendo, and unresolved tensions . . . [occupy] the same critical space staked out by a
playwright like Pinter” (36). An added question: What would have become of Bond as an
artist, had he not had such frozen contempt for Beckett?

Raymond Williams, a writer politically committed to the left like Bond, approves
of *Godot*, as a work that shows “the possibility of human recognition . . . and of love . . .”
(155). In regard to Beckett’s later plays, his approval evaporates. Williams identifies
works like *Endgame* as symptomatic of the art of a dying class, the bourgeoisie of late
capitalism. “There can be endless false traffic, as well as general confusion, between
notions of a doomed and contemptible species, of a hopeless and played-out civilization,
of a guilty and dying class, and of a displaced and alienated sensibility” (Williams 213).
Beckett’s art is a significant form, Williams notes, occurring in this point in history where
the “dominant messages are of danger and conflict and . . . the dominant forms are of
shock and loss” (208). While absurdist work is *significant* in this age, what, however, is
the *dominant* form of this period for Williams is one which fits Bond’s two early plays,*
*Saved and The Pope’s Wedding:*

The fact and source of tragedy are now, centrally, the inability to communicate.

People . . . assemble or are assembled. . . . [I]t is a collectivity that is only
negatively marked. . . . This group or that group exists, but always negatively.

There is no effective identity within it or outside it (Williams 214).

Williams desires the committed artist to get past the two negative dramatic forms. Both
absurdist work and tragedies of non-communication employ dramatic forms for those
aboard the *Titanic*. The artist needs to get past the “doomed verbal games” of later
Beckett or the negative groups talking past each other (Williams 216). Williams does not
give examples of the latter, but they could certainly include the early works of Bond.

Twenty years after *Saved*, another play arrives that deals with the abuse of the
child. The dramatization does not require aggro-effects to shock nor does it abstain from
interpersonal dialogue in order to present the image of lonely people unable to effectively
communicate with each other. The first surprise of Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* comes
from a Brechtian defamiliarizing technique in an offering of fantasy in the absurdist
theatre tradition: the presenting of seven women who never met in real historic time
coming together onstage for lunch and talk. The women include Pope Joan from the first
century, a famed Japanese courtesan who later travels Japan as a nun, the famous 19th
century British traveler, Isabella Bird, and two fictional characters, one from Brueghel
and one from Chaucer. These top girls talk of their individual historic times with
descriptive ease; they tell tales of bravado. Ultimately they expose the weight of history
upon their status as humans and as women, as in the example of Pope Joan’s recollection
that when she was discovered to be a woman, she was promptly stoned to death.

The loss of children or the inability to have them are expressed by the women as a
theme the audience will later see as significant for the present day characters of the two
sisters, Marlene and Joyce. After the astonishing scene with the historic figures, Churchill
switches to the realist mode to dramatize the story of a current top girl, Marlene, who left
her baby with her sister so that she could flee from a life of poverty at the bottom of the social structure. Churchill presents Marlene’s child, Angie, as an unhappy young teenager. She has no friends her age; other children consider her slow and odd. She is in remedial classes at school. She is an angry young girl who hates Joyce, the woman who cares for her. She places her Aunt Marlene on a pedestal. Both older women see little prospects for Angie. One is so busy getting ahead and the other is so resentfully making do that there is no room to really nurture the young girl before them. The drama is contemporized by the women’s talk of Margaret Thatcher, whom Marlene adores as much as Joyce despises. In the realistic drama of the play, the future of Angie is deftly captured. She does not die, like the baby in Saved, and yet her situation of abuse and neglect, in being dramatically realized, is all the more poignant and disturbing. Churchill, unlike Bond, can utilize the absurd as well as realist traditions to make a political play that awakens the audience in ways Bond cannot seem to imagine.
1.4 Realism

Bond positions his work in the realist tradition championed by Georg Lukacs, mentioning to Christopher Innes that he even sees *Early Morning*, with its *Ubu Roi*, over-the-top presentation of Victorian icons, as an example of "social realism" ("Rationalism" 109). To Worthen, Bond is an example of Lukacs’ “creative realist . . . [who] works to shape the ‘living dialectic of appearance and essence’” (89). Like Lukacs, Bond considers the social realist artist, never the absurdist artist, as the steward of art, best able to perform the task of presenting, as Lukacs describes it, “the concrete potentiality,” of the individual which “is concerned with the dialectic between the individual’s subjectivity and objective reality” (“Ideology” 24). The dialectic appears when the individual acts in the social world. “[O]nly in activity do men become interesting to each other; only in action have they significance for literature.” Lukacs writes (“Narrate” 123). “The sole test for confirming character-traits (or exposing their absence) is actions, deeds – practice” (Lukacs, “Narrate” 123).

Bond’s creative updating of a social realist play, however, is a somewhat risky venture in *Saved*. On one hand, Bond wants the audience to “‘take action’” (Lacey 149), as audience members conceivably might do in response to a play of social realism. On the other hand, as Stephen Lacey states, “[t]he problem is that Bond does not provide his audiences with an obvious course of action to take . . .” (149). Lacey believes that Bond does not give the audience “an obvious context in which to assess motivation” (149). Why, under such unpleasant circumstances, does Len want to stay at Pam’s house and why, with such an annoying boarder, do Pam and her family allow Len to stay? Certainly
Len is not the helping Geoff nor is Pam the symbol of a young unwedded pregnant woman’s begrudging, yet accepting humanity that Jo provides in the contemporary realist drama, *A Taste of Honey*. Significantly, as Lacey notes, there are no politically motivated characters in Bond’s play. “There is no Weskerian hero (or heroine) to articulate the play’s preferred point of view” (149), no Beatie Bryant, who in Wesker’s *Roots*, shares her newfound understanding of herself with the audience at the play’s end.

Bond does not want to give what he thinks would be easy answers in his play. He does not want to write a play that dramatizes “actuality … or [that gives] the glib proffering of specious explanation” (*Notebook I* 73). In *Saved* his is a rather ascetic approach to realism. Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey*, with its dramatizing of the actuality of the young, pregnant Jo and her relations to her wanton mother, black boy friend, and gay roommate, worked in the 1960s to open the dramatic situation to include what were then unfamiliar dramatic types. Beatie’s realization in Wesker’s *Roots*, that she needs to learn to speak for herself, is not so much a specious response to events but a personal attempt to find a way of rising out of the confinements facing her. Jo and Beatie may display too easy (and therefore perhaps too suspect) a means for the audience to identify with them, but their struggles to new understandings of themselves are eye-opening and brave.

Bond, in not emphasizing realist markers of character development and identifiable characters who offer the playwright’s point of view, risks confusing the audience or leaving them cold. The analytical Bond strongly believes it is best to present the problem as well as he is able and let the audience do the analysis. “Any literary solution of a problem is bound to be arbitrary, because it must use an emotional
commitment, and is therefore an attempt to condition readers or spectators to this particular solution . . .” (Bond, Notebook I 36). What Bond has stated regarding his social theories in his essays applies to his early “problem” plays like Saved: “I have not tried to say what the future should be like. . . . 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” (“Author’s Preface” 11).

In his version of social realism, demonstrated in his early plays, Bond is on both sides in the debate between Brecht and Lukacs concerning effective political art. Lukacs prefers realist drama; Brecht prefers new epic constructions with theatrical alienation effects. Lukacs’ contention with Brecht, in one regard, is the same as his (and Bond’s) problem with Beckett: he finds in Brecht an unnecessary stylization of art, an attention to modernizing forms over historic content. As Wright states, “Lukacs . . . wants to see real contradictions emerging from a single unified narrative, but this has to be done without betraying the hand of the artist” (74). Brecht, on the other hand, “uses demystification, not to get at the real, but to get a proper relation to reality, for it is in that relation that human values take shape” (Wright 73). Lukacs’ position is described by Bela Kiralyfalvi:

The receiver comes to the art work not as ‘tabula rasa,’ but as a ‘whole man of life.’. . . The true work of art endeavors to create its ‘own world’ and break into the recipient’s soul-complex, suspending his concern with the petty elements of his personal life and transforming him into a sense of ‘man’s wholeness’ whose concern is the destiny of humanity (24).
While Bond sides with Lukacs on the idea that the political art work is best cast in the mode of social realism, containing the historic contradictions within the work itself, he does not have the confidence that Kiralyfalvi projects for Lukacs’ modern audience. Especially in his later didactic phase, Bond, even with his high regard for the working class, realizes the audience needs to be assisted in gaining the correct political consciousness. “[M]any of the audience will not be political conscious and so will not understand the event” (“Dramatic” xiv), the playwright realizes. He must jump in to give interpretive support.

In approaching the audience, Worthen believes Bond operates in Brecht’s camp. To Brecht, Lukacs’ social realism is just stuffing new content into the old form of 19th century representation models that promote illusion and empathy. Brecht’s epic theatre, with its alienation effects, creates “human social incidents . . . [as] something striking, jolting, or discomforting, its aim is to bring the spectator to a heightened awareness of certain aspect of human social reality” (qtd. in Kiralyfalvi 23). Worthen compares Bond experimenting with form to elicit new relations to subject matter and audience to be similar to Brecht’s. Here it is a matter of vaulting over Beckett to get to Brecht:

How can we read the openness of the scene in Bond’s theatre not as the vaguely hostile and indifferent emptiness of the absurd, but as an attempt to disentangle realistic presentation from the oppressive social practices that form ‘the physical, institutional, legal, domestic environment – in a word ‘the social environment . . .’ ” (Worthen 91)?
Worthen’s question discredits absurdist dramas by reducing their affect to “indifferent emptiness” and in suggesting Bond’s dramas require a special Brechtian type of disentanglement to get past the absurd – as if the absurd did not disentangle realist representation enough.

In his discussion of Bond’s social realism, Worthen focuses on Bond’s theatrical depiction of the environment. Bond’s utilizes in Saved a few items to represent Pam’s home, the park, and other locations so as to connote a naturalist setting in a minimal way. Bond as creative realist wants to identify the objects on stage “as elements in a society. Somebody has had to pay for every object on my stage, somebody has had to work for it. . . . [T]he relation of the characters to those objects . . . for me, becomes very telling” (Innes, “Rationalism” 112). Pam’s relation to the Radio Times, which offers her a connection to the popular media and a distraction from her life, seems of more importance to Pam than her own baby. The pram is also of more interest to the child murderers at first than the baby. The pram represents the men’s ability to form anything, despite its contents, into an instrument of aggressive play. The paucity of objects also shows the characters holding on to relics of the environment, their decreasing contact with the environment, the loss of comfort of chairs, tables, pictures, curtains, all that fully represents a settled life. The remnants are ironic comments on the situation. The trash cans that Nell and Pell occupy in Endgame and the uncomfortable couch on which Len and Pam are to have sexual intercourse in Saved – both are sites that show the characters relating to very little and getting nowhere.
In creating the scenic environment, Worthen sees a similarity between Pinter and Bond. The boarding house in Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*, however, is set up differently than the house with a rented room in *Saved*. The comforts, at least the objects, of home away from home are all there in Meg and Petey’s resort establishment, but in a dilapidated condition. Pinter’s equates Meg and Petey’s to a place he found himself in on tour, the description of which he sent in a letter to a friend: “I have filthy insane digs, a great bulging scrag of a woman with breasts rolling at her belly, an obscene household, cats, dogs, filth, tea strainers, mess” (qtd. in Hern xxix). On *Saved*’s stage are so few items as to seem improvisational props. Bond talks of the aridity of the environment he equates to that of his play:

“I always get the impression, whether it’s true or not, that it’s . . . more industrialized. I’ve got a feeling too, that it’s physically flatter there – and those miles and miles of long straight streets that always look the same. I used to call it the brick desert . . .” (Scharine 64).

The examples of the two playwrights’ perceptions of reality are emblematic of their dramatic focus: Bond sees broadly, socially, analytically; Pinter sensually, personally, experientially. In the sense of defamiliarizing the stage environment, Bond is perhaps more Brechtian than Pinter. Worthen projects upon Pinter’s stage environment the notion that “[t]he stage displays its objects, but they fail to cohere, to claim a self-evident and natural relation to the characters and to a larger dramatic world” (83). It is not solely or mainly Pinter’s scenic objects that fail to cohere, but the dialogue and action of the characters onstage that create the instability.
Bond dislikes Pinter’s dramatic approach, which like Beckett’s, but even more so, creates the “experience of the situation being mysterious and of there being some hidden value within the mystery” (Letters II 143). He additionally is not impressed with Pinter’s use of dialogue, the famed Pinteresque speech with its razor sharp exactness, its casual repetitiveness, its spill into threat, and its pauses. For Bond, this is all just a style of generalities and evasions; Pinter is following a dead-end (Bond, Letters IV 86). Peter Hall explains Pinter’s dialogue in a more positive light:

“Pinter is always a cockney; albeit sometimes a very well bred one. The essence of his work is ‘taking the piss’: deriding an antagonist while treating him with extreme friendliness and charm. Ideally, the person whose piss is being taken should be entirely unaware of the fact. London taxi drivers are experts at the technique” (Shellard 94).

In Bond’s Saved, the men outside the home show derision, although there is no veneer hiding their contempt, as in Pinter. In Saved, dialogue does not develop to Pinter’s level of exchange. In fact, the most significant moment of similarity in dialogue in the two plays is realist enough: when Stanley, in Pinter’s play, is tortured to the point of making animal noises of pain, he reaches the state of the neglected, tortured baby in Saved.

Despite Bond’s disapproval with Pinter’s dialogic content, there is a valuable comparison in noting both playwrights’ agile use of the rhythm of dialogue, especially for Bond in his early plays. For Gilliatt, Bond’s approach to language is not so much a realist “slice of bread” as it is “skillfully stylized” (qtd. in Donahue 20-21). For others, however, the play is so realistic as to be documentary in style. In Saved, Donahue notes, Bond is
using his “own native, childhood speech” (Donahue 27). The working class language is based on “short, broken, stereotyped utterances,” where specific inflections indicate meaning, in comparison to “‘educated’ speech,” where meaning is indicated by the “intelligently’ ordered expression of internalized concepts” (Donahue 21). Donahue’s categories are certainly debatable, as if there are no working class who read more than Pam’s Radio Times and none among the “educated” upper classes who do not speak in grunts and groans. Nonetheless, Donahue’s reductionism complements Bond’s dislike for analytical discussion onstage: “I don’t like the theatre of discussion where people sit down and talk intellectually about an idea, because I don’t think that is what theatre is about. Theatre involves the whole person on the stage” (Innes, “Rationalism” 112).

The concept that the “whole person” does not on occasion talk intellectually is as troublesome as Donahue’s division of uneducated and educated speech. It as if the analytical Bond has no space for any other intellectuals in the room. There is a risk in the employment of singular manner of speech as the lingua franca of a class. Members of the class might be insulted, as a young dramatist from a South London working class family, Howard Barker, was when he saw the play:

I do remember feeling that Bond’s presentation of the South London working class was abominable and contemptuous. The inarticulacy, the grunting and monosyllabics, being accepted as a portrayal of working class people did offend me . . . (qtd. in Lamb 31).

When Beckett was asked about Waiting for Godot, he replied with a Latin sentence from St. Augustine that translates as, “Do not despair: one of the thieves was
saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned” (qtd. in Esslin 53). Beckett did so, he said, because “I am interested in the shapes of ideas even if I do no believe in them. . . . That sentence has wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters” (qtd. in Esslin 53). Ideas, shaped through language, do have an attraction in their composition as Beckett’s bemused statement suggests. What can be entertaining is witnessing the development of a new shaping of thoughts and emotions in dialogue, to see how it will play itself out in the drama. How will it create its rhythms? Will it relapse in conventional patterns of dialogue? Bond’s use of dialogue in Saved may allow some audience members to come to the conclusion that it recalls the patterns of an urban class, but this ignores Bond’s skill as a critical realist shaping material to create a “specific form of a specific content” (Lukacs, “Ideology” 19).

The form of cliché, so often apparent in the dialogue in Saved, seems to actually indicate the level of the character’s intellectual capacity, as Lacey notices (150). When Fred lies and says that it was another group of men who tortured the baby, he pontificates, “Pam. I don’t know what’ll ‘appen. There’s bloody gangs like that roamin’ everywhere. The bloody police don’t do their job” (Bond, Saved 85). Fred’s resorting to basic truisms about street violence avoids his connecting personally to the child’s murder and expressing any possible self-conscious shame regarding what happened.

Dialogue in Saved is not always in the form of the cliché. Len’s dialogue with others sometimes goes beyond the pattern of brief questions followed by the listener’s evasive response. There is an improvisational quality to Len’s dialogue with others that liberates Bond’s characters from the drudgery they otherwise evoke. Len’s exchange with
Pam in the boat is an example of the possibility of their getting beyond their individual circumstances by actually talking to each other:

Pam: I’m goin’ a knit you a jumper.

Len: For me?

Pam: I ain’ very quick.

Len: Can’t say I noticed.

Pam: Yer’ll ‘ave t’ buy the wool.

Len: Knew there’d be a catch.

Pam: I got a smashin’ pattern.

Len: You worried about that rent?

Pam: I ‘ad it give us.

Len: Yer ‘adn’t be one of the naggers.


The dialogue that Bond affords Len, Pam and the other characters, for long passages in *Saved*, is enjoyable for its formal effect, just as it is in a Beckett or Pinter play. For a play that leads finally to a reign of silence among the family members, it is the dialogue that often holds the audience’s attention in anticipation of what the characters will say next.
1.5 Hyperrealism

In “Hyperrealism in Contemporary Drama: Retrogressive or Avant-garde?” Gelderman places Bond among those playwrights creating a new type of realism, a hyperrealism that, with its “theatricalization of everyday life . . . [is] the only truly new aesthetic since the theater of the absurd” (366). Gelderman’s essay, written in 1983, links the new drama to the emerging New Realism in photography and painting, which captures McDonald’s restaurants and gin bottles point-blank, “realistically,” without a point of view. Gelderman and Malkin also find a source for the new drama in German folk plays, especially Horvath and Fleiser’s “Critical Folk Plays” of the 1920’s and 1930’s (Gelderman 358; Malkin, Verbal 194). The new hyperrealist drama differs from the folk parables of Brecht. As Kroetz notes, “If the workers at Siemens were as articulate as Brecht’s workers, we would have a revolutionary situation” (qtd. in Schregel 474). Kroetz, as a hyperrealist, believes that language is not owned by the lower classes. Like Bond with his distaste for the theatre of conversation, Kroetz disdains what he calls the “garrulity” of conventional drama, where the “existence of speech, dialogue. . . [is] the central agency of dramatic values . . .” (qtd. in Gelderman 361-362). Dramatic language belongs to the privileged class; the articulate is produced from a position of power.

As Worthen notes, lower class characters are often just supportive characters in much of the earlier 20th century realist drama. “To view the lower classes as objects is one of the originary aspects of realistic theater” (Worthen 73). It becomes the task of hyperrealist drama to show the lower classes as protagonists, albeit caught in a dramatic
arena where their language is not their own. Unlike Beatie in *Roots*, they can not gain power over their lives by taking power over their language. To give the rural poor of Kroetz’s *Stallerhof* and the disaffected lower middle class in *Saved* their voices, Kroetz and Bond utilize “actual speech, with all its repetitions, silences and pauses . . .“ (Gelderman 360). From the rhythm patterns of everyday speech the two artists invent their style. Malkin notes the Kroetz creates “an abstraction of lower class speech, a ‘model’ of verbal inhibitedness and poverty . . .” (“Verbal Politics” 365). Gelderman similarly describes Bond’s creation for his more affluent, urbane characters a “highly distilled stylization of rambling inarticulacy” (361).

An example of the technique developed by Kroetz occurs as the parents of simple minded, pregnant Beppi consider how to best handle the unwanted pregnancy of their child, based on rape, as they walk to church.

Staller: Does it show yet?

Pause.

Stallerin: Nothing yet.

Long pause.

Staller: I can see something.

Stallerin: You’re imagining it. There’s nothing to see.

Pause.

Staller: No one should ever see anything.

Stallerin: Of course not.

Long Pause.
They say if you’re slightly crazy, you don’t feel death like the rest of us.

Staller: Right, just as a fly feels nothing.

Pause.

Stallerin: Fifth: “Thou shall not kill” (Kroetz, Stallerhof 24).

Kroetz’ dialogue with its long pauses, lack of emotional tone, and use of familiar quotes, makes Bond’s seem loquacious. As Malkin notes, “Bond’s language . . . is much more insistent and fluent” (Verbal 127). An example of Bond’s style of dialogue can be seen in the example of life at home after Pam’s baby is born:

(The baby screams with rage. After a while Mary lifts her head in the direction of the screams.)

Mary: Pam-laa!

(Slight pause. Pam stands up and puts her cosmetics in a little bag. She goes to the TV set. She turns up the volume. She goes back to the couch and sits.)

There’s plenty of left-overs.

Len: Full up.

Mary: An’ there’s rhubarb and custard.

Len: O.

(Pause. The baby chokes).

Pam: Too lazy t’get up an’ fetch it.

Mary: Don’t start. Let’s ‘ave a bit of peace for one night. . . . (Pause, to Len.)

Busy?

Len: Murder.
Mary (Watching TV): Weather don’t ‘elp.

Len (Still watching TV): Eh? (The baby whimpers pitifully. . . .) (Bond, Saved 46-47).

“Hyperrealists are social critics,” Gelderman says, “without ideological commitment” (364). This certainly seems the case in the early plays of Kroetz, where no political point of view is visible. The hyperrealist is called to the stand to express his or her observations without bias. Gelderman, however, quotes Scharine to point to a distinction in Bond: “Bond is the artist who uses his art as a prosecuting attorney uses his brief: the defendant is the social order; the crime is perversion of the innocent; the evidence is Saved” (qtd. in Gelderman 365). In a way Bond is too opinionated to be a hyperrealist. He goes beyond the hyperrealist approach by dramatizing the notion that the social function of the character is falling apart. A basic social role, for example the role of mother, has more staying power in Kroetz’s play than in Bond’s. Beppi’s mother ultimately is a better mother than Mary is to Pam in Saved. Additionally, aggression is more sadistic in Saved than in Stallerhof. The farmhand’s rape of Beppi is a terrible act, but it is not as mean-spirited as the cruel, incessant sadism of the men murdering the baby in Saved. Saved employs the long pauses of Stallerhof, but it returns with a faster beat. Most often something must fill the void. If nothing else, Len can ask another question or Pam or another character can complain about their immediate needs.

The new hyperrealist drama does not want to perform miracles in portraying the lower classes. The underprivileged characters are less the supporting objects within the scene than they were in earlier realist presentations, but they are, in the artist’s
presentation of them as a single social class, objectified. Nor do full rights to dialogue and action make them escape their limited dialogue or social circumstances. There is still stasis; there are still unexamined injustices. In both Stallerhof and Saved, violence is at an extreme level. The very young Beppi is raped by the seedy old farmhand; in the sequel, Ghost Train, she kills her baby and is incarcerated in a juvenile detention center. The stoning of the baby in Saved is violence in extremis, also. Marx may valorize the proletariat as the class that will bring the revolution towards its utopian goal. The hyperrealists, however, must remain true to their vision. “In creating an authentic picture of the lower class, hyperrealists do not flinch from showing their characters as malicious, egocentric, cruel, and destructive” (Gelderman 363).

Certainly, hyperrealism is not a retrogressive art movement, in response to the question Gelderman’s essay’s title asks. Nor is it really avant-garde, in the sense of its most noteworthy strength being (in Erickson’s definition) the “foregrounding and deconstructing [of] the theatricality of its own operations (and analogically that of social ideology and norms)” (“Defining” 157). Rather, it creates another dramatic space for consideration, one where the audience can do little more than observe. There is nothing for Lukacs’ audience to ethically absorb and then resolve. There is nothing for Brecht’s audience to apply their critical, scientific approach. It is a general study hall period. Critics say such dramatizations speak volumes, but they do not. The dramas are closer to being at zero point of speaking to the audience. It is not that they are just withholding information. The artist does her or his job: the audience can see clearly. Gelderman steps in at the essay’s end to quote hyperrealist playwright, Georges Michel:
We are in the midst of a period of transition. An old world is dying, a new one is yet to be born. Science keeps moving ahead, while man stands still, marking time. Our need for certainty is rudely shaken. All the old truths have to be reassessed (qtd. in Gelderman 366).

Hyperrealist observation and capture of material must be direct and unbiased. The old truths to reassess are many: the political, the aesthetic, the social, the personal, the ethical.
1.6 Overstressing History

As seen in excerpts from his notebooks, Bond realizes that Marxism may lose the guarantee of reaching its determined goal of a classless society, not because its objectives might change as history progresses, as Merleau-Ponty, among many others, suggests. Rather, progress may be cut short because of the appearance of the H-bomb and other technological advancements in warfare that could lead to the total destruction of the planet. Capitalism, Bond believes, rather than be vanquished by communism, could decide instead to just blow up the planet. In a list of social issues, Bond places the H-bomb at the top of his list (Notebook I 155). Bond sees himself in an incredibly urgent situation. Violence could domino into total apocalypse. Communism, itself, in the Soviet example with its totalitarian values and purges, has caused more than trouble in the ranks. History has placed a barrier in the way of Marxism; people are generally alienated from it as a concept. A pragmatist, Bond understands that these are the “circumstances in which we have to work – there are no others and when we fail to break this barrier: we have failed. We do fail almost all the time – and I do not think we need to fail” (Notebook I 134-135). As he gears to breach the political alienation of the audience, he is oriented by the failure of the Soviet Union and looming presence of the atomic bomb’s mushroom cloud.

In a world on the brink of total disaster, Bond offers a rather harsh statement towards a character’s worth: a “character has not more political significance [on stage] than he does in life. . . . It is entirely irrelevant to the fate of the planet, which will be determined by other things - so that character is no longer a motive for genuine action”
Large social forces move the world and the political playwright is among those aware of the need for mass action. Individual achievement is secondary at best. As a political playwright, Bond appears in his early plays as the “authorial I” of social drama, who, Szondi notes, “stands above the play and does the showing” (36). Szondi’s example of a social dramatist is Hauptmann, who in plays like *Before Sunrise* and *The Weavers*, dramatizes “the politico-economic structures which dictate the conditions of individual life” (Szondi 35-36).

As a social dramatist, Bond is the deductive thinker handing clues to the inductive ones below. The exchange between artist and audience thus moves in one direction. The artist does not hand out what he thinks are “abstract statements universally true for all time,” for Bond sees these most often used in literature as “excuses and not reasons” (“Rationalism” xii). His expert as possible expression of the historical circumstances of postwar Britain, where communication is dead and people exist in isolation from each other, is his contribution to the social analysis that the audience performs in seeing *Saved*.

In his initial plays like *Saved*, Bond totters between telling the audience too little or too much. *Saved* may seem a moral blank check, but as Bond notes, “the moral involvement in the play is the last three scenes . . . almost . . . is overstressed” (*Notebook I* 92). Certainly in the last three scenes the moral of the story is given to the audience, by the surprising source of the usually distant Harry, the father of Pam’s family. The old man enters Len’s room, to find him lying on the floor, knife in hand, trying to see if he can hear Pam having sex in her bedroom below. In his long underwear and nightcap,
Harry seems like a ghost (Worth 207), coming to warn the living. Harry is nonplussed by Len’s pathetic obsessiveness, demonstrated by his position on the floor. Harry wants to explain the ropes to Len for living in their domestic situation: don’t talk, keep dialogue to a minimum, keep your head down, and you will do alright. Things can blow up and they do, just like when Mary, Harry’s wife, throws a pot of boiling water at Harry and hits him on the head. “It clears the air,” Harry tells Len (Bond, Saved 125). Similarly, Len’s arrival in their home stirred things up, but things are settling down. Why leave? “Don’t go,” Harry remarks, “No point” (Bond, Saved 128).

In preparing to write the play, Bond asks in his notes, “Why do people sit around saying nothing or talking about very trivial things” (Notebook I 73)? “[Either],“ he discerns, “because they have nothing to say . . . [or] they are afraid of what they will say” (Bond, Notebook I 73). From Len’s early conversation with Pam, the audience learns that something happened when Mary and Harry lost their first child, a son, during a bomb’s explosion in the park during the war. It becomes clear that the terrible silence between the parents has affected Pam, who thinks she is the reason for the parental standoff, not realizing the parents’ emotional damage might be more reasonably based on the death of their son. The cross talk irresolution of earlier dialogue begins to precipitate into a plot line: perhaps had Mary and Harry completed their grief, the family would not be as dysfunctional as it is when Len meets them. “That what made ‘em go funny” (Bond, Saved 34)? Len asks Pam about the boy’s death. Pam, true to form, is non-responsive and eager to move on. It is Harry’s later talk with Len on how to live in this lifeless environment that the initial tragedy is recalled, “There was a little boy first” (Bond, Saved
The absurd, unrealistic plan of Harry’s family maintaining a cold war of silence becomes a metaphor for the Cold War era, where historic understanding and social action threaten the status quo.

The past for the characters on stage is not to be dealt with and so becomes prologue. One baby dies from an act of violence; the next generation’s baby dies from an act of violence. Pam’s family possesses “the bombed-out consciousness” that Adorno ascribes to Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* (123). Beckett’s drama shows the state of mankind after World War II: “everything is destroyed, even resurrected culture . . . humanity vegetates along . . . survivors cannot really survive, on a pile of ruins which even renders futile self-reflection of one’s own battered state” (Adorno 122). Pam’s family is too hurt to make connections. It is a world where people cannot escape violence or history; where their wounded status has revoked their ability to go on the offensive and break their chains.

The final scene of *Saved* displays a social stalemate, a tableau where the audience witnesses the continuance of the family’s version of peaceful coexistence. “Fetch me ‘ammer” (Bond, *Saved* 132) are the only words spoken in the scene, by Len apparently to no one. Pam does immediately leave the room after Len’s request, but she does not return with hammer in hand. Bond’s stated goal in writing the play is accomplished. “Play leads up to tragedy. . . . But it doesn’t fall into tragedy. Everything – or everybody – becomes insulated – and there is no reaction” (Bond, *Notebook I* 72). Pam’s baby has been slowly, painfully murdered and all the audience sees as a result is Len and Pam’s family conducting business as usual. Mary straightens the room. Pam leafs through the Radio.
Times. Harry seals an envelope. Len fixes a chair. Len has become one of the family, the son they could not have. The tableau shows severely limited people. Working class members of postwar Britain, they are morally culpable in a child’s poor life and worse death, yet that are saved for another day of silence with an occasional act of random violence thrown in. Len and Pam are the future Mary and Harry, the moral of the story is set in their pathetic, silent acquiescence to Harry’s rules for domestic life.

With the appearance of the father as law-giver and the family status quo being once again achieved, Bond tips his hand and creates a readable realist drama. The “moral involvement” with the audience in the last three scenes is indeed an “overstressing.” Bond plucks his play from its experimental approach with realism to become a mere copying of it. Saved, Worthen remarks, is “Bond’s most conventionally realistic play” (94). In this perspective, Len is seen by Jenny Spencer, for example, in the rather traditional realist role, the naïve outsider entering a dramatic social situation. “Whether as an outsider asking questions, an observer making comments, or an insider offering unwanted but usually decent advice, Len is the likeable character through whom the viewer is introduced to this world,” Spencer writes (32). An enthused Esslin, feeling the moral involvement, praises the play:

“Bond succeeds in making his audience see deeply into the minds, and comprehend the motives, of human beings who are not only practically unable to talk but also incapable of understanding their own motives. . . . [B]y illuminating their speechlessness and letting us see into their tormented souls . . . Bond shows
us that these people too are full human beings, capable of the noblest emotions and actions” (Worthen 98).

Spencer and Esslin’s responses are examples of a common approach to the play, seeing it as a new version of the trusted social realism dramatic form offering the same benefits.
1.7 Aggro-effects

The conventional realist reading of Saved that Bond offers the audience by his “over-stressing” is, however, complicated, perhaps unconsciously by Bond, by the dramatization of the baby killing in Scene Six. Here is dramatic confrontation not avoided, but taken on full blast – a confrontation between Bond and the audience. Bond shifts from the authorial I of social drama to the provocateur of in-yer-face theatre. Scene Six swings away from the social realist offering of social/historical perspective to the punching away at the audience in a critique of their involvement. Underneath the attack, Bond wants to awake the audience, not just to the fact that a baby can be easily killed in a park, but to the status of the world in which such a thing could happen. As Bond states,

I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence. (“Preface” 3).

For Bond, social morality under capitalism is violence itself, stoked regularly by a power hungry ruling class and kept burning by its morally weakened subordinate class. This is the message unspoken in Saved, the essential meaning under the surface that Bond is wanting the audience to find.

For anyone reading Bond’s essays on the topic of violence, it is easy to see Bond’s ideas on the topic alive in Saved’s characterizations. Len fits the description Bond paints of the man “alienated from his natural self,” who “becomes nervous and tense and
. . . look[s] for threats everywhere” (“Preface” 4). Len’s introduction in the play shows a young man nervously trying to find a way to have contact with a woman, but too ready to displace mutual sex with his suspicions about her promiscuous sexual nature, too ready to be alarmed and distracted when Harry makes a noise offstage. For Bond, people under capitalism “live in a constant state of aggression” (“Preface” 3-4). A man like Len, who is deprived of his physical and emotional needs, becomes “belligerent and provocative . . . a threat to other people, and so his situation rapidly deteriorates” (“Preface” 4). Len is quickly belligerent, mocking the offstage Harry in the first scene. After Pam chooses Fred over him, Len is constantly provoking Pam, never leaving her alone, notwithstanding her many requests for him to do so. As the play comes to its final scenes of stasis, Len deteriorates into becoming Pam’s passive-aggressive stalker, lying on the floor with a knife, a menace to what little privacy and freedom she may have.

The deterioration of Len has as its counterpoint the deterioration in the men who stand around discussing the murdering of a child in Scene Three. The men exemplify for Bond what happens when a group of people “react violently because of an unconscious motive, an unidentified discontent” (“Violence” 15):

In some respects the young murderers in Saved belong to this group. Some of their cries while they murder the baby are ruling-class slogans. This is the way in which the working-class anger and aggression can be used to strengthen the unjust social relations that cause its anger and aggression, and the ruling class can recreate, in an increasingly inhumane form, the social conditions which it claims as the justification for its power (“Violence” 15).
Violence has a death hold on civilization. Bond is animated by the concept, fearing, at one point in his essay, the worst. What, he wonders, “[i]f we were innately aggressive[?]” It was necessary to for us to act aggressively form time to time. . . . [D]oes the human race have any moral justification for its existence” (“Preface” 4)? Bond cannot consider the idea of innate aggression in humans. Rather than contend with the dilemma, Bond turns to his concept of socialism, where violence will no longer exist. Terry Eagleton sees Bond’s theory of violence as being “insufficiently dialectical” (132). As Eagleton argues in his essay on Bond, “It is our nature to be maladjusted, and it is therefore in our nature to have the capacity for violence” (133). Realizing the human capacity for violence as something to be dealt within the best of social circumstances and considering a political state which works to always lessen it, is not in Bond’s line of sight. It is all or nothing for Bond.

Bond’s utopian hope lies in something he does find innate, the child’s “biological expectations . . . that its unpreparedness will be cared for, that it will be given . . . emotional reassurance, that its vulnerability will be shielded, that it will be born into a would waiting to receive it, and that knows how to receive it . . .” (“Preface” 6). These expectations parallel his definition of the basic needs of all members of society, to live justly, to “love, create, protect, and enjoy” (“Preface” 10). These defining needs for humankind will blossom in the non-violent, classless socialist society Bond envisions. Bond spotlights the baby as the spokesperson for the new humanity. “The child’s first word isn’t ‘mummy’ or ‘daddy,’ it is ‘me.’ It has been learning to say it through millions of years of evolution, and it has a biological right to its egocentricity because that is the
only way our species can continue” (“Preface” 6). Moreover, it is the dramatic metaphor Bond finds in the child’s progress in the world that is key to Saved’s composition. “Parents are worn out by daily competitive striving so they can’t tolerate the child’s natural noise and mess,” Bond writes (“Preface” 6).

[T]he weight of aggression in our society is so heavy that the unthinkable happens: we batter it. And when the violence is not so crude it is still there, spread thinly over the years; the final effect is the same and so the dramatic metaphor I used to describe it was the stoning of a baby in its pram (“Preface” 6).

To set the stage for the infanticide in Saved, there is the conventional use of foreshadowing in Scene 3, where the audience first meets the group of killers. Presented front stage is the child killer, Pete, wearing a sport coat and tie in order to attend the funeral of the boy he has just killed. He is followed closely in menace by Barry, a confused hanger-on who talks of “[s]hootin’ up the yellow nigs” (Bond, Saved 39) when he was in the war. These men have the joking, cocky style that would be ascribed to any conventional street gang in modern realist dramas, but with the most horrific of topics:

Pete: What a carry on! ‘E come running round be’ind the bus. Only a nipper . . .

Only ten or twelve. I jumps right down on me revver an’ bang I got ‘im on me off-side an’ ‘e shoots right out under the lorry comin’ straight on.

Mike: Crunch.

Colin: Blood all over the shop.

Colin: The Fall a the Roman Empire. (Bond, Saved 38).
The group’s obvious immorality is inescapably presented to the audience. Anyone having seen any violent movie, TV show or theatre piece would type these men as the villains, appearing in an initial scene in order to set up the audience’s expectations for their menacing return later on.

As Bond has mentioned, in a culture of violence anything can become a weapon, and the men in Scene Six begin to push back and forth the pram at each other in mock fighting, regardless of the living being inside. Soon though their interest turns to what is in the pram and the men begin to torment the infant in several ways. The child murderer from Scene Three, Pete, is again the instigator of the beating of the child, the first to touch the child by pulling the child’s hair. The other men follow in peer support:

Colin: ‘old its nose.

Mike: Thass for ‘iccups.

Barry: Gob its crutch.

. . . .

Pete: Give it a punch.

Mike: Yeh less!

Colin: There’s no one about!

_Pete punches it_ (Bond, _Saved 76-77_).

What happens in this prolonged scene of violence is that the audience becomes the sole moral witness available, provoked by what Bond calls an aggro-effect:

I have what I call the necessity of an ‘aggro effect.’ In contrast to Brecht, I think it is necessary to disturb an audience emotionally, to involve them emotionally in
my plays, so I’ve had to find ways of making that ‘aggro effect’ more complete, which is in a sense to surprise them and say, ‘Here’s a baby in a pram – you don’t expect the people to stone the baby.’ Yet – snap – they do” (Innes, “Rationalism” 113).

Bond’s statement is dismissive of Brecht (e.g., the audience can emotionally respond to the plight of Kattrin in *Mother Courage*) and forgetful of his use of foreshadowing of the baby stoning in the child murderers’ appearance in Scene Three. Significant in his statement is the strong desire to wake the audience up, to shake them into responding to a terrible situation: “If they were sitting in a house on fire, you would go up to them and shake them violently. And if they say, ‘You are insulting us, how dare you hit me!’ You say, ‘You don’t know what it is all about’” (Innes, “Rationalism” 113). Bond in the baby torture exhibition, in his aggro-effect, is the serious, but frustrated teacher of morality, sharing his vision to a group of students who need to have their noses placed against the blackboard because they have not done the proper homework: “they don’t know what it is all about.”
1.8 Resisting the Audience

Worthen concludes his discussion of Bond in his *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theatre* by stating that “Bond refuses the notion that the audience can share the perspective of this oppressed class” (98). It is not just, then, that audience members “don’t know what it is all about” and need an aggro-effect to wake them up. They never can comprehend what is happening. In his discussion, Worthen does not mention Harry’s exposition of the family tragedy to Len, that over-stressing of the audience’s moral involvement that Bond mentions regarding *Saved*. Nor does he take into account what the playwright has stated in interviews and writings regarding his artistic intentions in writing the play. For Worthen, Bond is not to be seen reaching out to the audience, but, rather, ruining their view. It is not that the characters do not have anything to say to each other; it is instead that they have nothing to say to the audience. Worthen paints Bond following a Brechtian “urgent assault on the practices of the stage, particularly the rhetoric implicit in realistic production and it construction of a ‘realistic’ social audience” (90).

Bond becomes ultimately for Worthen not an experimenter in a variety of forms in *Saved*, using the tools of the absurd, realism, dramatic and epic, but a master of the theatrical form of audience resistance. *Saved* arises as a unique political critique on current, conventional realist rhetoric. What Harry told Len has no weight, just an act to confuse the audience all the more. Bond’s assault on the audience, so powerful in the baby killing scene, sets the tone for the entire play for Worthen, stripping away the realist trappings and exposing the audience’s inability to understand. The audience is just seeing flak, a plummeting of debris from the author. It is the understanding of this attack upon
them that is the take away value of seeing Saved. Worthen’s argument is somewhat helped by Bond’s comment regarding the need to shake the audience because they don’t know what it is all about. Worthen’s notions, however, go against the fact that Bond anticipates and desires audience reaction and, ultimately, an understanding of the dramatic situation that he offers them.

Worthen, despite the earlier intentions of his essay, steps away from respecting the open-ended - it must be translated into something else. The vague must be replaced by the concrete. The silence of the final scene means for Worthen that the characters on the stage are “not speaking to us” (98). That they are not speaking to each other, however, seems more the point. Worthen simplifies the audience by making them seem resistant, thinking they are clueless to dramatic strategies and unable to cull anything from the drama before them. Worthen may say that “it’s not the self that has been extinguished in these characters, but rather that its possibility is withheld from the audience as a privileged point of reference and explanations” (96-97). The statement seems incorrect, as if the modern audience, versed in a Beckett and Brecht, cannot identify with characters who are not fully, realistically developed. Moreover, perhaps what the audience does see in Len and Pam and others is the characters’ true selves. There is nothing hidden; it is just that something has been extinguished in them because of their social and psychological circumstances.

It is not that Bond, however, does not have more than ambivalence to some members of the modern audience. “[H]istory abandons certain classes . . . art abandons certain classes” (Bond, “Rational” xvii), he remarks. Because Bond sees art before the
arrival of socialist art as being shaped by the ruling class, art’s history has been a difficult one. “The ruling class have the surplus value to create art or to have it created for them, and so their influence over art is predominant . . .” (Bond, “Rational” xiii). Bond’s thoughts revolve around the opposition of the working class and the ruling class. It is a very simplistic division, but Bond holds to it. He mounts the soapbox as the angry young man, a Jimmy Porter, raging against the violence within the social morality of capitalism. Bond in his zeal against capitalist society arrives at questionable rhetoric. Class society, because of its decadence, has no “moral right . . . and probably not even the political authority to deal with violence . . .” (Bond, “Violence” 15). When a child is beaten to death, class society has no moral right to step in? In his equations denouncing social morality, stated in his preface to Lear, judges equal social misfits, the censor equals the peeping Tom (10-11). Bond extrapolates wrongheaded socialized morality towards some of the audience. The violence active in the stoning of the baby “is not done by thugs, but by people who like plays condemning thugs” (Bond, “Preface” 6).

Saved, because of the baby stoning scene, becomes a milestone in the in-yer-face theatre movement, which found its apogee in the works of Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill in the 1990s in England. Aleks Sierz defines the movement:

The widest definition of in-yer-face theatre is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm (In-Yer-Face 4).
Bond’s rationale for using aggro-effects is certainly something Sierz identifies in in-yer-face theatre. “Usually, when writers use shock tactics, it is because they have something urgent to say. . . . [S]hock is one way of waking up the audience” (Sierz, In-Yer-Face 5).

The continuing torture of the baby in the pram exemplifies the in-yer-face method:

Mike: Look! Ugh!
Barry: Look!
Colin: What?
They all groan.
Pete: Rub the little bastard’s face in it!
Barry: Yeh!
Pete: Less ‘ave it!
He rubs the baby. They all groan.
Barry: Less ‘ave a go! I always wan’ed a do that!
Pete: Ain’ yer don it before!
Barry does it. He laughs.

Colin: It’s all in its eyes (Bond, Saved 78-79).

For Worthen, the baby torture onstage “comes at us with an immediacy it has outside the protective distance in the theater, in a way that is more real than realism ever allows” (97). Worthen is correct to a point in thinking Bond is breaking down audience protection. However, in the baby torture scene, what Worthen sees as more real than realism seems actually more theatrical than theatrical realism, a staged violence of blatant, almost exaggerated theatricalization. For example, the verbalized blow by blow account by the
torturers as they pummel the baby seems forced, the kind of over explanation Bond does not want to offer the audience otherwise in the play. The spoken account of baby torture recalls the old melodramatic theatrical device of the characters’ describing to the audience what they are doing in case the audience can’t tell. Additionally, the strongly stated desire to torture children, the motivation of Barry and Pete, is emphatically pronounced. A professed child killer and a racist, off balance army veteran are a little too excited about rubbing feces in an infant’s eyes to be taken as anything but craven theatrical villains. Bond is in effect rationalizing the performance of violence, not by making the violence seem random and spontaneous, but showing it being performed in necessary and efficient steps. It is a cold, clinical performance – first you pull the baby’s hair, then you punch the baby, then you rub feces in the baby’s eyes, ad absurdum.

Bond’s attack on the audience derails the audience from its understanding of the play, toppling the audience from its viewpoint. As Garner suggests,

Theoretically, the depiction of pain is subsumed within the broader system of representation governing the play, constituting the most extreme point in what Bond has called his ‘rational theatre.’ But this formulation risks underestimating the disruptiveness of pain in a dramaturgy of rational detachment and the effect of its urgency on intellectual analysis (181).

Extended acts of violence, images of torture, would be a staple of many of Bond’s plays after Saved. In witnessing these images the audience is distanced in a totally different way than the alienation effects offered by Brecht. With the introduction of Saved’s aggro-effect, Bond offers some unique choices in audience response: feel the pain of the event
and survive to contemplate its larger meaning or be angry at the author for assuming violence is needed in order to force response.

Meyerhold mentions that the artistic stylizer is an “analyst par excellence” (138), whose schematization of reality not only “seems to imply a certain impoverishment of reality” (138) but, in its second stage of stylization, produces, like a result of strain, the grotesque. Is this formal equation working in Bond, the very opinionated, voluble socialist moralist who tries to cut his characters’ “reality” to a minimum only to thereby produce a grotesque baby killing scene? Or is this scene just Bond’s acknowledgement of the hard facts of political drama, that the “dramatization of the analysis instead of the story . . . may seem cold and abstract but it is not . . .” (“Dramatic” xx).

In-yer-face theatre may have the tradition of assaulting the audience with shock tactics, but the shocks can slide into evoking ironic audience reactions just as much as a poor melodrama with too much exaggeration can turn to camp. “One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing” (qtd. in Sontag, Against 291), Wilde remarks. If Dickens’ description of Little Nell’s death was an overdose of pathos for Wilde, the grotesque overdose of violence offered by the baby stoning in Saved might be an overdose of theatricality for some audience members. The technique of shocking the audience can lead to unintentional laughter at the ridiculous rigor required of acting violent, as exampled in the scene in Brenton’s The Romans in Britain, where not only is the spectacle of murder and rape played out, but the rapists must complain en passant of what is possibly their formerly acquiring venereal disease as well as the complaint that their victim has piles. The desire cited in regard to Brenton, to ‘piss in their [the
Audience’s] eyeballs’ (qtd. in Edgar 166) can become an out of control pissing contest. Too many details can lead to the audience laughing at the overkill. Additionally, the arch audience, overeducated in violent images, hearing of a baby torture scene in *Saved*, may arrive expecting shock theatre and leave disheartened, finding it too theatrical and disappointing in comparison to the many torture scenes available in the modern world - in movies, TV, video games, comics, theatre, the web and the news.

While it may seem like Bond is treating the audience like a powerless child, rubbing their faces in a prolonged scene of violence staged especially for them, there are some critics, like George Bas, who think it is the audience’s responsibility to take from the aggro-effect the opportunity to see themselves as being in league with Barry and Pete. According to Bas, to understand how in the world Barry, Pete, and the others could torture an infant, the process requires the audience to “own the action . . . to be able to see yourselfstoning a baby and wonder why you would do that” (qtd. in Davis 203). In this view of things, if the audience takes too quick a moral stance by blaming the victimizers, they miss the chance to open up to a proposed broader understanding of the play. This tact is important to Bond critics like David Hirst, who shows condemnation of those who immediately make “glib moralistic pronouncements” (56) and fail to see via *Saved* that “public violence is a direct result of political aggression and social inequality” (56). After all, Hirst reminds the reader, the baby’s torture is connected “with the defense strategies or economic policies of the government” (55). Bond’s stated desire to not give the audience easy solutions to resolving the play is met with assumptions, at least by some critics if not by Bond himself, that they will arrive at very specific political
conclusions - if for no other reason than to avoid name-calling from critics like Hirst for being so backward as to think child torture is first and foremost child torture.

Some critics identify the audience neither as the baby nor the baby’s torturers, but as Len, who is in the trees watching the murder occur in the park. Len’s inquisitiveness that always stops before confrontation and his prurient interest in other people’s lives fits the notion of a sleeping audience that Bond wishes to awake. Jenny Spencer states that Len is “our lens” (32), the “likable character through whom the viewer is introduced to this world’ (32). What Bond does, according to Spencer, is to complicate Len as the audience guide as the play proceeds. Len’s innocence sometimes becomes passive-aggressiveness, his constancy becomes self-serving and onanistic (Spencer 31-32). As Spencer notes, the audience is like Len: “the essence of Len’s action in Scene Six is ‘to watch and do nothing’” (35). In this sense for Spencer, Len and the audience are one.

The idea that the audience identifies with Len, of course, hinges on their reception of Len, whom the audience has seen as early as the first scene as not so much an innocent newcomer but an anxious, neurotic, and awkward post-adolescent. Spencer’s belief that the audience is like Len in that they both watch the baby torture and “stay put” (35) seems a broad equation to make. Just as equating the audience with the murderers is incorrect; identifying the audience with Len is similarly placing the audience in the wrong spot. Some may, and have, walked out on Saved. Some may be in the position of the playwright and be watching the play in a political manner. Others may watch the play, like Worthen, relishing the excellent aesthetic challenges to the audience that is not
them. Whatever the response of the individual audience member, Len is on the proscenium stage and, despite any goading from Bond or critics, the audience is not.
1.9 Len in the Oedipal Drama

As a student, Jenny Spencer thought Bond’s work was “at once presumptuous, unnecessarily violent, deliberately obscure, or maddeningly simplistic” (xiii). She later was able to discover that “Bond’s plays immerse . . . [the] audience in questions involving history and politics that more popular playwrights may prefer to face” (xiv). Spencer’s fascination with Bond, in her *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond*, leads to superlatives. Bond is “more sensitive to struggles outside the theater than admittedly apolitical playwrights” (Spencer 1). “Unlike his American counterparts, Bond assumes that the stage is an appropriate and serious forum for the discussion of cultural issues” (Spencer 4). Convinced and converted in favor of Bond, Spencer praises Bond for creating plays that allow a “plurality of meanings” (3). *Saved* thus becomes a site where the “narrative itself is woven from the subtly differing responses of characters who come from the same social class, speak the same language, and face the same environmental conditions” (Spencer 7).

While *Saved* does have a variety of characters, the characters do not display any subtly differing responses. It is difficult to tell what these subtleties might be within the play, as the characters speak in brief, broken sentences to each other and, when not violent, perform trivial, self-serving actions. Certainly the need for analytical interpretation at the expense of the immediacy of reaction could allow a critic and/or audience member to find subtleties anywhere, especially in a minimalist work where meaning is left open, and, in *Saved*’s case, where there are bare differences in the characters’ manners of response. There may be subtleties of critique the audience may
wish to evoke in response to *Saved*, just as they might in a play in the Theater of the Absurd. Perhaps Didi is subtly different from Gogo in his responses, certainly Len is different in his responses from Fred – but does this require the application of subtlety to the differences?

Spencer’s appreciation of Bond’s purported ability to show a plurality of meanings is demonstrated in her following Bond in exploring the psychological elements of the play. Bond has called *Saved* an “Oedipus comedy” in his “Appendix to Saved” (311). Len, with his inability to wrest Pam away from being under Harry’s roof and his lack of success at flirting with Harry’s wife, can be seen as someone who does not break past the oedipal situation to achieve its resolution. Len’s prolonged adolescence displays itself throughout the play. He befriends Fred, his sexual rival, to find out how sex was with Pam, not so much in jealousy as to learn something about what sex is generally like with a woman. Similarly, he learns from Harry what sex was like with Mary. With both men, he is not so much someone sharing experiences as absorbing the other’s experience. “The Oedipus outcome should be a row and death” (“Appendix” 310), Bond notes, but since Len is not playing “his traditional role in the tragic Oedipus pattern of the play, Len turns it into what is formally a comedy” (“Appendix” 310).

*Saved* is not formally a comedy, unless the baby stoning is a joke. The fact that Bond calls *Saved* an Oedipus Comedy is just one of his pointed comments in his Appendix, written at the publication of the play in 1968. As with many of the provocative positions made in his essays, Bond’s discussion of Len’s oedipal status seems to offer riffs on a theme, and simplistic, rather naïve ones at that. For one thing, hasn’t Len, in
identifying with the Harry, resolved his oedipal complex in some odd way? If Bond says he is exploring “the Oedipus atmosphere at other stages” (310), why does he leave out in his analysis the infant, who could be mentioned in the regard to the Oedipus narrative, the abandoned baby left on the hillside to die? Instead he cites the “Oedipus, atavistic fury fully unleashed” (Bond, “Appendix” 310) in the child’s murderers. Do the murderers have unresolved oedipal complexes that make them need to beat up and kill a child?

Finding another psychological explanation, Spencer mentions Freud’s “A Child Is Being Beaten” essay to note that a child, having unresolved feelings for the father, turns his masochistic feelings around by substituting another child for himself in the beating fantasy (31). Is the stoning of the child Len’s projection that is being realized? Is that what Len is imagining in the trees: having Pete and Barry and the other men kill the baby as a representation of himself? Does this oedipal story indicate what Len is running away from? Lacey commends Spencer for her discussing that in Bond’s work the “psychoanalytical drives are socially located” (153). What is the application? That in prolonged, anti-social disconnects from political action, men are bound to act out scenes from the oedipal crisis? Is that what Bond is really wanting the audience to garner from Saved, to perform as an analysis – a psychoanalysis within a political analysis? If so, then violence equals the oedipal crisis and, in another Bond equation, violence equals capitalist morality. Does this mean in a socialist utopia there will be no oedipal crisis? Is this another benefit?

In discussing interpretations of Early Morning with Irving Wardle, Bond remarks, “You can always read a psychological meaning into a play. . . . That’s nothing to me in
the theatre . . .” (qtd. in Scharine 88). Certainly some sort of shopworn oedipal template can be constructed for many plays, including but definitely not limited to plays in postwar England. There is often a weary, marginal father figure, like Bildew in Barker’s *Claw*, Petey in *The Birthday Party*, and, of course, Harry in *Saved*. The fathers are complemented by their wives, addled, love starved creatures that have their doomed, youthful counterparts in the corresponding characters of Nora in *Claw*, Lulu in *The Birthday Party*, and Pam in *Saved*. The young men are portrayed as confused, easily distracted and with no secure path to the future easily available. *Look Back in Anger*, it can be even argued, initiates the oedipal template for postwar England. Jimmy Porter’s father is a failed leftist; his wife Alison’s father is a lonely, former colonialist. Jimmy’s mother is described as a dispassionate witness to her husband’s death. Alison’s mother is a symbol of hypocritical morality of the right, just as Jimmy’s mother’s hypocrisy is of the left. With the stage interpreted as an oedipal site, Jimmy can be interpreted as being stymied, like Len, in having no great action to take, no chance to overcome the oedipal crisis and become the man, that at least initially in the play, Alison hopes he will be. Of course the affixing of a generalizing oedipal template to any of these plays goes only so far, missing as it will the individual differences in these works, but certainly such an interpretation is possible.

The question still remains, what about the baby? Jimmy Porter foreshadows earlier in *Look Back In Anger* the loss of Alison’s baby in his remark, “Oh, my dear wife, you’ve got so much to learn. I only hope you learn it one day. If only something - would happen to you, and wake you from your beauty sleep! . . . If you could have a child, and
it would die” (Osborne 37). Jimmy’s cruel words come true, much to the grief of both Jimmy and his wife, who, at the play’s end, come together in a sense of mutual loss. Not so Pam and Len, nor any character, in regard to the baby’s death in *Saved*. No one wakes up to the death before them. The play is not just about Len or Len’s specific oedipal issues, it’s also about the baby.
1.10 Len as Ethical Hero

Bond’s Appendix to *Saved* is a somewhat disappointing essay for those wanting to be illuminated about the play from the playwright himself. After describing the oedipal nature of the play, Bond is quick to state that “more important” is the “social comment,” but, because this is “more obvious” (“Appendix” 311), he does not take what could be an excellent opportunity to discuss the issue. The topic can of course be discovered in other essays where Bond mentions *Saved* in a social comment, but his lack of going into some detail in this main link to the play is off-putting. Evidently, the appendix is meant to be a challenge, what with its very arguable propositions, like the one regarding the baby’s death:

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

Such political judgments do nothing to support Bond’s argument in the play regarding the horror of a baby’s death, making it seem instead that, in the big picture, Pam’s baby’s death is of no concern at all. At the very least, when it comes to “cultural and emotional deprivation,” does not torture and death hold the higher card? The prioritization of the political over the emotional response makes the playwright seem like he is using the death of a child solely as a platform for his current thoughts.

What is also surprising in the appendix is Bond’s labeling *Saved* an optimistic play. If the spectator does not take this position, she or he is the one found lacking. “[H]e
has not learned to clutch at straws” (Bond, “Appendix” 309). Bond forgets or recants this statement, made in 1968, when he notes later in 1980 that “Beckett shows that however the human being is pulverized by circumstances there will always remain a spark of the human in him. That is never enough for an artist to show – and it isn’t even true” (Notebook II 52). As it is with Bond’s 1980 opinion of Beckett, so it is with Bond’s opinion in 1968: is it really enough that Len’s mending chair at the play’s end displays a spark of hope in the world, showing that Len “has not lost his resilience . . . he mends the chair . . .” (“Appendix” 309)? In his appendix to Saved, Bond romanticizes Len, the social cripple, the man watching in the trees while a baby was stoned to death. Len “lives with people at their worst and most hopeless . . . and does not turn away from them. I cannot imagine an optimism more tenacious, disciplined or honest than his” (Bond, “Appendix” 309). These are shocking words indeed for anyone who has seen the play and witnessed Len’s very lack of these traits.

Some Bond critics, however, follow suit with Bond. Richard Scharine evaluates Len as someone “who continues to struggle under what seems hopeless conditions . . .” (276). Tony Coult sees in Len at the play’s end “the truly astonishing potential for an unsentimental and wholly human love” (62-63). Scharine goes further, it is the “first physical evidence of Bond’s fascination with crucifixion representations” (80). Len, who is in the trees while a baby is tortured to death, is considered a Christ figure, a carpenter bound for socialist utopia. The positive appraisal of Len from Bond and others is a clutching at straws some audience members may not be able to make. Len is to be regarded as a positive figure, set out from the others, because he is fixing a chair. This is
the same Len who helped Mary with her nylons and does not pull away when Mary
begins to show sexual feelings for him, the same Len who gives cigarettes to Fred but
then torments him about the baby’s death, the same Len who stands by Pam after the
baby’s death only to be seen upstairs, knife in hand, in sexual suspicion of Pam sleeping
with someone below.

“In many ways,” Donahue writes, “the end of the play is unspeakably terrible”
(33). Donahue sees beyond Len as a redemptive figure to focus on Pam, whose reactions
to her child’s death, to the fighting between her parents, to the threatening behavior of
Harry towards Len with a knife, go unheard by the others. At the play’s end, Harry’s pact
with Len may seem to Bond and others as a sign, albeit so slight, of one man reaching out
to the other, but it is also a sign of the continuing subjection of Pam and, to some extent,
Mary under their rule. For Donahoe, there is a pact between the males, who are able to
convene in “secret conversations” (34) while the women are not to be heard at all. It is
ironic for Donahue when critics compare Len to Christ, setting up as it does “a rather
terrifying resonance associated with the myths of male dominance” (34). Bond sees Len
as being resilient and sticking with the family - aren’t the others, both the two women and
the old man, doing the same thing? Why privilege Len’s relation to Harry as being a sign
of positive communication? What have the many scenes of Pam and Len been about or
even Len and Mary? There is something in Saved that is off balance when it is critically
approached as a male oedipal drama or where it is the male who will some day open the
door that exits us from hell.
1.11 Len and Scopey

In Bond’s first professionally performed play, *The Pope’s Wedding*, the character of Scopey begins the line of protagonists Richard Scharine identifies as the Bond Innocents:

The Bond Innocent is an existential optimist, “clutching at straws” in an attempt to preserve his humanity within an inhumane society. Although they are all destroyed or stalemated, their continuing attempts indicate, in whatever debased form, the survival of goodness on earth (36).

Bond places Scopey in the first of his “problem plays” (qtd. in Hay 75) that offer the audience social problems to think about. *The Pope’s Wedding* is the most open-ended of the set, with *Saved* close behind. In *The Pope’s Wedding*, there is no authorial interjection into the dialogue pointing to social wrongs, no moralizing indicating a better way. Two problems remain unanswered as the play ends: why did Scopey leave his mates and his young wife to stay at an old man’s decrepit domicile and why did Scopey end up strangling the old man to death? Just as there is no clear, specific reason why Len stays with Pam’s dysfunctional family, similarly there is no effectively dramatized reason why Scopey leaves his wife or kills the old man. Exposition explains the baby stoning in *Saved* with the knowledge given about the murderers’ predilections. There is no exposition or foreshadowing equally strong in regard to the death of the old man, Alen.

Bond maintains a very bare stage, with not the many objects of naturalist theatre. His use of dialogue sometimes employs a hyperrealist, not a naturalist technique. Nonetheless, *The Pope’s Wedding* is a rather naturalist play. The East Anglican dialogue
seems authentic and fluid. The characters portray everyday actions of young people living in a rural village, trying to have some fun and trying to make ends meet. Bond’s stated desire to make art that is analytical is overcome in this early play by his inability to curtail the ways he naturalistically sets the action, dialogue and tone. He is clearly giving a very humanistic view of life in Scopey’s village, as witnessed in the scene of the young men playing soccer. There is nothing absurd about The Pope’s Wedding, except perhaps its title and the ending image of Alen dead on the floor and Scopey in Alen’s coat. Somehow, at the end of the play, the promising young Scopey has deteriorated to a destroyed, murderous wreck.

Bond says that he called the play after a pope’s wedding because it “is an impossible ceremony – Scopey’s asking for an invitation for something that isn’t going to happen, that can’t happen” (qtd. in Hay 8). What is it that can’t happen for Scopey? On one hand, it could be Scopey’s finding something that will enlighten him about Alen’s reasons for being a hermit. Scopey, Donahue writes, “seeks to penetrate the secret of otherness, of an alternative view of life which is as whole and mysteriously promising as the shack in which the tramp Alen lives . . .” (12). This interpretation is assisted by Bond’s comment, “[t]he important thing is not to be intrigued or puzzled by images but always to understand them . . . That is what Scopey does in the play . . . [a]nd of course there is nothing there” (qtd. in Spencer 15). Bond’s comment about Scopey’s fascination in Alen, like his comment about Len’s goodness, is not so clearly visible in the play itself. Trussler notes, “there is little sense of development in Scopey’s increasing need for Alen as a prop of his own personality” (10).
What does happen to Scopey, more generally, is his inability to find contentment anywhere in his environment. It is not totally clear what makes Scopey become so inwardly depressed and outwardly disoriented. There are some situations that do point to his unhappiness. Scopey does not seem to care for married life, when a couple learn to share the same space and where the conducting of personal freedom becomes more difficult. One problem in the marriage of Scopey and Pat is Pat’s caring for Alen, so reclusive a figure that he seems unable to take of himself or go outside his shed. Pat daily goes to see him, to keep his house tidy, and to ensure he is fed. Scopey is left out. In Pat’s initial scene with Alen, it seems that Pat is being very patient with an old, demanding hermit who acts as cranky and egotistical as Hamm in *Endgame*. Later, when Scopey begins to care for the old man, it seems that Alen is just another person for the young people to project their feelings upon, his place another space to check out. He becomes a source of jealousy between Pat and Scopey, another symptom of the young couple’s shaky marriage.

Perhaps it is when Scopey and Pat face their home life together that the trouble starts. The shoestring budget and a lack of cigarettes seem to be the last straws for Scopey. Unlike hanger-on Len, Scopey shows a fit of anger. When Pat takes his last cigarette after they agreed she would not, Scopey blows up - he stamps on the empty cigarette pack and yells in anger. Perhaps the trouble starts when Pat comes to visit Alen and complains about Scopey. Scopey, not wanting Pat to know he is there, has hidden behind the couch and hears every word. Scopey, the audience learns, has lost his job and spends his time with Alen. Perhaps it is the pressure of a working class married life that is
too much for the young Scopey. Much like his unhappiness at home with Pat, Scopey eventually has had enough with Alen’s messy, rather pathetic life and strangles him. When Pat arrives Alen is dead on the floor and Scopey sits in silence. Bond has somewhat met his goal:

My play = such and such happens, then such and such, then a marriage, a murder, a wife sending for police. But no suggestion of *because*. Only a record. Because is not only absent, if it were in it would falsify what I want to do (*Notebook I* 63). The “*because*” is not totally absent because of Bond’s creating situations where all the actions, even the murder, make some sense within the naturalism of the play. Bond’s offering of one naturalist scene after another indicates social reasons why a young man of ruined social expectations might lose control and take it out on someone weaker and less socially acceptable.

Scharine reports that initial critical response of the play ranged from thinking the play “too long, too portentous, too elliptical” (32) to its being a “powerfully atmospheric piece” (32), with Bond showing a good ear for dialect and a good sense for affecting mood. In its offering no authorial comment, the play allows some critics an open site to impose their own ideas about the play’s meaning. Much like with *Saved*, some critics view Alen’s actions in the same favorable light that they are able to see Len’s. This notion is backed up by Bond himself, who says, regarding Len and Scopey,

*[T]heir state of still being alive is shown by restless curiosity – this may seem a minor thing, but it amounts to the search for truth, and in the context in which they find themselves it’s miraculous (qtd. in Hay 43)*!
Scharine sees Scopey as an “inquiring individual and his less-than-perfect society” (36) yet, as with Len, Scopey is less than perfect himself and all the society visible in the drama have similar inquiring minds. Scharine is able to mark the tendency of Scopey to be above the crowd on the fact that he is the one who volunteers to fix Pat’s purse (34). The only trouble with his interpretation is that Scopey is the one who breaks the purse and only offers to fix it after Pat and her friends demanded that he does so. Similarly, like Scharine, Jenny Spencer imposes another possible meaning, seeing an obvious oedipal dilemma in the play, just as it is similarly projected in Saved by Bond himself. To Spencer, Alen’s shed is like a womb and Scopey’s interest in Alen possibly points to homoerotic conflict (17). In both critics’ interpretations, one where Scopey is exceptional, the other where he is sexually complicated, the real Scopey is missed.
1.12 The Three Lens

Bond’s “Letter to Irene,” written in January, 1970, offers a perspective of Len in *Saved*, Scopey in *The Pope’s Wedding*, and Arthur in *Early Morning*. *Early Morning* becomes the first in the problem play cycle where a character voices Bond’s opinions on society within a play and so signals Bond’s working towards a growing didacticism in his art. In *Early Morning*, the lower class character, Len, commits a crime that shows the level of absurdity working in this lengthy farce: he and his significant other kill and eat another person while waiting in a queue to see an entertainment. Arthur, as part of the royal household, is among those hearing Len’s case in a farcical mock court. Bond explains,

Scopey, Len, Arthur are of course the same person in different stages of development. Scopey commits the crime, Len witnesses it ambivalently, Arthur is legally involved in the court that tries Len. The Len who appears in *Early Morning* is of course Len from *Saved*, and the trial in the first Act of *Early Morning* is in fact a trial of the whole play *Saved*, seen from Arthur’s point of view . . . (qtd. in Hay 43).

Len in *Early Morning* seems nothing like Len in *Saved*; the former is a much more active survivor than the latter. The Len of *Saved* stays on the sidelines; the Len of *Early Morning* prefers being in the middle of the action. What is of more interest is Bond’s idea of Arthur as the most developed of the three protagonists in the three problem plays. Compared, for instance to Len in *Saved*, Arthur has the “point of view which is the most morally and emotionally . . . developed” (qtd. in Hay 43).
Capitālist society in crisis can only lead for Bond to either fascism or madness, and *Early Morning* shows Queen Victoria’s rule as offering a large dose of both. Her iron hand over her government and people has made life near unbearable, a situation of which she is well aware:

Our kingdom is degenerating. Our people cannot walk on our highways in peace. They cannot count their money in safety. . . . We cannot understand most of what is called our English. Our prisons are full. Instead of fighting our enemies our armies are putting down strikers and guarding our judges. Our peace is broken (Bond, *Early Morning* 144).

Hers is a palace of cut throats and traitors. Her husband plans to kill the mad queen. In the plotting, a series of prime ministers and chancellors trade sides at the blink of an eye. In this situation, there is a voice of sanity in Arthur, who early in the play states the problem, “The trouble with the word is it’s run by politicians” (Bond, *Early Morning* 141).

When his twin, George, plans to marry the young naïve Florence Nightingale, it is Arthur who thinks the idea should be at least discussed between the two brothers. The situation is made all the more absurd by the queen’s rape of the young Florence and her creating an ongoing sexual relation with Florence. In the intrigues of court, Arthur dreams of just being happy once. His being physically attached to his bland brother makes his case for discovering freedom almost impossible to imagine. It is Arthur that asks the vital question within the play, why do people kill each other? He asks this ethically of Len at Len’s trial, not caring to know all the absurd details that lead Len to
kill another person, but wanting to understand ethically how could one man kill another. Arthur repeats over and over again, “Why did you kill him . . .“ (Bond, Early Morning 153) until Len ends the repetitive question that he cannot answer by raising a fuss. This is the question Arthur is asking the characters of Saved and Scopey of The Pope’s Wedding: what leads to murderous violence? After absorbing many examples of the folly of Victoria’s society, Arthur realizes that he has solved his riddle. The answer to the terrible social situation, where people kill others indifferently, is to rid the world of all people – to end humans and human consciousness.

Madness comes to Arthur. George is killed in an attempt to assassinate the queen. Arthur is, in a sense, free, as George’s part of their shared corporality begins to wither to the bone. Alone onstage, Arthur performs what Bond will later identify as a public soliloquy, an opportunity for a character to speak directly to the audience. In one of the initial examples in Bond’s career of lengthy monologues embedded in his didactic plays, there is the mixing of fantasy with social critique, a somewhat complicated attempt at showing the character’s subjective experiences in contrast to the author’s political acumen. The speech is interrupted by the appearance of a distracted, disoriented doctor, whom Arthur begins to address, but the monologic drive of Arthur’s speech continues, not changing to dialogue. The difficulty in Arthur’s speech is not his discussion of Hitler, who of course comes after Victoria and Albert, but in the muddleness of the metaphor regarding him.

The speech begins badly, with Bond as he often does, equating good men with evil men:
Heil Hitler! Heil Einstein! Hitler gets a bad name, and Einstein’s good. But it doesn’t matter, the good still kill. And the civilized kill more than the savage. That’s what science is for, even when it’s doing good. Civilization is just bigger heaps of dead (Bond, Early Morning 186).

Arthur is growing mad, but it is doubtful that his illogical leap to equating Hitler to Einstein is meant to show madness, but rather, for Bond, a truth within the madness. Arthur’s rhetoric is disconcerting, as if Einstein can be clumped together somehow with the man who engineered totalitarian barbarity and the Holocaust. This is an awkward and awful intrusion of the playwright. Arthur’s statements, like “Hitler protected his own people” (Bond, Early Morning 187), show incredible naiveté, a disappointing historical consciousness - all for the sake of giving rhetoric to a young man mixed up in a Victorian nightmare.

Arthur’s mad speech culminates in his going to the side of evil. Arthur’s solution is to be stronger than Hitler and kill everyone. Hitler did have the “vision. He knew we hated ourselves, and each other, so out of charity he let us kill and be killed” (Bond, Early Morning 186). Arthur’s plan is destroy all the people in his country so as to end the madness he cannot escape in himself. Finally, Arthur has become his mother’s son; he has gained political experience. Bond falls into displaying a form of private tragedy that Williams sees as a move towards the theatre of incommunication, and as such, away from tragedy. The creation of this specific dramatic form converts the social responses of “shock, loss and disturbance to conscious insult and a deliberately perverse exposure” (Williams 213). To Williams, the form amounts to accepting the logic that “if we are as
filthy as this (‘and we are’) there is no point in anything else . . . “ (213). The statements of anguish that Bond inserts in Arthur’s mouth points to a response that Williams bases on “a raw, chaotic resentment, a hurt so deep that it requires new hurting, a sense of outrage which demands that people be outraged” (213). The audience hears the overwrought author, speaking through his character, thinking painfully out loud in his pessimistic grief about society. If Bond thinks Arthur is the most emotionally and morally mature of the three young men, Scopey, Len and Arthur, the young male character type, the “Bond Innocent,” still has a long way to go.
Chapter Two: “Why do I want to dig graves all my life?”

2.1 The Gravedigger’s Boy

The aged king wants peace, a carefree life of minimal political and social responsibilities. He prepares to divide his kingdom among his three daughters; “tis our intent / to shake all cares and business of our state, / Confirming them in younger years” (Shakespeare 4). Immediately the problem surfaces: the king does not want short oaths of fidelity from his daughters or discussion about how the division might succeed, but expansive expressions of faithful love. Whoever speaks best will receive the most. The eloquence of Reagan and Goneril wins over the plain speaking of Cordelia. The tragedy of King Lear is set in motion: the man will learn who loves him and is faithful to him after it is too late. Is King Lear a tragedy? After great personal suffering, including the witnessing of the suffering of others, Lear is dealt the final blow of Cordelia’s death. If the play’s production is effective, yes, the play is a tragedy, bringing an audience to a catharsis in the release of strong empathetic emotions. The audience identifies Lear as a tragic hero whose final recognition of his flaws is manifested in his request to Cordelia, near the end of the play, for forgiveness. The play tells of limits, the limits of words, the limits of human beings in their assumption of power, and, most significantly, the limits of love. Within the limits is found commitment, a commitment to others that cannot be abjured by wishful thinking, even by that of a powerful old king.
Edward Bond’s *Lear* is another example of Bond’s idea that “real character – real goodness – is the active love of truth (Innes, ”Rationalism,” 112). Greater than the complicated love of others is the love of truth, which breaks limits in pursuit of its goal. Consequently in *Lear*, the king is not a tragic hero, but a dramatic protagonist, finding out late, but not too late, how to politically and nobly act in the world. By the time Lear has fled to the countryside in Bond’s *Lear*, violence has taken control of the kingdom. The cruel, despotic old man has been wrested from power by his equally callous and violent daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle. In the first scenes, the play seems like a sped up version of *King Lear*, squeezed of any excess so that violent actions and constant betrayals of one human by another are constantly demonstrated. The unnecessary shooting of a worker by Lear, followed by Bodice and Fontanelle’s torture of Lear’s advisor, Warrington, has alerted the audience that they are viewing scenes of an insane government that exists before the play begins. In relief to the violence occurring at court, Lear finds peace at the Gravedigger’s Boy’s farm, which seems to exist, as Lear’s old councilor says, at “the end of the world” (Bond, *Lear* 30).

The sense of safety and, more importantly, the sense of a functioning world that Lear discovers at the farm are due to the Boy’s calm demeanor and responsible, active life. The Boy embodies the positive character that Bond rather cavalierly appreciates in Len in *Saved*. In his hospitality to the old, useless vagabond that is Lear, the Boy seems “naturally good” (309), the state Bond has ascribed to Len in his appendix to *Saved*. If anyone meets Bond’s appraisal of Len, that he “lives with people at their worst and most hopeless . . . and does not turn away from them” (Bond, “Appendix” 309), it is the
Gravedigger’s Boy. He feeds the terribly damaged Warrington. He is patient with his nervous, high-strung wife. The stage is bare in Scene Five, just an “empty plate and jug,” and “[f]urther down, a piece of bread” (Bond, Lear 30). Lear appears, dethroned by his daughters and seeking shelter. “My daughters have taken the bread from my stomach,” his bemoans (Bond, Lear 31). Enter the Boy, bringing bread and water, which he offers the old man without hesitation.

In the maladapted kingdom of Lear, the Gravedigger’s Boy is a resourceful presence. His world is far removed from the treachery of Lear’s court. Finding the water table when burying his father, the Boy opportuneely decides to dig a well. “[W]hy do I want to dig graves all my life?” he asks Lear (Bond, Lear 32). The Boy is of a new generation. Not wanting to dig graves all his life like his father, he wants to bring life to the earth by creating a working farm for himself and his wife. He is a generous man, not just with his goods but with himself. He typifies the existence Bond praises in his preface to his play about Shakespeare, Bingo: the Boy lives in “workable simplicity” (xiv).

Humanely, the Boy realizes that Lear requires shelter and attention. Kind to the poor stranger, he does not recognize him as the king. Someone with no great respect for the king, he warns that if the king were to appear, “I’d go back to my old job and dig a grave for him” (Bond, Lear 39)! Although perhaps not totally politically committed as Bond would like, the Boy still enjoys subversively destroying Lear’s great passion, the wall that his kingdom is building to protect itself from outsiders. The Boy states, “We used to dig his wall up at night. . . .” (Bond, Lear 39). The Boy in his wall-wrecking again recalls an appraisal given by Bond to Len. He does not make the “gesture of
turning the other cheek,” which Bond equates in his appendix to Saved with “refusing to look facts in the face” (309). The boy attempts to live a productive life, yet he is not above hating the evil king and wrecking the king’s wall.

Somewhat problematic in the Boy’s life, however, is his wife, who carries more of the nervous self-centeredness often found in Bond’s characters. Unlike Pam in Saved, however, the wife communicates with her significant other, able to express gratitude towards the Boy. “You make me happy – my father said I’d be unhappy here, but I’m not, you’ve made me so very happy” (Bond, Lear 35). It is not totally clear whose child the wife carries – the Boy’s or the equally attentive carpenter’s. Unlike the jealousy and sexual confusion found in Len’s character, there is a matter-of-factness in the Boy’s relation to his rival, the carpenter. “He’s in love with my wife” (Bond, Lear 38), he rather nonchalantly says to Lear.

In this rural setting, the wife wants to stay in her current situation, with her husband, her child coming, and a neighboring carpenter in love with her. She wants nothing to do with “[b]eggars, scoundrels, filthy old men” (Bond, Lear 33). She is as territorial on her farm as Lear has been with his kingdom. It is absurd to keep Lear around; he almost sits on and breaks a cradle that the carpenter has made for the Boy and his wife’s baby. Still, the Boy has plans for Lear. Lear can help his wife by tending the pigs she raises. There is more than a level of frustration in the wife towards Lear in the scene. Even in expressing her gratitude to the Boy, she shows some aggravation towards her husband: “[W]hy can’t I make you happy? Look at the way you brought that man here! The first one you find” (Bond, Lear 35)!
A theme in *Saved* is the difficulty of human interaction and the forging of effective interpersonal relationships. This is muted in the relationship of the Boy, his wife and the carpenter. Bond presents a new triangle from the one in *Saved*, where there were responses of jealousy, coldness, and obsession within the triangle of Len, Pam, and Fred. Although the Boy’s wife brings some anxiety to the relationships, there is caring and cooperation at work. At much higher level than in *Saved*, communication engages the self with the other. The Boy and wife may argue about keeping Lear on the farm, but when the Boy brings back the discussion in the morning, there is a moment of reconciliation just as couples have after disagreements. “You’re better” (Bond, Lear 37), he says after kissing her, to which the wife simply replies in the affirmative.

Just as the relationship of the Boy, his wife and the carpenter seems more symbiotic than the Len’s triangle in *Saved*, the relationship found in *Saved* between the young man, Len, and his elder, Harry, is also much improved. The situation is completely reversed. In *Saved* it is the older man giving the young man encouragement and a place to stay, albeit in a heavily ironic way. In *Lear* it is the Boy who offers the old man security, here, in an open and direct way. Also in reverse, it is the Boy who brings the play’s exposition forward in the dialogue between the young and the old. The old man in *Saved* talks of the good old days of the war and the way to survive in the cold war at home. The young man in *Lear* reasserts what the audience has recognized in the beginning of *Lear*, that the wall is a destructive force in the kingdom. The king must be mad to focus his country’s resources on such an enterprise. The young man knows what the old man cannot seem to fathom.
The Boy’s death at the hands of invading soldiers is an unusually quick one in the portrayals of protracted, gruesome deaths that occur in Bond plays. The Boy is shot by the soldiers while in the responsive act of going down the well to see why the water his wife has drawn is dirty. There is nothing of the self-absorbed lethargy in this young male character that is seen in Len, who, when hearing a baby cry, cannot go to help the child. As the Boy goes down the well, Lear realizes the well is full of blood. Coming up from the well with the dead Warrington in his grasp, the Boy is shot by the soldiers of Lear’s daughters and dies among the sheets on a clothesline, wrapped in white with his red blood seeping through the sheet as he drops dead. It seems a rather aesthetically beautiful death, especially as it follows the dreadful death of a wall worker and the lengthy, onstage torture of Warrington. Sensing the situation of the marauding soldiers before he is shot, the Boy yells, “Cordelia!” (Bond, Lear 43). This is an unusual situation in Bond - the audience is surprised by something other than an aggro-effect. Narrative reflexivity appears - the audience recognizes that the Boy’s wife is Cordelia from Shakespeare’s King Lear, appearing in an unusual and unexpected form.

Bond’s introductory essay to Lear ends on an odd note. The Boy is delegated by Bond to the dustbin of history:

But I think he [Lear] had to destroy the innocent boy. Some things were lost of us long ago as a species, but we all seem to have to live through part of the act of losing them. We have to learn to do this without guilt or rancour or callousness – or socialized morality (Bond, “Preface” 12).
Such an astonishing idea would seem out of character for Bond were it not for the fact that stating what is on his mind, no matter how provocative, is within Bond’s character traits as a writer. Bond in his essays prizes the radical innocent demanding a place in the world, as the Boy seems to do by his diligent actions. To coolly condemn the Boy is an inconsistent move to make.

Bond is drafting the character of Lear so that he seems to go from childhood to maturity as he undertakes his political education. To say that Lear is a radical innocent (Bond, *Notebook II*, 308) and not the Boy almost seems to correspond to a dramatic rule in Bond: there is only one radical innocent allowed per play. Bond says, “My plays are about the quest for freedom of one man” (qtd. in Cohn, “Fabulous” 193). Perhaps it is when Bond morphs the Boy into a ghost that his concept of a creature too innocent for the world draws strength. The “wistful wraith” of the Boy, “with his ‘face like a sea shell’ and eyes full of terror” (Worth 207), certainly grows weaker and weaker while Lear continues to gain a political conscience as the play proceeds. Bond, however, is not stating that the ghost of the Boy has no place in the world. It is the Gravedigger’ Boy himself, not just the ghost, who is to be banished permanently. The ghost somehow just further proves the point.

There are several reasons for the character cleansing. One is that the Boy represents life for Bond during a country’s golden age, before it had to face the inequalities within it. Such a concept of a golden age is puzzling. Bond explains to Tony Coult,
Writers ought to spend some time dealing with the great ages of the past so that we don’t fall into the error of believing in a golden age when all the answers were known – and believing that if we could recreate the social conditions of that age we could possess these answers (Roberts, On File 63).

It is not clear if Bond is referring to some conception of Renaissance England or if he is speaking of just a mindset of a golden time. That the Boy is in a golden age is not apparent. Life is not dramatized on the farm as a scene of complete bucolic happiness. If the Boy’s life were one of pastoral bliss, he would not have to tame the pigs or clean the well, feed lost souls like Warrington or destroy state property at night. Nor is the Boy some simple Candide happy in his garden. The Boy shows he learns from his experiences. He demonstrates compassion that not is blind to others; he shows a patient understanding of his wife and of Lear.

The other possible reason for his banishment from the species is his connection to a theme Bond has developed from his own understanding of Shakespeare, that blind acceptance of the status quo is the message to be taken politically from King Lear. Bond states, “[T]he social moral of Shakespeare’s Lear is this: endure till in time the world will be made right” (qtd. in Hay 53). Bond’s arguable conclusion about Shakespeare’s play places the Boy’s status in jeopardy. The Boy in his willing acceptance of others and ability to deal with reality demonstrates to Bond someone treading water, just waiting for better times. The Boy has not suffered the knowledge that political involvement must come before personal happiness. Cartelli sees the Boy’s ghost in a similar manner: “he effectively operates as the sentimentally charged ghost of suffering humanity . . . as the
affective locus . . . of history itself, insofar as history, as heretofore constructed, constitutes a sentimental education in human pain and endurance” (165). Political, ethical citizens in the brave new world cannot afford the Boy’s negative capability, his ability to observe and accept the world and not leap to quick or easy political conclusions. It appears that the Boy, who appreciates all that he has, is a naïve soul better excluded from a sound political system.
2.2 Dialogue

As William Gaskill mentions, Bond’s work in *Lear* is at its best when many things are happening on stage at once (Cohn, “Fabulous” 197). The early scenes at the Boy’s farm are good examples. Unlike in *Saved*, where the only group action that seems effective is stoning a baby, the characters at the farm act in concert and are responsive to each other’s situations. The peace is destroyed by the soldiers’ attack in Act One, Scene Seven. The soldiers shoot the Boy, drop him and Warrington down the well, and capture Lear. As the pregnant Cordelia is raped by the soldiers and Lear is lead off in captivity, he yells out, “O burn the house! You’ve murdered the husband, slaughtered the cattle, poisoned the well, raped the mother, killed the child - you must burn the house” (Bond, *Lear* 44-45)! Lear’s words show his tortured powerlessness, echoing in tone similar expressions uttered by Pam in *Saved* as she sums up her situation as the world around her collapses: “No’ome. No friends. Baby dead. Gone. Fred gone” (Bond, *Saved* 123).

Response to terror is verbalized in both cases, registering a depth not seen in either character until that moment.

Successful use of dialogue in both *Lear* and *Saved* is a come and go affair. Use of language in both has moments of effectiveness and awkwardness. In *Saved*, the language of the men killing the baby seems not so much street wise as self-conscious theatrical exposition. In *Lear*, there are also ineffective uses of language, such as the king’s, when Bond has him attempt the Shakespearean. Most often Lear’s speech, when it reaches for poetic metaphor, is quick, equating his condition to that of an animal. He is an “owl on the hill” and a “cunning fox” (qtd. in Spencer 86). Near the end of the play, his waxing
poetic seem self-pitying and histrionic: “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” (Bond, Lear 100).

Disconcerting also is Lear’s uttering platitudes from Bond’s essays, which sound overly profound and do not seem to require a response from the person Lear is talking to. He tells Cordelia’s councilor, “I have lived with murderers and thugs, there are limits to their greed and violence, but you decent, honest men devour the earth” (Bond, Lear 93)!

When did Lear live with murderers and thugs? When did he elevate the councilor to a decent and honest man? Similarly difficult is the parable that Lear narrates to the citizenry that come from miles around to hear the old man speak after his return to the farm. To paraphrase the parable: a man loses his voice to a bird, which he captures. Since the bird has a man’s voice, the man wants to capitalize on the situation and has the bird taken to the king. Like in the Warner Brother’s cartoon about the singing frog, the bird says nothing in front of others and the man is humiliated. The man complains aloud, mentioning some negative things about the king, which the bird starts repeating back in the wild. The king is enraged when he hears the bird and kills it. The man for the rest of his life feels the pain the bird felt while dying. This rather convoluted, fractured fairy tale is too lengthy in getting at its moral. It is doubtful that people would walk across the street to hear such homilies, yet during a time of warfare people come distances to hear a parable so complicated as to be unclear. To come to hear sermons from a despotic king who has ruined their country shows an incredible shift in popular sentiment. Lear is not an articulate Tolstoy talking to the peasants.
Also ineffective is the Boy’s stiffly repeating exposition regarding the wall that was clearly presented in the first scene of the play. In the first scene, workers are presented behaving like slaves. In building the wall, men die and the foreman bluntly tells the living to continue working. Enter the despot Lear with his daughters. He is frantic that the men are not working effectively. When he says about those in charge, “They treat their men like cattle” (Bond, Lear 16), his meaning is not concern, but related to being efficient. Lear wants to make sure they are treated like healthy cattle: “[T]hey must be kept in dry huts. All these huts are wet. You waste men” (Bond, Lear 16). The Boy’s subsequent embellishment of how the building of the wall happened in his rural area calls up the same theme about the madness of the wall that was dramatized earlier. The expository style that the Boy takes on sounds oddly authorial, inconsistent with other dialogue between the Boy and Lear. “The king was mad. He took all the men from this village. . . . I hid. . . . [W]hen they started on the wall their hands bled for a week” (Bond, Lear 39), he tells Lear. “You died of work or they shot you for not working” (Bond, Lear 39), the Boy reminds the audience. Hayward laments about the difference in language in Saved and Lear:

In his later, more literary plays Bond’s dialogue is much less convincing. Saved could only have been written by a moralist, but the moralizing is filtered through the behaviour of inarticulate characters. Bond presents the bare fictional facts without commentary. But in Lear the moralizing is articulated directly in the dialogue (19).
In a letter written in 1993, Bond states his belief that modern society’s use of language is stunted. Compared to Shakespeare’s time, “[w]e are much less ‘literary’ . . . We are less articulate in expressing our emotions; or (more significantly) sensing a connection between our emotional experience and the nature of the world” (Bond, Letters IV 171). Since the enlightenment, we see humans as machines and language as machine-like, Bond believes. “Our mother tongue is the language of our machines” (Bond, “Commentary” 277). An example of modern language being like a machine is demonstrated when we break down. We make noises like machines in the throes of dysfunction. Bond’s point is perhaps personal as he continues his description: “We are not taught to express emotional experience” (Letters IV 171). As is often the case, Bond suggests rationality as the resolution to the current problem: people cannot learn to express themselves “unless expression of emotion is also the expression of ideas” (Letters IV 173).

Bond does not perceive his plays as examples of a style he dislikes, the “‘theatre of silence’ – where there is supposed to be significance in the unspoken because it is unutterable but nevertheless apprehendable” (Letters IV 175). Bond, in making the statement, forgets the final, silent scene in Saved and several silent scenes in The Pope’s Wedding, perhaps because of the general point he is trying to make: “My plays are about my characters’ need to speak” (Bond, Letters IV 175). At the end of the letter, Bond acknowledges that sometimes his plays do apply a more literary language - when they are based on a past time or are an adaptation of a text that employs literary devices. “Lear itself creates a tension between its own text and WS’s [sic]. It is a device - and then I try
to create my own language of experience within the opportunities the device creates, using and adding to WS’s original” (Bond, Letters IV 176). Spencer sees Bond reworking Shakespearean language and imagery, making verbal metaphors in King Lear concrete. King Lear’s verbalized wish to anatomize the soul of Regan becomes in Lear the messy autopsy of Fontanelle. Spencer also states that Shakespeare’s simile “like an engine” spoken by King Lear - “O small fault / How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show, / That, like an engine, wrenched my frame of nature” (Shakespeare 32) - becomes in Lear a material thing: the mechanical torture device placed on Lear’s head to make him blind (83).

Spencer’s description of Lear’s language takes a different tact than that expressed by Bond in his letter, which was written after Spencer’s book was published. The difference in language in King Lear and Lear, Spencer believes, is based on the different relationship both playwrights paint between the “self and society” (89). Spencer notes that Bond’s method avoids what Shakespeare’s does not: “the murky depths of psychological interiority” (89). The statement is a stunningly harsh devaluation of Shakespeare’s approach, as if it was unsuccessful in exploring depth of character and, on the other hand, as if depth of character in times of terror becomes too murky to express. Spencer says of the language in Lear that it is “in every case a response to the social situations literally depicted onstage” (89).

The social situations onstage, especially in the first two acts of Lear, show people in the midst of constant crisis and terror; their language is affected by their struggling in a society of interminable fear, betrayal, and loss. Shakespeare’s play shows people in the same situation yet speaking much more eloquently, not to avoid reality but to impress
reality with their individual meaning. Because individuals have deeper relationships with each other in Shakespeare’s play than the people in Lear, the eloquence of the characters in *King Lear* have more outward social and personal relations to act upon. Shakespeare elevates the situation not by a language that solely shifts, as Spencer thinks, to the psychological or providential, but by modulating the experiences shown in times of terror among people who are not isolated individuals. Shakespeare’s genius, according to Jan Kott, lies in the fact that he sees complexly, that “he gave an inner awareness of passion, cruelty ceased to be merely physical. Shakespeare discovered the moral hell. He discovered heaven as well. But he remained on earth” (230).
2.3 Aggro-effects

Unlike in *Saved*, there is almost non-stop physical violence in *Lear*. Every rest, such as that at the Boy’s farm, leads to more violent action. The debatable dramatic effectiveness of aggro-effects in *Saved* is less debatable in Bond’s play of modern, total war. As Taylor mentions in *The Angry Theatre*, the baby stoning in *Saved* seems both realistically and theatricality questionable. The scene is “difficult to believe, and the way he [Bond] writes . . . does not make the belief any easier. . . . [S]uch things happen from time to time, but in quite this way? . . . [Though] ‘good taste’ can hardly be invoked any more as a criterion, relevance I suppose can” (Taylor 110). The more plausible, more “relevant” violence in *Lear* takes Bond somewhat off the hook. Some of the modern audience, familiar with 20th and 21st century war atrocities, are not surprised by the terrifying actions onstage.

Taylor’s wishing for Bond’s violent images being relevant is somewhat, then, fulfilled in *Lear*. The second production of the play was performed in 1972 by a student group, whom Coult mentions as being ripe for an anti-war play:

In the atmosphere of ‘come-down’ from 60’s euphoria, with the harsh pressing reality of political crises at home and abroad, questions of political power and revolutionary challenge to the state and status quo were intensely relevant, and a student and youth generation were keenly aware of their importance (Davis 16). During the Vietnam War and thereafter, modern audiences could not fail to find theatre that reflected current events seen via television, photojournalism, and other mass media sources. The initial scene in *Lear*, for example, of the rigid, tyrant king shooting the
prisoner recalls Eddie Adam’s photograph of a Viet Cong officer being shot by General Nguyen Ngoc Loan (Adams 184). Lear’s shooting of the worker is mental torture for the man as he awaits his fate while Lear and Bodice argue over the need for killing him. Adam’s photograph of the Viet Cong officer shows a slight bodily wincing by the officer, expressed more so in his face, as the bullet moves through his head. The audience senses the same painful tension as Lear holds the gun at the worker’s head. Another example of similarity to current events is the soldiers’ destruction of the Boy’s farm, in all its wanton violence, recalling the atrocity of the My Lai massacre. The revolutionary violence of Cordelia’s guerilla movement projects the breakdown of Cambodian society when the Khmer Rouge’s takeover of the government in 1975 lead to the mass murder of millions under the name of a better, Marxist state (Valentino 139).

In his *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, Jan Kott remarks that Shakespeare’s history plays strike resonance with modern audiences. Using *Richard III* as an example, Kott notes that “the violent deaths of the principal characters are now regarded as an historical necessity . . . something altogether natural” (3). The modern audience, after witnessing the horrors of the wars, failed revolutions and ethnic cleansings of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is not put off guard by scenes showing obscene violence. In Shakespeare’s history plays, Kott notes, “history turns full circle” (4) and displays a repetitive pattern. First, the current ruler is seen dragging “behind him a long chain of crimes” (Kott 4). To achieve the throne, he murders his foes, then his friends, and then his possible successors. “[A] young prince returns. . . . [He] personifies the hope of a new order and justice”’ (Kott 4). Sadly, history then repeats, the young man kills off
his enemies, then his allies, then his successors. In operation is what Kott calls “the Grand Mechanism,” the seemingly endless repetition of power politics occurring in the reign of kings (9).

Modern audience members witness in Lear an update to the Renaissance Grand Mechanism. This time at work is the mechanism of modern revolution, a mechanism that has occurred in countries around the globe in the 20th and 21st century. A child born while Stalin ruled the Soviet Union, Bond most frequently equates Cordelia to that dictator, whose mass murders and purges were part of the betrayal of the initial revolution of the country. Bond may not define the Boy’s standing in contemporary history as he does Cordelia, yet the Boy can be equated, certainly in stereotype, as a counter culture, organic farmer who fights the man and practices random acts of kindness. “The come down from the 60’s” that Coult mentions happening in the world during the Vietnam War period is portrayed in the death of the Boy: paradise is lost. The rising of Cordelia is the sobering truth of the grand mechanism of contemporary political events. “[W]e’ll make the society you only dream of” (Bond, Lear 99), she tells Lear. Bond and the audience know better.
2.4 Lear as Political Hero

Much as in Saved, no change to the general good results from the abuses, deaths, and despair that the characters endure in Lear. The possible, truly socialist state the Cordelia might forge is not forthcoming. Her response to the political crisis is as mismanaged and horrendous as the government created by Bodice and Fontanelle. Bond, as in his earlier play, offers a straw to clutch at the end of the play. In Saved, the image of Len fixing a chair, what Bond saw as a signal for optimism, is dramatized more unequivocally in Lear. Rather than recede into silent anonymity as Cordelia requests, Lear makes a symbolic stand. Blind, he is taken to the wall where he begins to tear it down with a shovel, until he is shot by a soldier. Bond has noted in an interview that while a line can be drawn in his early plays’ protagonists from Scopey, Len and Arthur to Lear, “Lear is not Len” (qtd. in Hay 19). The political education Lear undergoes is far from Len’s very slight progress in Saved. Unlike Pam’s family who ignore Len as he mends the chair, Lear’s act is acknowledged by another character onstage. As the play ends, one of the workers moving past the corpse of Lear looks back at his remains and the shovel sticking up from the ground. The torch, Bond indicates, has been passed.

Lear’s gesture, though more clearly defined, does not however give the audience much more to analyze than Len’s gesture does in Saved. It may conclude the play with a better hint at positive progression and indicate personal redemption for Lear, but it is not sufficient for inspiring social action or insights for the audience. The Boy, after all, mentioned his gesture of wall-wrecking earlier in the play. Additionally, the audience has heard during the play that others have also worked subversively against the wall’s being
built. Lear’s action is nothing historically new. It is just new for him. Lear’s gesture is a hardly a straw to clutch - if the audience wishes to find ways out of the grand mechanism of modern revolution. For B. A. Young, Lear at the time of its first production was Bond’s “most dramatically mature play, [but] Bond has still nothing more concrete to say than that power, rather than the misuse of power, is wrong” (qtd. in Trussler 25). A slogan from the late 1960s, taken from Lord Acton, that power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely, is the banner being waved. For a play like Lear, perhaps the simplicity of Young’s judgment suffices. As a contemporary “war fable” (Cohn, “Fabulous” 185), the play resonates as an indictment against war. From the 1960s and onward, productions of plays, from Lysistrata to Mother Courage, from Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance to O! What a Lovely War! support the growing sentiment of the time that war was pointless and must be stopped. Lear is part of the catalogue, with Bond bringing his aesthetic tools of aggro-effects and scatter-shot dialogue, with its didactic snippets, to the mix.

Trussler ends a 1976 critique on Edward Bond’s work by tying together Saved and Lear in order to make a rhetorical conclusion about the playwright’s effect:

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 partly be due to the climate of opinion his work has helped to create. So far, the hopeful signs may be of little more account than Len’s mending a chair, or Lear’s few spadeful of earth. But they are there, the straws at which humanity must clutch. Bond’s is the solid dramatic brickwork miraculously built of straws (34).
It is not, however, Bond’s providing straws for his audience that results in *Saved* and *Lear*’s effective dramatic moments: it is in the moments of dramatic tension before the straws are given. The symbolic gestures are not just incomplete; they are ineffective answers to the problems the two plays present. The straws are banal, undramatic, and singular. If straws must be given, rather than Len fixing the chair and not responding when no one will help him when asked, a more symbolic gesture would be for Len to demand help with the chair.

It is likewise perhaps a short straw that is given at the end of *Lear*. A better indication of growth would be for Lear to get involved with Susan and Thomas, the latter who has become a new, more revolutionary minded Gravedigger’s Boy and who points to the new type of life to be lived:

> We talk to people but we don’t really help them. We shouldn’t let them come here if that’s all we can do. It’s dangerous to tell the truth, truth without power is always dangerous. And we *should* fight! Freedom’s not an idea, it’s a passion! If you haven’t got it you fight like a fish out of water fighting for air!’ (Bond, *Lear* 90).

Bond notes that Lear lives his life by dying in it (“Preface” 12). It might have been a bigger step for Bond as a dramatist had he shown Lear attempting to live - if Lear lived and dialogued with others to effect group action.

William Gaskill, who directed both initial productions of *Saved* and *Lear* at the Royal Court, sees Lear’s gesture “[i]n some ways . . . as ineffectual as Len’s mending the chair in *Saved*. . . . Both actions are existential; they may not change the world but they
have to be done” (120). An example of an interpretation of the play that does not comprehend the political significance of Lear’s gesture is Perry Nodelman’s “Beyond Politics in Bond’s Lear.” Nodelman walks the reader through Bond’s play to explain his hypothesis, that “[i]t is a personal gesture Lear makes for himself, a stand taken against the wall-building tendencies of all political philosophies – including Edward Bond’s” (275). Nodelman believes the lesson to be learned in Lear is that pity for others is a vain and arrogant gesture; Nodelman states that trying “to improve the lives of others . . . [is] the source both of evil and of politics” (274).

Nodelman begins his essay with a reduction of Shakespeare to a political opinion: “Shakespeare believed that monarchs had an obligation to keep order in the state . . .” (271). Lear’s wall-building in Bond’s play thus becomes a Shakespearean act of trying to maintain order. As Bond’s Lear learns of his errors, he continues to keep building one orderly wall after another. His conclusive way of speaking indicates his need for order. Nodelman sees Lear finding order at the Boy’s farm. He quotes Lear: “I should have spent my life here” (qtd. in Nodelman 271). Later, after the Boy and his daughters appear as ghosts, Nodelman again quotes Lear to show his need for stability: “Stay here. . . . We can stay here together” (qtd. in Nodelman 273). As Lear drops the ghost of the Boy and recites his final poetic speech, Nodelman sees the phrase “my tears fall down on me” (Bond, Lear 100) as Lear’s tragic recognition that acknowledged pity for one’s own self is the proper sentiment to make. It is the appropriate limiting of oneself to one’s self; it is a gesture against politics and evil.
Nodelman does not mention interactions in the play that might complicate or negate his theory, like the worker looking back to see the symbolic gesture that Lear makes as he is killed. Nodelman does not mention Lear’s politically minded cohorts, Thomas and Susan, who are offered to the audience by Bond as having the correct political mindset. Perhaps most importantly, while Nodelman quotes the phrase regarding Lear’s self-pitying tears, he does not tie it to the last words of Lear: “I can still make my mark” (Bond, Lear 102). The last statement of Lear is more plausible as an acknowledgement of his performing a political act rather than as a rejection of all politics.

“In discussing Lear once with some German students,” Katharine Worth writes, “I was surprised to find that they regarded the heroic ending of the play . . . to be deeply pessimistic. Nothing had changed by his [Lear’s] death, they said; the wall was still there . . .” (208-209). Bond says in this preface to Lear that it is definitely not a play of pessimism or resignation (11) yet the rationale that follows this statement is based on wishful thinking. Bond says that the young audience member watching the play might think that “truth is always ground for pessimism when it is discovered but one comes to see it as an opportunity” (“Preface” 11). A clutching at straws continues to be the recommended response, from Saved to Lear.
2.5 Lear and King Lear

Bond’s Lear operates as an inversion of Shakespeare’s King Lear. Lear wants to build a wall to contain his kingdom; King Lear wishes to disband the kingdom. King Lear is surrounded by people who care for him, like Kent, Cordelia, Gloucester, Edgar, and the Fool; Lear as king is surrounded by those who do not wish him well and can easily turn on him: his daughters, the old councilor, the daughter’s husbands, even Warrington. There is some fidelity to Shakespeare’s story in Bond’s work. A king does lose his kingdom to two less than loyal daughters, the daughters do betray their husbands, a terrible war is set lose, and the king does penance in mental and physical suffering for his former rash actions. A difference is in how the two playwrights utilize their protagonist. Shakespeare’s King Lear is a tragic character. He suffers gravely for the flaw of thinking himself wise when, by trying to divide his kingdoms and retire in peace, he is foolhardy, ignoring the good counsel of his friends and his most trustworthy, most loving child. Bond’s Lear, on the other hand, though he suffers from his ignorance, is redeemed by political consciousness and becomes wise from his suffering. He is more didactic a representation than Shakespeare’s Lear; any audience pity or sadness is to be replaced by admiration and the gaining of insight.

Bulman describes Shakespeare’s Lear as “authoritarian . . . socially oppressive . . . blind to the needs of common humanity “(61). Bulman is confusing his subjects. What Shakespeare presents of King Lear in the first scene of the play is someone stubborn, inflexible, and blind to his friend’s advice, but do his actions and words in themselves equate to Bulman’s description? Bulman’s description is basically supposition and
extrapolation. In fact, Bond’s Lear fits Bulman’s description better. When he first appears onstage, Bond’s Lear acts the despot, building a resource-eating Maginot Line and oppressing common humanity, indeed killing his own people.

*King Lear* ends in the overwhelming grief of Lear holding the dead Cordelia in his arms. *Lear* ends with the Lear an existential hero, learning from his mistakes and executing a symbolic action. He may bemoan the Boy’s second death, as a ghost, when the ghost is killed by pigs, but the death to Lear is a necessity. There is not anguish at all like that King Lear has for the faithful young Cordelia; there is recognition that the ghost’s death is for the best. Shovel at his side, Lear ends in validation and hope. The new tragedy, Bond writes in his notebook in 1971, is a reverse of what tragedy has been. “Tragedy attempts to have the meaningless things and events have meaning. A modern writer has to show that what has meaning has been made meaningless by human stupidity, fear and pride” *(Notebook I, 123).* After Lear parades through the meaninglessness of the war and wall building, he performs for Bond a gesture whose purpose is to create new meaning.

Thomas Cartelli equates the ghost of the Boy to Edgar in *King Lear*, when Edgar is in disguise as Poor Tom (162). Poor Tom aids his father, Gloucester, after his father is blinded and flees his home. Edgar feigns madness to escape recognition and death from his power hungry brother, Edmund, and the new government under Goneril and Reagan. The Boy as a ghost does not just display a change in appearance as Edgar does; he displays a change in character. The politically untested, earnest Edgar, despite his threatening situation, is still the same Edgar under his disguise as Poor Tom. He does not
become weak; his madness is feigned to keep him alive. As the play enfolds, he is tested and proved worthy of his initial promise, not so the Boy in Lear. Returning as a ghost, the Boy becomes weak, complaining, overcautious, and fearful. He turns from his normal, active, helpful self to be emotionally trapped between life and death. He has become disoriented in death just like the many living destroyed by the awful civil war:

When I died I went somewhere. I don’t know where it was. I waited and nothing happened. And then I started to rot, like a body in the ground. Look at my hands, they’re like an old man’s. They’re withered. I’m young but my stomach’s shriveled up and my hair’s turned white (Bond, Lear 56).

The ghost seems not so much the return of the Boy as a projection of Lear’s mind as he copes with his imprisonment and torture. Just as on the farm, he offers Lear a stabilizing presence. Edgar, in the subplot of King Lear, guides his parent as he plays the fool. Edgar and Gloucester’s relationship echoes the fidelity and growing understanding between King Lear and Cordelia. At first, the ghost of the Boy continues to be an example to Lear that there is good in the world, but the Boy’s possible subplot has been subsumed by Lear’s more important plot line. His existence as a ghost serves the main function of helping fulfill the destiny of Lear. Lehman makes a distinction in his “Heiner Müller’s Spectres” between ghosts in Shakespeare and ghosts in Müller’s work. The ghost in Shakespeare is often “a materialization of history which continues to have an effect on the present” (87). In comparison, Müller’s ghosts “can claim a . . . place . . . in ‘theoretical statements’ and rhetorical figures” (87). The Boy’s ghost performs both functions, reminding Lear of the recent past before his daughters and the Boy were killed.
and also appearing as a rhetorical function, representing for Bond the over-cautious nature of those trying to avoid contact with a negative status quo and not fighting against it.

Bond identifies the most moral among the young in Shakespeare’s play, Edgar and Cordelia, as the most immoral characters. Attuned to Bond’s strategy, Bulman notes, “[t]ogether, then, Cordelia and the Gravedigger’s Boy represent the Scylla and Charybdis, married in opposition, of political defensiveness and private retreat between which Lear must sail if he is to become a genuinely moral man” (63). Within this thinking is the opinion of the Boy as the spirit of denial, wishing to escape from the world. As Lear describes his nightmare vision of humanity under unjust rule, the Boy reacts, “That’s the world you have to learn to live in. Learn it! Let me poison the well” (Bond, Lear 95). The Boy’s plan to poison the well and find sanctuary in the woods is a pivotal moment in Bond’s drama. It signals the error Lear might make of living too apolitical and asocial a private life. The moment the ghost expresses his fears recalls the moment in King Lear where the fool wishes to save the King from his roaming in the wilds: “O nuncle, court holy water in a dry house is better than this rainwater out o’door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters’ blessing. Here’s a night pities neither wise man nor fool” (Shakespeare 204).

In the Fool’s case, this expression does not mark the Fool’s desire to accept life under Goneril and Reagan as much as it expresses the extreme situation he and the king find themselves in. The expression is not to be taken literally and summarily. Differently in Lear, the Boy’s expressed fears have great meaning for Bond, indicating his political
unfeasibility. They also demonstrate Bond’s inability to allow any emotional excessiveness in his plays when not linked to social action. Every word has a prime political meaning, regardless of its emotional context. “Why,” Oppel asks, “does the Ghost want to poison the well so that every form of human life is extinguished, when he himself is convinced of the worth of human life? Why is he torn to pieces at the end by his own pigs, which he had earlier tended with such care” (8)? In examining Bond’s use of the ghost in Lear, Oppel states that “[i]t is questionable if the playwright has really succeeded in intertwining the manifold strands that connect the figure of the Ghost to the main plot” (8). There are, however, those who follow Bond in his disfavor towards the ghost boy. Coult says, “The Ghost shows how dangerous are those escapist fantasies of rural life which threaten to cut Lear off from the pains and sorrows of wider society” (39).

Shakespeare’s Cordelia follows suit as an immoral character. There may be some regret in Bond’s preface to Lear and in the play itself that the Boy must go, that his time in world history is up, but there is less fellow feeling for the young woman revolutionary. It is difficult to absorb Bond’s appraisal of Cordelia in King Lear:

I don’t want to make this seem easy or slick, but Cordelia in Shakespeare’s play is an absolute menace. I mean she’s a very dangerous type of person, and I thought the other daughters, though I am not excusing them, were very unfairly treated and misunderstood (qtd. in Shaughnessy, Plays 65).

Shaughnessy supports Bond: “Shakespeare’s play glosses over the realities of Cordelia’s war against her sisters – for not abstract goodness determines the outcome of the play”
Shaughnessy finds a “disparity between Cordelia’s personal virtue and her political role; the disparity becomes apparent in her defeat” (Plays 66).

No quotes are given by Shaughnessy from King Lear to support his view. In the play, Cordelia in defeat offers four lines:

We are not the first
Who with the best meaning have incurred the worst
Myself could else outfrown false fortune’s frown,
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters (Shakespeare 256)?

In these lines it is not easy to see in Cordelia the disparity between her personal virtue and political role that Shaughnessy sees. Is her menace in her ability to think of the many others who have met the same fate? Is there something to be found in her neutral words about Goneril and Regan in the last of the four lines? Shaughnessy concludes, “In the final analysis, the idealization of Cordelia in Shakespeare’s play is an endorsement, not a critique, of traditional authority” (Plays 66). Has Shaughnessy politicized King Lear in such a way that an endorsement of loving another is not allowed?

Bulman also supports Bond’s labeling of Cordelia as a menace: Bond “does not allow Lear a loving Cordelia to forgive him his sins and entice him into the antisocial resignation of ‘Come, let us to prison. We two alone will sing like birds i’ the’ cage.’ (V.3.)” (62). Bulman takes the lines out of context, as if Cordelia and Lear had to verbalize resistance and political insight immediately upon meeting, without even beginning a conversation to first show continued love for each other. Tragedy happens in King Lear, and perhaps the meaning of the tragedy is there in the first scene, when
Cordelia’s love is not grandiloquent enough for the old king. Perhaps unconditional love between adults, between father and children of age, is not a reasonable expectation; perhaps mature human love is conditional or it is not love. Shakespeare does not let the theme of love wither in *King Lear*. Cordelia’s soliloquy at the French camp shows her feelings for her father:

…. O, dear father,

It is thy business that I go about;

Therefore great France

My mourning and important tears hath pitied.

No blown ambition doth our arms incited,

But love, dear love and our aged father’s right.

Soon my I hear and see him (Shakespeare 100)!

Bulman criticizes Shakespeare for erroneously prioritizing the personal over the political. Bond’s counter strategy, as Bulman sees its, is to abstract “those qualities of Cordelia that seemed to him politically most significant – her self-righteous militarism and her willingness to overlook Lear’s social irresponsibility – and . . . [divide] them between two characters in his own play: the new Cordelia . . . and . . . the Gravedigger’s Boy” (62).
2.6 Bond and Brecht on Shakespeare

Bulman considers *King Lear* “a dangerous product of its age” (61) in its acceptance of the Elizabethan political status quo. As a political playwright, Bond finds *King Lear* a challenge. “I can only say,” Bond says in an interview, “that Lear was standing in my path and I had to get him out of the way” (qtd. in Bulman 60). Bond follows other playwrights in having an ambivalent relationship with Shakespeare. As Margot Heinemann mentions, Brecht “once said, ‘one has to grapple with Shakespeare as one does with life’” (228). Both Bond and Brecht are able to see the power of Shakespeare. In a 1976 interview Bond says that *King Lear* “the greatest play written, and it’s the play I get the most out of” (qtd. in Roberts, *On File* 24). Brecht also holds great value in Shakespeare:

> In the lack of connection between his acts we see the lack of connection in a human destiny, when it is recounted by someone with no interest in tidying it up so as to provide an idea (which can only be a prejudice) with an argument not taken from life. There’s noting more stupid to perform Shakespeare so that he’s clear. He’s by his very nature unclear. He’s pure material (qtd. in Heinemann 230).

Part of the animosity expressed by Bond and Brecht towards Shakespeare is due to how his plays have been commodified as part of the culture industry. Bond states,

> I very much object to the worshipping of that play by the academic theatre, which I dislike very much because I think it is a totally dishonest experience. ‘Oh, yes, you know, this marvelous man suffering’ and all the rest of it. . . . I think it is an
invitation to be artistically lazy to say. ‘Oh, how marvelously sensitive we are . . .’

It’s nice and comfortable. You don’t have to question yourself, or change your society (qtd. in Scharine 183).

Brecht is similarly unhappy with the theatre generally as a sacred yet sterile event:

I even think . . . that in a Shakespeare production one man in the stalls with a cigar could bring about the downfall of Western Art. He might as well light a bomb as light his cigar. I would be delighted to see our public allowed to smoke during performances. And I’d be delighted mainly for the actors’ sake. In my view it is quite impossible for the actor to play unnatural, cramped and old-fashioned theatre to a man smoking in the stalls (On Theatre 8-9).

Both Bond and Brecht recognize Shakespeare a man of his times. Heinemann quotes Brecht regarding Shakespeare’s “living between the two worlds of declining feudalism and nascent capitalism” (231). Brecht writes in the Messingkauf Diaries, “We too are living at one and the same time fathers of a new period and sons of an old . . .” (qtd. in Heinemann 234). Bond defines Shakespeare as a Renaissance man facing a changing time when society and human consciousness were more complex than the preceding feudalism (“Activists” 134). For both playwrights, Shakespeare often is regarded as an as another study for Marxist review, as a person in a particular historic moment.

The young Brecht during his initial, anti-aesthetic, revolutionary period was even capable of dismissing Shakespeare altogether. As Heinemann notes, during the late 1920’s to early 1930’s, “at a time of rising tension and economic crisis which the left
expected to lead inevitably to communist revolution, he [Brecht] argued that actors and
audiences would learn too little from performing Shakespeare to make it worthwhile”
(234). Similarly, Bond is capable of finding Shakespeare inadequate for contemporary
use, during this time when the ghosts of Auschwitz and Hiroshima breathe down on
humanity. Bond cites King Lear as an example of Shakespeare’s failings:

Shakespeare took this character and I wish to correct it so that it would become a
viable character for me and, I would like to think, for our society. Shakespeare
does arrive at an answer to the problems of his particular society, and that was the
idea of total resignation, accepting what comes, and discovering that a human
being can accept an enormous lot and survive it. . . . What I want to say is that
this model is inadequate now, that it just does work. Acceptance is not enough. . .
. You can go quietly into your gas chamber . . . you can sit quietly at home and
have an H-bomb dropped on you. . . . Shakespeare had time. . . . [F]or us, time is
running out (qtd. in Hay 18).

Bond and Brecht, in the moments when they dismiss Shakespeare, are reacting to their
undeniably difficult historic times and misread him. Brook in his tribute, Evoking (and
Forgetting) Shakespeare, warns against the “subtle poison that invades much of our
social life – it is called ‘reductionism.’ In practice, this means reduce the dimension of
whatever is unknown or mysterious: debunk wherever possible, cut everything down to
size” (39-40). Thus, for Bond, Cordelia in King Lear is really just a supporter of an
authoritarian regime. All the greatness of King Lear is reduced to the idea that it is about
supporting the status quo. Missing in the reductions is a close reading of the play; there is blindness in Bond’s political interpretation of Shakespeare.

In Shakespeare’s play, Edgar proceeds from a comfortable naïf, from someone, perhaps like his father, easily duped by Edmund, to become a man educated by experience. His final words calm the audience, but they also show the challenging situation of the day. Powerful fathers have misused their influence and have created a world of terror for their children. It is time to acknowledge their folly and their suffering, to not sink into amnesia. It is also time to look differently at the future:

The weight of this sad time we must obey,

Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

The oldest hath borne most, we that are young

Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (Shakespeare 270).

Before assuming that the situation leaves “no question about the unendurable prospects of enduring in a world shorn of all its bright prospects and illusions” (Cartelli 160), perhaps there is the need to look at the fortitude of the specific men who have survived the storm.

Before assuming Edgar’s final words equal a state of inaction, the political interpreter would do well to think of the feeling behind the words and the commitment being taken.

Narrow political interpretations, in focusing dutifully on political truisms of the day – left, middle, and right – do themselves, to use Brook’s word, a “disservice” (15). Bond wants to create a new theatre for the time, a new update to King Lear, but Lear for many is not a sufficient replacement. Bennett quotes a critic’s response to Lear, “Unlike Shakespeare, Bond has a tendency to preach . . . [a]nd his play lacks the richness and
compassion of Shakespeare . . .” (48). In Lear, there are statements uttered, straight from Bond’s essays of the time, that are telegraph messages from the author to the audience. Lear tells Cordelia about her nascent government, “Your law always does more harm than crime, and your morality is a form of violence” (Bond, Lear 99). In his preface to the play, Bond expresses the exact same sentiment about society in general. Discussing how aggression is created by capitalism, he writes, “Society’s formal answer to this is socialized morality . . . another form of violence” (Bond, “Preface” 9).

Bond is in conflict in regard to Shakespeare. He knows the strength of Shakespeare’s work yet he must stay true to his correct political point of view. Difficulties in logic result: Bond recognizes Shakespeare as a genius yet Shakespeare doesn’t express the Marxist political point of view needed for an artistic genius. To handle this quandary, new myths must be entertained. Bond grabs the bull by the horns and states that Shakespeare is in fact a political writer. It is difficult to believe, as Bond states, that “[n]o writer was ever more obsessed with politics than Shakespeare” (qtd. in Bulman 63). It is Bond, not Shakespeare who writes, “[a]ll theatre is political . . . theatre always emphasizes the social in art” (“Dramatic” xii-xiii). Bond is projecting his own ideal of a playwright – astutely politically conscious - upon Shakespeare. In his “The Rational Theatre,” Bond displays another jump in logic:

Had Shakespeare not spent his creative life desperately struggling to reconcile problems that obsessed him he could not have written with such intellectual strength and passionate beauty. What were these problems? The nature of right and wrong, in what way an individual should be part of his society, why some
men are tyrants and others nearly saints, why some governments are despotic and why at other times reason appears briefly to rule a country or city (ix).

The description of the specific problems facing a writer may fit someone, but they fit Shakespeare only loosely. Bond’s essay implies that only if Shakespeare is obsessed with the problems Bond lists could he be creative as he is. Since he is creative, ergo, he is so obsessed. It is Bulman who shows how to stop the wishful thinking and stop beating around the bush:

For a dramatist to know as much about injustice and oppression as Shakespeare must have known to write *King Lear*, then to allow the play to devolve into a study of one man’s personal adjustment to such wrongs, was a dereliction of his moral responsibilities as a writer (63).

Bulman’s inability to notice that his verdict about Shakespeare could similarly be given to Bond in his focusing on Lear in his play demonstrates Bulman’s short-sightedness.

Bond wants to make the point clear that Lear’s gesture is not the final, existential act of man demonstrating his revolt against the world, but the start of social action for others.

My Lear’s gesture mustn’t be seen as final. That would make the play a part of the theatre of the absurd and that . . . is a reflection of no-culture. The human condition isn’t absurd; it’s only our society which is absurd. Lear is very old and has to die anyway. He makes his gesture only to those who are learning how to live (qtd. in Hay 54).
To possibly identify Lear, if his gesture is taken as a final act, with the Theatre of the Absurd is a great damning by Bond, what with his hatred of Beckett. In his writing about Shakespeare, Bond sometimes comes close to thinking Shakespeare is an absurdist, yet most often he pulls back from directly stating that this is so. Certainly, Shakespeare in his “romantic comedies,” Bond thinks, created “the first plays of the theatre of the absurd” (“Rational” x). However, as Bond notes, in contrast to modern writers of the Theatre of the Absurd who “write from weakness because . . . they have no rational view of the future,” Shakespeare writes his plays “from a position of strength, of someone who partly understood the future . . .” (“Rational” x).

Bond’s placing Shakespeare close to the precipice of the decadent literature of the absurd is taken further by Bulman, who pushes Shakespeare over the edge. Bulman suggests that Bond fears that Shakespeare’s “[s]eeing all sides of a question . . . may lead to dramatic equivocation . . . and such equivocation stands in the way of commitment” (63). Bulman notes that Bond’s direct sentiment about Shakespeare equals that of his feelings toward Beckett. Bond says of Shakespeare,

You know, we think that two people went up to the mountain and got things written on tablets, one was Moses and the other one was Shakespeare. He’s the sort of great idol of the humanist West. . . . As a guide to conduct, or to attitudes to work, he’s not so good for us. I object to the idea of him being for all ages in a particular sense (qtd. in Hay 58-59).

Bulman easily compares Bond’s description of Shakespeare to Bond’s similar description of Beckett:
He’s a writer I admire very much, but I think it’s wrong to make a culture hero out of the man. One can say, all right, you’ve lived through a time of enormous and extreme suffering that your plays capture very well, yet a writer has to do more than this. In Beckett’s plays there’s no earthly reason why Beckett should ever have written them, and every reason why he should go and kill himself tomorrow (qtd. in Bulman 67).

In his essay, Bulman echoes Bond’s sentiments about “apolitical” writers like Beckett and Shakespeare: “A writer must do more than dramatize suffering” (Bulman 67). His essay makes a point of matching Bond’s idea that both writers would be better off as suicides, an idea Bond applies in his play Bingo by having the character Shakespeare kill himself.
2.7 Negative Capability

The Gravedigger’s Boy may seem a politically inessential fool for attempting to live on a farm without being an active political agent first. He does perform some of the functions that the Fool performs in *King Lear* and so is like the Fool. When he first meets Lear, he blatantly criticizes the king. In his complaining, he recalls the royal Fool in *King Lear*, who tells unvarnished truths to his deposed king directly. As a ghost, the Boy shows the weakness of an easily skittish fool when he asks the king to retreat from his painful freedom. Yet the Boy is not a fool. In fact, Bond’s dramaturgy cannot allow the character part of a fool. Lear himself, at the play’s beginning, seems closest to becoming a fool, what with his standing in front of the firing squad by mistake and, later in the same act, in his sitting on Cordelia’s baby’s cradle, but his absurd actions do not continue throughout the play. No permanent occupation of fool is allowed in a play of such seriousness; the professional fool points elsewhere: to the absurd.

The Fool in *King Lear*, like the Boy in *Lear*, vanishes before the play is over. What happens to the Fool is not clear. When the dying Lear says, “And my poor fool is hanged” (Shakespeare 269), is it Cordelia or the Fool of whom he speaks? Perhaps the Fool’s disappearance is meant to be unclear, an example of Shakespeare employing negative capability. Keats’s letter to his brothers mentions *King Lear* as an example of art’s “intensity,” showing its “close relation with Beauty and Truth” (60). In the letter, Keats praises Shakespeare for his “Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (60). In crafting his play, perhaps Shakespeare decided the outcome of the Fool
was an event not necessary to pursue, a loose end to be left undone. In contrast, Bond underscores the Boy’s second death as ghost by making it a tortuous one.

Torture is required unlike in the Boy’s first, quick death; the ghost must be strenuously erased from the plot. First offstage is heard a “distant squealing of angry pigs,” then the “Ghost stumbles in . . . covered in blood” (Bond, Lear 100):

    Ghost: The pigs! I’m torn! They gored me! Help me, help me! I’ll die!
    . . .

Lear: No, too late! It’s far too late! You were killed long ago! You must die! I love you, I’ll always remember you, but I can’t help you. Die, for your own sake die (Bond, Lear 100)!

The audience, not following the author’s intention in his essay, may not know the Gravedigger’s Boy is a type of person not needed in the modern world. The audience may not grasp Bond’s concept that the Boy is a prehistoric creature and that social evolution excludes him. Instead, they may take the dialogue at face value and think the Boy indeed was killed long ago, not in historic time, but in the progression of agonies in the play. The phrase Lear utters, “I can’t help you. Die, for your own sake die!” (Bond, Lear 100), sounds like an emotional response of despair, not necessarily a judgment of character.

Ronald Hayman finds Bond at the “opposite pole” (25) from Keats in regard to appreciating Shakespeare’s negative capability. Hayman quotes Bond to indicate Bond’s determined focus on the political: “Writers who don’t develop in this way become shut up in private fantasies, experiments in style, unrewarding obscurities – they become
trivial and reactionary” (25). Hayman disagrees. Bond’s approach is the “reaching after fact and reason” (Keats 60) that Keats sees as rushing too quickly to a conclusion in describing a situation. Shakespeare is also Brook’s great example of the artist being able to absorb the situation: “Shakespeare was genetically endowed with an extraordinary capacity to observe, an extraordinary capacity to assimilate and an extraordinary capacity to remember” (Evoking 8). Shakespeare and also Calderon, Sontag almost applauds, “construct metatheatrical jeux d’esprit in the bosom of a world rich in established feelings and a sense of openness” (Against 137-138). Bond’s work often demonstrates what happens when political art does not utilize negative capability. The artist cuts short the seeking after truth and beauty, instead grabbing onto truisms. He draws a politically negative image (i.e., the ghost) and begins to erase it - until it shows the torture of its existence.

Hayman elects Beckett’s Endgame as a better modern adaptation of King Lear than Bond’s play. Hayman has essentially the same critique of Lear as Eric Shorter’s: “There is no point in comparing it to Shakespeare, since Mr. Bond’s point isn’t dramatic. It is moral. There is a message. There is inevitably little or no attempt at characterization, at human relationships or exploring anything” (qtd. in Bennett 49). For Hayman, Endgame is more a creative exercise. It is not tied down to the high moral tone that Bond strikes. The rhythm of Endgame’s dialogue, the multi-layers of meaning and the sense that, in all the bitter exchanges between Hamm and Clov, existence must go on are preferable to the sanctities and leaps to conclusions found in Bond.
In comparison to both Shakespeare and Beckett, Bond’s use of language in *Lear* is not of the same caliber. When Lear speaks, Hayman senses the phrases are “as tritely declamatory as expostulations in Victorian melodrama” (20). Hamm, the Lear figure in Beckett’s play, is more able to state things poetically and make ironic sport of his own words. It is not that *Endgame* matches *King Lear* nor that Hamm matches the humanity of King Lear, but aesthetically there is a similar openness, a sense of rhythm, a texture, and an engaging use of language and character. There is little aesthetic surprise in *Lear* for Hayman. Bond “strip[s] away all the poetry” from *King Lear* “subordinating characterization to his didactic starting point” (23).

For Bond, the prioritizing of subjective experience in modern theatre over political analysis has progressed disastrously from “Hamlet’s soliloquy . . . [to] the senile monologue of *Krapp’s Last Tape*” (“Activists” 136). Jan Kott looks at Shakespeare’s connection to Beckett in a different light. In his essay on *King Lear* and its similarity to *Endgame*, Kott capitalizes on the notion of the Fool, who stands apart and sees the absurdity of all human vanities. In equating Shakespeare’s play to Beckett’s, Kott uses the concept of the grotesque. Maurice Regnault’s quote in the essay informs Kott’s meaning: “the absence of tragedy in a tragic world gives birth to comedy” (qtd. in Kott 91). The grotesque is the sad comedy Kott recognizes in *King Lear*. Kott’s notion, however, is partially based on the arguable assumption that King Lear and Gloucester are rather ridiculous, somewhat unbelievable characters (the former for dividing his kingdom, the latter for believing Edmund over Edgar). For Kott, Lear is like *Endgame*’s Hamm, a foolish leader with no one to lead but the Fool. Edgar is like Clov, especially as
seen by Kott in his pretended taking of his blind father, Gloucester, to the cliffs to Dover so that the betrayed old man can end his life.

It is not that the grotesque does not exit in the tragic world, but the situation has changed because of its presence. Whereas “tragedy is an appraisal of human fate, a measure of the absolute,” the “grotesque is a criticism of the absolute in the name of frail human experience” (Kott 92). The absolute in modern times has become absurd. The result is the uphill struggle of Sisyphus. Kott’s essay’s logic hinges on a sense that King Lear ends without resolution:

[U]nlike the Histories and Tragedies . . . the world has not healed again. In King Lear there is no young and resolute Fortinbras to ascend the throne of Denmark. . . . [T]here will be no coronation. There is no one whom Edgar can invite to it. Everybody has died or been murdered (109-110).

Kott’s statement does not do justice to the characters. Edgar, Kent and Lear have all been made powerless by events. Certainly Albany has been more than jarred. Perhaps the faithful colleagues of Lear can even be considered somewhat accountable for being blind to the dangerous situation. However, each man’s ethical character is not eradicated by the events of the play; they are strengthened. Each man fights back. Some of Kott’s judgments about King Lear are as idiosyncratic as some of Bond’s. Both writers indicate the difficulty in maintaining sufficient negative capability as they absorb the play.

Brook suggests Edgar’s ending statement, “We that are young / Shall never see so much nor live so long” (Shakespeare 270), “rings like a half-open question . . . it carries no moral overtones at all” (Empty Space 94). Brook recognizes in King Lear that
many themes “criss-cross its prismatic form” (*Empty Space* 92), including the relationship between the young and old. Brook wonders if it is not the case that each generation in the play has its own freedom (as exampled in the young by Edgar) and blindness (as exampled in the young by Edmund). Edgar’s words do not “suggest for one moment that youth or age, seeing or not seeing, are in any way superior, inferior, more desirable or less desirable one than another other” (Brook, *Empty Space* 94).

Shakespeare, for Brook, works with the audience by letting them ponder meaning, questioning what is said by the characters. In this way, he is able, as Brook remarks, to offer “the most burning themes of our time, the old and the new in relation to our society, our arts, our notions of progress, our way of living our lives” (*Empty Space* 94).

Brook sees the positive impact of negative capability at work in Shakespeare’s plays:

Nowhere in *King Lear* can you find anyone closing their eyes to the cruelty of mankind, and yet the play is not a black existential play showing that mankind is a worthless species, nor a naïve expression that all mankind is noble and beautiful. The vertical and horizontal are there at one and the same time to be grasped if one wants to and if one can (*Evoking* 29).

Brook’s 1962 production of *King Lear* is often associated with Kott’s essay. Sinfield is an example of someone finding the results troubling:

The politics of this is nihilist; Brook, made sure that his Lear could not be construed as offering any positive possibilities for humanity by making the servants hostile instead of sympathetic to the blinded Gloucester, deleting
Edmund’s final repentance, and introducing as a last gesture a renewed rumbling of thunder, suggesting of the storm to come (Dollimore 187).

Lenore Lieblein’s essay, “Jan Kott, Peter Brook, and King Lear,” makes the point that it is an “oversimplification to say that Jan Kott ‘influenced’ Peter Brook. Rather, their views in the early 1960s converged” (47). Brook’s King Lear does show the application of the absurd expressed in Kott’s reading of the play. His production also shows the influence of Brecht, as well as his own understanding of King Lear.

Brook’s King Lear, as described by Lieblein, “rejected traditional readings which made Lear a Titan raging against the storm or a ‘foolish, fond old man,’ and resisted the usual moral alignments” (43). Brook utilized, in his interpretation, tools of the Theatre of the Absurd. “The image of an absurd universe was created, it was felt, by a lack of definition in the stage environment” (Leiblein 44). Scenery became minimal, colors were dulled, actions made quotidian. Brook’s production made one critic respond, “In the end, in this production as in no other I have seen, Lear becomes the representation of all humanity. . . . But this Lear is not Humanity, he is only human” (qtd. in Leiblein 44). Possible grand gestures were replaced by “stage business that insisted on necessity if not triviality” (Leiblein 45). For instance, in the first scene of the play, Edgar (who has not speaking part in the scene) is onstage helping his father on with his coat and begins to polish his boots (Leiblein 45). Leiblein summarizes the affect, “meaning was not immanent and given but a product of human activity” (44).

An example of Brook avoiding conventional meaning is in his presenting Kent as not just “a loyal servant . . . [but also] an ‘unreflecting bully’” (Leiblein 43). In this
manner Kent’s loyalty to Lear is qualified by Kent’s negative character traits. Brook does not just turn off the loyalty of the Kent character as Bond does in his ambivalent and cold character of Warrington; he humanizes it. Similarly, Brook shows sympathy in his presentation of Goneril and Regan, so they are not just seen as power-mad villains. Brook’s sensibility in this regard is similar to Bond’s. Bond’s having the Gravedigger’s Boy’s ghost bring the ghosts of Fontanelle and Bodice to Lear in prison is to show their side of the story, to tell of their loneliness and dependence on a father who was unable to nurture them or allow them, in his overprotecting them, to gain maturity. How different, however, are the two interpretations of Kent. Bond’s treatment of Warrington makes Warrington the victim of protracted torture, the results of which he cannot recover. When Kent is in the stocks, Brook has him eating a sort of picnic lunch with the Fool. Bond’s touch is not as light; his objectives appear more single-minded than Brook’s.

In “King Lear versus Lear at the Stratford,” Alan Sinfield’s review of a 1982 Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of King Lear and a concurrent production of Lear leads to his conclusion that it is better to rage against the bard, as Bond does in Lear, than edit King Lear until it becomes awkward and contradictory. Sinfield’s political viewpoint is monolithic. He bemoans Brook’s neglect of “political power and political action” in his early work in the 1960s (Political 187). Similarly, he finds much in Shakespeare that is politically objectionable. The terrible state of affairs that Goneril and Regan bring to Lear’s kingdom is minimized by Sinfield to prove a point: “King Lear suggests that loosening the conventional bonds of authority in society gives rein to all manner of violent disturbance” (5). The audience knows better than to think a king who
divides his kingdom against the advice of counsel and offers it on a plate to two
sycophants is performing a mere act of “loosening bonds of authority.” He is, even at
best, breaking the bonds in two. In history, such actions, even in favorable conditions,
can lead to war as much as to a decentralized peace.

If Brook’s 1962 production of *King Lear* is “politically and artistically
incoherent” to Sinfield, so is Adrien Noble’s production in 1982 (12). Noble seems to call
upon Kott in his having the King, like Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, bring his boots to
the front of the stage (12). Like Brook, Noble also cuts the part of the play where
Edmund attempts to save Lear and Cordelia, purportedly to Sinfield because it thus
continues the theme of “damage done by arbitrary rule” (13), which Noble, like
Shakespeare, wants to place under the category of what happens when authority is
loosened.

The astonishing change that Sinfield reports happening in Noble’s production is
the new, added action of Lear killing the Fool. “Noble,” Sinfield explains, “meant this to
be Lear killing his conscience, that of which he is ashamed” (11). Of course, as it is
staged as an accident that the king even fails to notice, Noble projects the king’s
subconscious in his dramatic concept. The death of the Fool in this production of *King
Lear* is not compared, as it easily might have been by Sinfield, with the death of the
Gravedigger Boy’s ghost, that other figure in a Lear play that is a conscience killing.
Sinfield simply notes that the Fool was killed in order “to develop Lear’s inner
experience” (13). Sinfield’s essay ends with his main point. Modern productions of
Shakespeare, like Brook and Noble’s, make Sinfield wonder if “any production that
aspires to modern relevance is really Shakespeare. . . . It may be that the only way to
produce a more definite political theatre (or criticism) is not to interpret King Lear, but,
as Edward Bond sees, to quarrel with it” (14).

Sinfield thinks the production of Lear happening at the same time as Noble’s
King Lear was “excellent” (7). To Sinfield, the actors playing Lear and the Gravedigger’s
Boy especially performed their task well: “It falls to these two actors to repudiate any
imputation that Bond is deficient in positive human feeling – to show that the rejection of
the interpersonal pastoral is grounded in sufficient awareness of what is sacrificed”(7).
Bond, however, recalls the production differently. In his letter to Terry Hands of the
Royal Shakespeare Company, he writes, “The RSC production of my Lear was in many
ways saying directly the opposite of what I intended. Personally I loathe the play . . .”
(Letters III 11). In his unhappiness, Bond then proceeds in his letter to show the extent of
the Company’s betrayal:

I wrote my Lear as a criticism of Shakespeare – what the RSC did . . . was
assimilate it into the Lear tradition. That is a betrayal of the author. Doesn’t
matter. Its [sic] also a betrayal of the victims of Auschwitz and Hiroshima –
because they are the great criticism of William Shakespeare. And that does matter
(Letters III 11).

When the chips are down, Shakespeare’s play is somehow added to the factors
responsible for modern history’s horrors.
2.8 Modern Adaptations of Shakespeare

Jenny Spencer is very sympathetic of Bond’s plight as an artist trying to write in the difficult conditions of modern society. “[H]is class informed perspective . . . [can manifest] resentment and misunderstanding . . . in particular audiences” (Spencer 79). Perhaps Bond’s statement in his letter to Terry Hands stating that Lear is a criticism of Shakespeare is best taken in the same way Spencer considers Bond’s relation to the bard. “Bond’s argument is not with Shakespeare . . . but rather with the agencies and institutions that determine . . . their cultural value” (Spencer 79). Spencer sees Bond not just reacting to the classic text of King Lear but creating a new classic for a new era. The new classic requires a production atmosphere that is very difficult to find in the theatre industry. Bond is a cultural hero for Spencer.

He . . . writes as a confident member of an emerging social class whose ‘classics’ have yet to be written. In other words, Bond writes consciously artistic plays (fictional, structured, and participating in a tradition of literary forms) in behalf of a society that does not yet exist (6).

Spencer sees Bond doing something other writers, such as Stoppard, Müller, and Sartre, cannot do in rewriting classics. He “competes with Shakespeare and the Greeks on his own terms to write tragedies of comparable vision for his own century” (Spencer 79).

Spencer’s rhetoric is not sound when she, in her support of Bond, states that Sartre’s The Flies is an example of adaptation so dependent on its source that it would wither if the source text did not exist. To say that Sartre’s play is dependent so much on the Oresteia that it would lose its intelligence if the audience does not know the Greek
source is not valid, rather insulting both to Sartre and the modern audience. Certainly Sartre’s play maintains its “intellectual force” (Spencer 78) even if the audience has never seen the source play or has forgotten it from schoolroom days. For one reason, Zeus’s exposition at the play’s beginning brings the audience up to date so that they can capture what proceeds on stage. Sartre’s version of its source material stands just as much alone as Lear, and in fact, seems rather similar in purpose to it. The Flies records a situation of terror facing the young Electra and Orestes as they dare to go against the local gods. Their plight seems very close to that of Lear as he faces the madness of total war and the grand mechanism of modern revolution. Orestes arguing against his sister’s desire to stay and live in guilt is just as convincing, even more compelling, a dramatic situation than that facing Lear and the ghost of the Boy. Most importantly, Orestes’ decision to leap into action, based on his understanding of the mad, chronic situation, seems very similar to Lear’s decision. Both the young man and the old man make a symbolic, existential move that shows their ability to say no. Spencer’s judgment, in praise of one play, is too reductive to the other play.

Spencer also cites Stoppard’s Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead as an example of something lesser than Lear. With its use of two minor characters from Hamlet and its continued recall of the Hamlet narrative, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern belongs for Spencer to the “theatre of quotation” (78). Like Lukacs and Bond, Spencer is wary of works of that seem to prefer style above substance. She prefers Bond’s projects, which owe “nothing to . . . the dislocated verbal gymnastics of self-consciously scripted postmodernist work” (Spencer 2). Those interested in such postmodernist fare, Spencer
believes, might feel “uncomfortable with a playwright who defines his artistic activity as ‘telling the truth’” (2). The truth for Bond, which he at one time could connect to fantasy plays like *Early Morning*, was of the same nature as the “imaginative truth” (Als 78) Ionesco gives to his own work in the Theatre of the Absurd. By the time Spencer writes about Bond, the “imaginative truth” of Bond has been hardened into set theatrical expressions. In his essay on contemporary socialist theatre in England, C. W. E. Bigsby notices a general problem. Bigsby notes that “[f]or Adorno, the power of Beckett . . . derives from the fact that he works by dismantling appearance, by penetrating the carapace of objectivism . . .” (290). In contrast, the “committed theatre allows itself to be too fully known. Character defers to role, the anguished self to class function, the ambiguities of human motives and the confused facts of action – half-willed, half-contingent – to a clear-minded rational response to a world in which nothing remains hidden. It is . . . the unreality of its realism which threatens its truth” (Bigsby 286-287).

The social role in Bond’s plays determines character. Spencer notes that “this is most apparent in the case of minor characters, trapped in role which deprive them of humanity and over which they have little control” (89). In Stoppard’s work, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trapped in their parts in a play and find they have little control. On wondering if the should step in and stop the possible murder of Hamlet, Guildenstern says: “[W]e are little men, we don’t know the ins and outs of the matter, there are wheels within wheels, etc. All in all, I think we’d be well advised to leave well enough alone” (Stoppard 58). Stoppard’s play is a comic goldmine in its focusing on two minor characters in *Hamlet*. Presented onstage are two men so identity shy that they have
difficulty recalling which one is Rosencrantz and which one is Guildenstern, just as the audience would have difficulty in distinguishing them within their little stage time in *Hamlet* itself. The pair’s dialogue and interactions are a send-up of those who must act a mediocre minor part within a great play, a knocking over of the almost culturally sacred *Hamlet* text, and a homage to Beckett’s Didi and Gogo, who in *Waiting for Godot*, could seemingly perform their philosophical vaudeville act forever. Even in death, death necessary to their being the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who die in *Hamlet*, the two seem as curious and somewhat hopeful as they prepare for death as they did when they first appeared:

Rosencrantz: “That’s it then, is it?” (Pause.) We’ve done nothing wrong. We didn’t harm anyone did we?

Guildenstern: I can’t remember.

Rosencrantz: All right, then, I don’t care. I’ve had enough. To tell you the truth, I’m relieved.

Guildenstern: Our names shouted in a certain dawn . . . a message . . . a summons . . . there must have been a moment at the beginning when we could have said no. But somehow we missed it. Well, we’ll know better next time.

Rosencrantz: Till then (Stoppard 64).

Stoppard’s work does depend on the audience’s knowledge of the source text. The play’s moral is expressed through comedy: be careful what role you are given – it just might kill you. The audience experiences the play’s theme of powerlessness based on the actor’s acceptance of his role through comic turns and new perspectives of famous events, not
through aggro-effects and moral profundities. Stoppard’s is a play based on Shakespeare that argues that it is not a good idea to blindly accept your part on the world stage, just as Bond’s play similarly suggests.

Bond, who, like Spencer, is not appreciative of Stoppard’s dramatic approach, sees his own work employing farce effectively:

[F]arce in my play poses its own problems. . . . The farce isn’t the aura of the text but it cuts into it. Its [sic] as if two different jigsaw puzzles had to be assembled together. One is farcical, and the other not – indeed the other is often its opposite, tragic- meaning. . . . [T]he two worlds have to be bound together by the overall social realism – otherwise you get an arbitrary aesthetic effect . . . a mere ‘piece of theatre’ (Letters II 40).

Some are able, like Spencer and Hirst, to see farce working in Lear in unexpected scenes. Spencer sees “grotesquely comic overtones” (82) in Bodice and Fontanelle’s torture of Warrington. Hirst, who sees “savage ironic humor” (138) throughout the play, cites the slow torture of Warrington as a prime example. “As Fontanelle helps the soldier to jump on Warrington’s hands, shrieking ‘I want to sit on his lungs!’ Bodice remarks wryly: ‘Plain, pearl, plain. She was just the same in school.’ This comment is made directly to the audience and is intended to provoke laughter” (Hirst 138). It is a question of what kind of laughter is provoked. The aggro-effect of seeing a man tortured into a grotesque might lead only to nervous laughter, if there would be any laughter at all.

Another group of adaptations Spencer finds less effective than Bond’s work are those associated with the “anti-textual aesthetics of performance art” (2). Even more than
between Sartre or Stoppard and Bond, there are similarities between Bond and Heiner Müller. In Spencer’s organization of playwrights, Müller, nonetheless, appears with Stoppard among practitioners of the theatre of quotations, rather than with Bond in the group of new socialist classics writers. If, with its Grand Guignol aggro-effects and its apocalyptic vision, *Lear* could be said to detonate a political bomb under Shakespeare’s play, Heiner Müller’s adaptation of *Hamlet, Hamletmachine*, creates a nuclear firestorm. If characters in *Lear* lose their way in a fearful, total war, it is still a linear, conventional three act play that is familiar to the audience. Müller’s work is dramatically a different matter altogether.

A description of Robert Wilson’s 1986 production helps explains *Hamletmachine*’s dramatic style:

One of the playwright’s scenes is interpreted on film. As we watch, the faces projected are transformed into apes and then, as on a computer screen, into a Cubist canvas. Flames leap up on screen – evoking an image – in my mind – of the burning of the Reichstag, firebombing and nuclear holocaust. The subject under scrutiny is terrorism in all its guises, from assassination to genocide (Gussow).

Based on a seven page text by Müller, *Hamletmachine* has been staged as everything from a two and a half hour production to a seven hour one. Like Stoppard’s play, it does pull quotes from Shakespeare. “SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THIS AGE OF HOPE” (53) the Hamlet based character says. The smell of rot is from the political, historical, and cultural situation that Müller observes not in Hamlet’s Denmark but in modern Europe.
Like Bond and Brecht, Müller in his career offers positive and negative comments about Shakespeare. In one instance, he states, “Shakespeare is a mirror through the ages, our hope a world that he doesn’t reflect anymore. We haven’t arrived where we lived as long as Shakespeare writes our plays” (qtd. in Kalb 103). The words could be those of Bond. Müller notes in 1975 that “[a] classical literature is first of all the literature of a class” (qtd. in Kalb 88). Bond’s “The Rational Theatre” includes the thought that the “ruling class have the surplus value to create art and to have it created for them . . .” (xiii). For both men, literature is class conscious. As Brecht does later in his career, Müller also later recognizes that Shakespeare serves as “a fount of fresh dramatic ideas” (qtd. in Kalb 87). Significantly, Müller, Kalb notes, finds in Shakespeare an ally in his struggle with Brecht. “Shakespeare was for me also an antidote to Brecht, to the simplification in Brecht” (qtd. in Kalb 88).

The penultimate section of *Hamletmachine* begins with a reference to the 1956 Hungarian uprising that was quelled by the Soviets. Later in the section, the Hamlet-Actor disengages from his role and suits up in machine like armor and splits the heads of Marx, Lenin, and Mao with an axe. The plays’ references are deep in historic experiences of Marxist regimes that have not worked. As Bond has said in regard to his own political viewpoint, “I think that there is no viable political system in existence in the world at the moment. . . . Far from ensuring prosperity and happiness, most systems are actually vicious” (qtd. in Hay 27). *Lear* also expresses the attitude both Müller and Bond have regarding modern history; there is no workable socialist regime in sight in the play. Consequently, Lear and Hamlet in the two men’s plays makes gestures towards
understanding a painful mise en scene. Yet despite all these examples of possible 
simpatico between the two playwrights, Bond finds Müller, as seen in his production of 
*Hamletmachine* with Robert Wilson, making a retreat backwards to the early Brecht 
dramas (Bond, *Letters I* 144). Rather than look at Müller as a comrade in arms, he is a 
figure to avoid. Bond’s postmodernism will not be, like Müller’s, a “return to a 
reactionary classicism” (Bond, *Letters I* 144).

Nonetheless, a production of *Lear* influenced by a Müller interpretation, that is, a 
production that would bring together Müller’s daring with the mostly linear, traditional 
dramaturgy in *Lear*, could emphasize what is best in Bond’s play. Bond notes that *Lear*, 
with its many characters, is really one “role showing the character of a society” 
(“Preface” 12). The “Learmachine” could make this clear by a front and center 
presentation of Lear himself, breaking up the play with a sense that the entire situation 
onstage is occurring in Lear’s head. Bond believes that Shakespeare’s Lear, the “most 
radical of all social critics” must express his insights as “madness or hysteria” (“Bingo 
Introduction” vii). How else, Bond wonders, can one tell the truth in the midst of such 
suffering and violence, when there is no sound political option, like Bond’s socialism, 
around? A “Learmachine” production of *Lear* could express Lear’s madness in all its 
psychomachy.

Bond can only go so far with the theme of madness in the current day because of 
his belief in the rationality of socialism and socialist art. Bond holds, like other artists, 
Shakespeare in his vision. Shakespeare is a great monolith:
Perhaps only every five hundred years or every thousand years can there be a completely new mind. Not an original mind – but one that may sum up common experience. In some ways – too many - we still live in Shakespeare’s mind. Perhaps it takes centuries of machines devouring flesh, and wind and rain and sun crumbling granite, and many shots be fired, and there must be many calls, and much selling and buying, before there can be a new mind, before the old rhetoric no longer speaks instead of our thinking, and we begin to speak again (Notebook II 293-294).

Müller, in tackling his own references to *Hamlet*, history, madness, sexuality, violence, and politics, sums up his common experiences and escapes Shakespeare’s mind – or Brecht’s mind – or the mind of the GDR political machine – to offer what is a new mindset to the audience in *Hamletmachine*. It is not messianic; it is not the new mind Bond envisions. It does show the mind of a playwright at work, turning to a new surrealism to avoid the state’s preference for stodgy social realism.
2.9 Lear’s Dramatic Form

Spencer, in aligning Bond’s new classic with those in the established canon, sees Bond working within the genre of tragedy and creating a modern socialist tragedy. In her description of Lear’s plot, she references terms from Aristotle’s definition of tragedy:

[I]t traces the fall of a man from an eminent position (peripeteia), involves the hero’s discovery or recognition of his error through suffering (anagnorisis), and involves the death or destruction of the protagonist (catastrophe) (91).

In Lear, however, Aristotle’s concept of audience response to tragedy, of how cathartic feelings of terror and pity move the audience, is no longer required. Catharsis is replaced by audience response of shock from aggro-effects. “Unlike the aim of Aristotelian ‘pity and fear,’ the ultimate effect of these violent moments,” Spencer writes, “is not cathartic, but deliberately unsettling . . .“ (83). Aggro-effects in Lear, Spencer states, are “akin to terrorists tactics . . . [that] play upon the audience’s socially conditioned fears” (83).

What seems to be important in this new tragic form is to “resist delivering up a sense of time that is unrelated to the real movement of history. . . . Bond must avoid either the psychological . . . or providential sense of time that alternately lies behind modern and traditional interpretations of Shakespeare’s King Lear” (Spencer 91).

Spencer sees Bond able to do this, changing from the hurried, urgent sense of time in the first act and settling into the naturalist time of the last act, where “Bond delivers back to the audience the sense of control over events that makes Lear’s gesture of defiance meaningful” (92).
Early in his career, in 1959, Bond shows disdain for the idea of catharsis, seeing catharsis-based theatre making “men . . . vapid, stinking marsh gasses, latrine odours . . . “ (Notebook I 16). His dramatic writing must avoid two versions of catharsis currently in operation in the theatre. First there is traditional catharsis: “we have taken the god in us for an airing and instead of acting out our urges in a moment of violence, we let them go simpering inside us just off the boil” (Notebook I 23). For Bond, the traditional catharsis solely feeds the emotional self, leading to “disastrous results . . . [for] society” (Notebook I 23). Secondly, there is Brecht’s use of catharsis, which is also debilitating to the audience; it is the “automatic hardening of [their] jungle instincts under a veneer of boredom or logic” (Notebook I 16). What is needed is a theatre that makes people think, not be reconciled either to the status quo or their being dull pupils to a didactic, strict program that Bond sees Brecht delivering.

Spencer mostly centers on Lear’s suffering as an ingredient of the tragic form. Plot is to Aristotle the “soul of tragedy” (Telford 13). Plot shows the progress through the stages of reversal, suffering, and recognition. Suffering, as a part of the tragic process, disturbs a certain political mindset. Suffering that leads to the recognition of some truth is too transcendental an affair; the ancient definition of tragedy needs correction. It would be nihilistic, in this sort of political thought, for man, as the active agent of history, to settle for suffering and think it leads in itself to some transcendent value. The tragic notion of “inevitability” must also be done away with. The tragic fate of Oedipus and King Lear are not allowable in a world where political action allows man to make his own fate. “For Bond . . . time is history”; it is not the “psychological sense of time or the
providential sense of time” (Spencer 91). The audience should have neither emotional catharsis nor spiritual connection to the sublime in experiencing the new tragedy. Bond’s aggro-effects are thus designed not to make suffering spiritually or emotionally transcendent, but intellectually transcendent. Violence on stage is to be shown not for cathartic effects, but to destroy the “rationalizations and glamorizations” (Bond Letters I 105) of violence: “Art has to be desperate or it has very little to say. That means reproducing the problem in order to make the handling of it desperate. What is cathartic is not emotional release but the rational description and analysis of violence” (Bond Letters I 105).

Lou Lappin, in The Art and Politics of Edward Bond, brings Raymond Williams’ ideas about tragedy into his own description of the new form of tragedy that Bond is creating. He references Williams’ remarks on how history is related to tragedy: “Since the French Revolution, the idea of tragedy can be seen as in different ways a response to culture in conscious change and movement, the action of tragedy and the action of history have been consciously connected . . .” (qtd. in Lappin 121). Revolution is Lappin’s focus for the new tragedy. Shakespearean tragedies have no regard for revolution; the new tragedy does. Lappin maintains a very affirming, very simplistic view of the power of revolution. Lear for Lappin is a play encouraging revolution. Bond’s dramatic goal is clear. Bond “offers us a process – political revolution in which justice implies a human form of evolution” (Lappin 118). Lappin quotes Bond regarding revolution, “Whatever it costs, it is less than the cost of the alternative. . . . [Lear] christens himself with revolution on the day he dies” (119). This quote is somewhat troubling in that Lear, in a
sense, must commit suicide to join the revolution. There are arguably many other
dramatic actions that could have been performed to make clear a revolutionary
commitment by Lear. Lear’s act seems just as much an act of resistance as one of
revolution. Lappin’s high praise for revolution is definitely naïve: “[S]ince 1917 our
world has been one of successful revolution” (122). To see the Russian revolution as an
unqualified success offers strange encouragement indeed.

Raymond Williams in *Modern Tragedy* provides a much more complex reading
of the connection of history and tragedy than is implied in the Williams quotes that Lappin
cites. If the French Revolution has changed the idea of tragedy, it is not that new problems
do not replace the old. Gone is tragedy’s inability to show itself as a “response to social
disorder” (Williams 63). Newly present is the devaluation of suffering, now negligible
within a historical or political perspective. The act of historicizing events within a political
framework causes a new blind spot:

From day to day we can make everything past, because we believe in the future.
Our actual present, in which the disorder is radical, is as effectively hidden as
when it was merely politics, for it is now only politics. It seems we have jumped
from one blindness to another, and with the same visionary confidence (Williams
63-64).

Williams remarks, “Before, we could not recognize tragedy as social crises; now,
commonly we cannot recognize social crises as tragedy” (63). Williams sees what Lappin
cannot, that the concept of revolution itself can reduce itself, like the concept of tragedy
also can do, into commonplace thinking and definitions that are reductive to seeing the
term fully – in seeing revolution “as a whole action of living men” (Williams 65).

Neither Spencer nor Lappin offer a full definition of the modern tragedy that they
see Bond creating. Both state more often what Bond’s form of tragedy is not than what it
is. A comparison in Lappin’s essay offers some enlightenment: the locus of Shakespeare’s
tragedy is “contemplation and wonder;” the locus of the tragedy that Bond creates is
“provocation and activity” (119). Spencer’s essay, after noting the Aristotelian pattern of
peripeteia, anagnorisis, and catastrophe in Lear, offers two tragic themes apparent in
Bond’s work: “the complex relationship between history and the individual . . . [and]
between the experience of necessity and the desire of freedom . . .” (91). Williams, not
writing specifically about Bond, does offer a definition of what tragedy would be like
under the cause of socialism when revolutionary action is pursued: he terms it the tragedy
of revolution. Such a tragic form is “tragic in its origins:”

It is born in pity and terror: in the perception of a radical disorder in which the
humanity of some men is denied and by the fact the idea of humanity is denied. It
is born in the actual suffering of real men thus exposed, and it all the
consequences of their suffering: degeneration, brutalization, fear, hatred, envy
(Williams 77).

The origins of this tragic situation are expressed in Bond’s Lear. The whole wall-
enterprise, whether taken up by the King or taken up by Cordelia’s government, show
men and women denied their humanity. It is seen, of course, in Bond’s aggro-effects, in
Warrington’s torture and Cordelia’s rape. It is seen in the degeneration of Lear’s daughters, in their envy and hatred.

Williams also adds the second ingredient of the tragedy of revolution. Such a tragic form is tragic in its action: “[I]t is not against gods or inanimate things that its impulse struggles nor against mere institutions and social forms, but against other men” (77). Bond has stated: “First there was the theatre of people and animals, then of people and gods, then of people and the devil. Now we need the theatre of people and people” (“Post-Modernism” 32). Bond’s pronouncement shows agreement with Williams about a new terrain for drama yet Bond himself does not have William’s sophistication, his negative capability in understanding or in expressing the socialist road ahead. The death of the Gravedigger’s Boy’s ghost is not the most exemplary display of callous brutality in the name of socialist revolution, but it is of significance. It is not that the Boy should not die in the play; it is that his is to be an inevitable death, a necessary death to further the political cause. He is a temptation the audience should avoid, leading as he does to insignificant political commitment. He also negatively tempts Lear, as Trussler states, “towards an easeful rather than useful death” (24). Further, the death of the Boy points to more developed instances in Bond’s Human Cannon, where innocent people must die, with no regret shown by the murderers, all to the glory of socialist revolution.

Williams warns against Marxism that “in practice . . . is only a residue of old positions” (75):

[There is] a main current in Marxism, which though Marx may at times opposed it, is . . . profoundly mechanical, in its determinism, in its social materialism, and
in its characteristic abstraction of social classes from human beings. I can see that it is possible, with such habits of mind, to interpret revolution as only constructive and liberating. Real suffering is then at once non-human: is a class swept away by history, is an error in the working of the machine, or is the blood that is not and never can be rose water. The more general and abstract, the more truly mechanical . . . the less any actual suffering really counts . . . (75).

When the resistance fighters in Jean-Pierre Melville’s Army of Shadows must strangle to death a young quisling, it is done with nausea and felt anguish – by the men who must kill the pathetic, cowering young traitor. This sense of the tragedy of humans killing other humans, the murdering of one’s fellow human beings, is not part of Bond’s sensibility. Bond has stated often in his writings that even to create the rational world of socialism one may have to do irrational things, like acts of violence against others, but he does not show the concern that Williams expresses for what this cold thinking really entails.

Williams finds a passage from Marx to support his concern for those who, in the name of Marx, abstract social classes from human beings: “The communist revolution . . . abolishes class rule along with the classes themselves” (qtd. in Williams 76). Williams sees revolution needing to focus on humanity’s social life, not its political life. Williams quotes Marx, “[M]an is more fundamental than the citizen, human life more than political life” (76). Consequently to Williams, a socialist revolution is a general human revolution, not solely simple class warfare of the proletariat against all others. Notwithstanding the still difficult thinking required in accepting any violent revolution being necessary or ethically valid, there is still truth in William’s idea that political agents, including
playwrights, take a dangerously narrow approach when they ordain one class as being higher over another class.

In her essay on Shakespeare’s influence on Brecht, Heinemann mentions that Brecht suggests that the audience should not pity Cordelia for Lear disowning her, but pity the division itself and the “thousands of people who were thus given away” (qtd. in Heinemann 240). Similarly, Brecht is disturbed if the audience sides with Lear against the petty tyrant, Oswald, who is after all, just “a servant carrying out his mistresses orders” (qtd. in Heinemann 240). Always siding with the proletariat and having foreordained knowledge of their reactions makes for bad aesthetic and political judgments. Bond says that when a servant tries to protect Gloucester, he is incongruously acting outside his social status. “In [King] Lear, there’s the very telling scene where the servant kills one of the dukes who is putting out Gloucester’s eyes. Servants don’t do that - that’s a feudal myth he’s going back to. . . . If the man’s paid to stand by, then he will stand by . . . “ (qtd. in Hay 60). Such thinking demonstrates an unnecessarily divisive class distinction and one that is not true. People do often respond humanely without thinking of their differences in social status.

In a letter written in 1993, Bond discusses the difficulty of creating tragedy in current society:

We have to understand the reasons for our fear – and one of the reasons lies in the nature of the modern world. We have to change that or we will destroy ourselves, as previous societies have done, but even without the ability to speak of our fall –
which has in the past always been some token of humanness to future generations.

We suffer but have no tragedy (Letters IV 175).

Bond, like Williams, does see the value of tragedy in progress towards socialist revolution. “Tragedy is not a spectacle for God. . . . Tragedy teaches nothing. It is necessary for process – it is the consequence of humanity being in process” (Notebook II 85). It is this process, “the suffering of the whole action . . . the full weight” (65), which Williams wishes to show in the tragedy of revolution. Bond, with his eager desire to create rational steps for the socialist revolution and his belief in socialism’s utopian effects, holds himself back from creating the modern political, socialist tragedy Williams suggests.
2.10 The Son in *Bingo*

Bond’s play, *Bingo*, about the last days of Shakespeare’s life, presents a different sort of young character from the Gravedigger’s Boy: again a nameless young man, the Son. The Son is developed in opposition to the character of Shakespeare in Bond’s play. Shakespeare - apparently both the man and Bond’s fictional character - is condemned by Bond for his disregard for humanity. It is in Shakespeare’s self-recognition of his own callousness at the end of the play that Bond acknowledges as a positive change in the man. In comparison to the aged Shakespeare, the young man, the Son, is not self-conscious of his dysfunctional ways; he keeps making one incorrect adjustment after another to his social situation. Bond states,

I don’t approve of the Son, no, because I think he deceives himself. Shakespeare acts fraudulently but because he doesn’t deceive himself mentally, he judges himself. The Son does not. He, I think, accepts a series of false values, false beliefs, false attitudes (qtd. in Hay 62).

The Son points to the character of the young man as radical innocent in Bond’s later plays, such as Leonard in *In the Company of Men*. In this later work, the young man entering the capitalist world is approved by Bond as a radical innocent, despite his misguided behavior. The Son is not given this latitude, even though the words Bond uses to describe him describe Leonard.

In comparing the Son and Shakespeare, Bond tells Howard Davies:

They both want something out there which will justify their actions, their attitudes, make it all clear, solve it for them. And that you can’t do, you have to solve those
problems for yourself. There is a terrible dilemma . . . that it is not possible to reach a rational world by wholly rational means, and that’s very, very difficult (qtd. in Hay 62).

Bond in *Bingo* wants to show the despair and madness that capitalism brings and the difficulty in finding a way out. Rational attempts go only so far and then fail. Bond remarks,”I wrote *Bingo* in 1972 [sic] because I felt this conflict in Shakespeare was the beginning of the present conflict in society. . . . It is a purpose of *Bingo*, of all my plays, to show that it is a Culture of Death” (qtd. in Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare* 178). The two characters of Shakespeare and the Son are stuck in a deadly culture and must play out their parts accordingly.

The play recalls *Lear*. There is an old powerful man reduced to living outside society; there is a young man who must make decisions about his start in life at the same time as the old man decides what to do with the remainder of his life. There is even an unhappy daughter who is alienated from her father and who shows a subsequent turn to grabbing social power. In the case of Judith in *Bingo*, the displaced desire to be secure in a father’s love is demonstrated by her trying to find Shakespeare’s will at the end of the play, to find comfort in the power of money. If *Lear* can be positioned as a tale of war within the context of Vietnam and Cambodia, *Bingo* also can be placed in a historical context. As Shaughnessy notes, “This was, in short, the period in which the postwar political culture of consensus in Britain . . . suddenly and spectacularly disintegrated, when the compromises that underpinned the existing welfare capitalist settlement reached the point of exhaustion” (*Shakespeare* 157). Consequently, Shaughnessy remarks,
reviewers of the play saw in *Bingo* “a bleakness and desperation which was more a response to current anxieties about political and economic breakdown than to the play itself” (*Shakespeare* 157). Shaughnessy mentions the reviewers’ response to show that the “play has touched a raw nerve of middle-class impotence and guilt” (*Shakespeare* 157). The response also indicates the almost knee jerk reaction to the play’s solemn messages.

Bond’s plays may be seen as the dramatic equivalents of those insistent Oxfam ads which thrust children with sparrow-legs and pigeon bellies under our well-nourished noses. Each insists we face the kind of realities that make us instinctively drop our eyes and change the conversation (qtd. in Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare* 157).

The Son, in his decision to leave his home and seek freedom elsewhere, is further historically identified as representing “American values . . . against the Englishness of *Shakespeare*” (Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare* 152). The Son’s last discussion with Shakespeare implies his going to America:

I’ll go away – where there’s still space. I want t’be free. I cry for that. Sometoime when I’m out in the fields I climb a tall tree an’ set stride the top an’ cry. Let me be free. Liberty. Where no one stands ‘tween me an’ my god, no one listen when I raise the song a praise, an’ I walk by god’s side with curtesy an’ fear nothin’, as candid loike a child (Bond, *Bingo* 50).

Bond tells Davies regarding the Son and his religious group, “[Y]ou’ve got to place these people in the historic context: it’s absolutely true these people did go off and founded
America. And what good was that? I was writing when there was all this fuss about Nixon” (qtd. in Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare* 152). The Son, in “his self serving utopia,” represents the “military and economic imperialism” that the English left could associate with America and so could reclaim their “national identity” (Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare* 152).

Shakespeare in the play, disgusted with his personal circumstances, isolates himself outside of his own home, either sitting in his walled garden or walking in the wilderness. He is a morose, pessimistic version of Bond’s Lear, a man unable to talk to those around him, “a poet reduced for the most part to a linguistic inadequacy as complete as Len’s in *Saved*” (Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare* 156). With a father mentally challenged because of an accident and a mother working as a servant in Shakespeare’s house, the Son often carries the same tone in his voice as Shakespeare’s unhappy daughter. As the Son’s father, the Old Man, says about the daughter, Judith, and the Son, “[S]he’s cross with the two on us. My boy’s cross too. He rage up an’ down all hours. Say yo’ agin poor people. . . . He’s allus talking t’ god – so stands t’ reason he never listen to a word I say” (Bond, *Bingo* 15).

Although Bond stacks the deck against the young in the play, the Son’s mother and father do show concern for their child. Shakespeare is cold and cruel to his daughter. Bond has Shakespeare realize his social error in siding with the rich over the poor in an enclosing of land:

What it costs to stay alive? I’m stupefied at the suffering I’ve seen. The shapes huddled in misery that switch away when you step over them. Women with shopping
bags stepping over puddles of blood. What it costs to starve people. . . . How can I go back to that? What can I do there? I talk to myself now. I know no one will ever listen (Bond, Bingo 26).

In his understanding of his social error, Bond does not make Shakespeare also see his more personal error, his hurtful, unbending dislike for his own daughter. He coldly tells her,

Listen. . . . When I ran away from your mother . . . I was so bored, she’s such a silly woman, obstinate, and you take after her. Forgive me, I know that’s cruel, sordid, but it’s such an effort to be polite any more. . . . The only thing I can afford to give you now is money. But money always turns to hate. If I tried to be nice to you know to you now would be sentimental. . . . I treated you so badly. I made you vulgar and ugly and cheap. I corrupted you (Bond, Bingo 41).

Bond assesses Shakespeare’s crime as his political inability to act; the greater crime is how he treats his own child. This top man treats his child as badly, indeed worse, than Marlene treats her daughter in Churchill’s play.

Shakespeare destroys his own child’s emotional health and the Son shoots his father to death. The Son, much like the Gravedigger’s Boy and his associates in tearing down Lear’s wall at night, is destroying the wealthy Combe’s enclosure of the land in an act of resistance. His shooting of his father is an accident. Much like Judith getting no fatherly advice or attention, the Son’s telling of the accident to Shakespeare leads to nothing from the wise old man. Instead, the Son is given an ironic abstraction from Shakespeare, “A murderer telling a dead man the truth. Are we the only people who can
afford the truth” (Bond, Bingo 48)? The Son responds, “I fire a gun – I yont hide no truth. That yont mean I shot him” (Bond, Bingo 50). The Son shoots in the dark at a figure he could not make out while he is trying to stop Combe’s enclosure. The act is unintentional, an accident. Still, Shakespeare dubs him a murderer in his maudlin self-absorption and lets him go.

It is the matter of Shakespeare’s lack of integrity that bothers Bond. Here is the man who wrote the play “about Lear who went mad on the heath, and standing on the heath insisted on certain moral insights, certain moral priorities for conduct, and you did those things even if it meant your death and even if it meant the destruction of your family” (qtd. in Hay 59). How could the same man allow his own village’s heath to be enclosed by the wealthy or create plays while people were being hung? While Bond does not approve of suicide, what else could Shakespeare do? Bond’s answer is harsh: “[H]e had no reason to live. That’s the judgment that one would make about him: that he compromised himself so much . . .” (qtd. in Hay 59). Shakespeare, like Bond’s Lear, slowly becomes aware of his political errors but, unlike Lear, is not given redemption by the author. Bond’s character of Shakespeare says of writers, “Every writer writes in other men’s blood. The trivial, and the real. There’s nothing else to write in. But only a god or a devil can write in other’s men’s blood and not ask why they spilt it and what it cost” (Bond, Bingo 42). Bond’s Shakespeare needs only to look inside his own house to see the blood he is writing in.
Chapter Three: “But I think he had to destroy the innocent boy.”

3.1 Sacrifice

When the young comrade is killed in Brecht’s *The Measures Taken*, it is a case of political necessity. Sacrifice, either of oneself or of others, is often a theme in political drama. Self-sacrifice, like that in Bond’s *Lear*, can ennoble the cause; the sacrifice of others questions it. In *The Measures Taken*, a comrade must be killed, not so much that he is the enemy within, but because the comrade stands in the collective’s way of effectively dealing with the political problems at hand. The Young Comrade in Brecht’s *Lehrstück, The Measures Taken*, is not able to follow the orders of the party headquarters. He is too sympathetic, too undisciplined. Told to work anonymously and do as he is told, he is unable to stop over-identifying with the working class members he meets and, in his interaction with them, exposes his cover. His interference makes his group lose their anonymity and they are discovered as outside agitators. Either he must die or political objectives will suffer.

*The Measures Taken* presents a relentless judging of the Young Comrade, who although effective in his youth community, handicaps the work of the agitators in the field. Brecht’s play presents a Control Chorus who hears the agitators’ case to see if they did the appropriate thing in murdering the young man. The language of the play is stiff, exclamatory, and expository, as when the Young Comrade, played by one of the agitators, describes himself:
I am the secretary of the Party House, the last before the border. I sympathize with the revolution. The sight of injustice compelled me to become a fighter. Man must help Man. . . . I am for the measures taken by the Communist Party, fighting against exploitation and ignorance for a classless society (Brecht, *Measures* 10).

Three times the young comrade botches his part of the agitators’ missions to anonymously spread propaganda. The agitators wear masks at a party leader’s request so that they will blend in with the crowd. “[Y]ou are no longer no-one. . . . [Y]ou are unknown workers, fighters, Chinamen . . . who in sleep and in delirium speak only Chinese” (Brecht, *Measures* 12-13).

The Control Chorus explains how the agitators must operate:

He who fights for Communism

Must be able to fight and not fight

Must tell the truth and not tell the truth

. . . .

He who fights for Communism

Has of all virtues only one:

That he fights for Communism (Brecht, *Measures* 13).

The time is not one for emotional or personal, ethical responses. The fight for Communism requires the strict following of party orders. The young comrade does not disagree; he is just unable to comply. He cannot bear to see the coolie sliding on the bank of the hill or the worker being yelled at by a policeman. He intercedes and in doing so
betrays the party’s mission. It is not that the agitators do not warn him. He is unable to follow through. The Control Chorus notes, “He who quickly corrects his mistake is wise” (18).

*The Measures Taken* is didactic, authorial, stiff, and, ethically defective. It is a serious misjudgment as a theatre piece, regardless of the historical urgency of the time or the author’s intentions. Kalb reminds the reader in his essay concerning Brecht and Müller that *Lehrstücke* were not especially for public viewing, but were really teaching exercises for actors, the director, and other theatre workers. He quotes Brecht’s 1937 essay:

The *Lehrstück* teaches by being played, not by being seen. In principle, spectators are not needed for the *Lehrstück*, although they can of course be utilized. It is basic to the *Lehrstück* that the people playing can be socially influenced by the execution of certain attitudes . . . the repetition of certain speeches . . . [T]he imitation of highly viable patterns plays a large role, so does the criticism of these patterns . . . (26).

Kalb attempts to dissuade the reader from seeing Brecht’s learning plays as overly didactic experiences for an audience. The “explicit goal” is “collective artmaking;” the producers (i.e., theatre workers) involved receive intellectual training in order to be the “athletes of the mind that good dialecticians should be . . .” (qtd. in Kalb 26-27). If only the collective at work in *The Measures Taken* brought forward a less didactic, less intolerable, more open-minded theatre work, showing the difficulties of collaboration among the agitators and a compassionate working with the young recruit’s ardent nature. Rather than their killing him, some less violent tactic would be a less dramatic but a more humane approach, perhaps even a more practical decision in utilizing this fervent young
man. (And if they do decide to kill him, could not one of the agitators show some sign of compassion?)

Heinrich Müller, who acknowledges a great artistic debt to Brecht, struggles with Brecht’s Lehrstücke. As Kalb notes, in the 1960s, Müller reacted to Brecht by deciding “to repudiate dialectical parables, conventional dialogue, and numerous other techniques that he thought cut off possibilities for interpretation for spectators, propagandizing and fostering ideological obedience rather than original thinking” (22-23). Müller’s experiments with his own Lehrstück shows the difficulty in harnessing the form.

Müller’s goal in composing his play, The Horatian, is not, Kalb notes, to argue about killing another as a matter of ethics, but to best indicate how characters speak about the decision to murder one of their own. In his play, a Horatian kills a Curiatian in a contest to decide which of the two groups will be dominant in their battle against a common enemy, the Etruscans. The Curiatian loses the fight. There is a, however, a complication: the Curiatian is the Horatian’s sister’s lover. He begs for mercy but is killed. When the Horatian’s sister demands her lover’s clothes, the Horatian kills her also, for she is siding against her own group in this show of grief.

Müller does not switch to interpersonal dialogue in his play to avoid the language of Brecht’s Lehrstücke. He employs “what Theodor Adorno called ‘epic naïveté.’ This is the tactical quality of Urdummheit (‘primal stupidity . . .’) that creates a provisional trust in readers and spectators . . .” (Kalb 30-31). In employing this type voice, Müller hopes to avoid in his Lehrstück the problem of the author’s voice being so obvious or so
dominating in the play. Kalb offers a section of the play to show how Müller executes his dramatic strategy:

And the wreath carrier said:
His service cancels his guilt
And the ax-carrier said:
His guilt cancels his service
And the wreath carrier asked:
Should the victor be executed?
And the ax-carrier said
Should the murderer be honored (32)?

Müller eventually moves his characters to a resolution: the Horatian must die. The people in the decision have spoken in one voice.

Kalb still sees difficulty in Müller’s Lehrstück. When the people make their final response, it is as troubling in its own way as was the chorus’s didactic resolution in The Measures Taken. The people in Müller’s play say that to not stick to their group decision makes a person guilty of a great error. Results require clarity:

But he who speaks of his guilt at one time
And speaks of his service at another
Talking out of two sides of his mouth

. . . .

His tongue should be torn from his head.

For the words must remain pure. Because

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A sword can be broken and a man
Can be broken, but the words
Fall into gears of the world irrecoverably
Making things clear or unclear.

Lethal to humans is the unclear (Kalb 35).

Kalb is concerned with the change from initially allowing ambiguity as the people attempt to make their decision to finding it later to be a problem to express doubt. He, who discusses this ambiguity, now that a decision is made, will have his tongue cut out. Müller falls into a trap. Collective thought is not an easy task to express in the Lehrstück tradition with its love of pronouncements and solemn finality.

The deliberation made against the Young Comrade in Brecht’s plays is the same measure taken by Bond in regard to the Gravedigger’s Boy. When Bond evaluates the Gravedigger’s Boy as a lost cause, a character not needed in the building of the utopian future, he is speaking not just for Lear, but for the good of the politically committed audience as well. Bond defines the exclusion of the Boy as something necessary for species development. He does somewhat prevaricate with his statement, “Some things were lost to us long ago as a species, but we all seem to have to live through part of the act of losing them” (Bond, Lear 12) - as if the Boy was a part of all human beings’ identity that they must eventually shed as they politically mature.

The Boy with his political innocence must go - in comparison to the radical innocence of the infant that Bond believes lasts a lifetime within our humanness. The Boy’s exclusion is not like the death of the Young Comrade in the The Measures Taken.
The comrade does not represent a species type, as the Boy somehow does for Bond. What is this type in the Bond taxonomy? He is not the radical innocent, like Lear. He is not the innocent corrupted by social morality, as are the majority of the characters in Bond’s plays. He is a blank in the typology; he does not fit Bond’s system. Perhaps it is just not good to have someone prospering and doing no harm in the society Bond wishes so desperately to change. A character in a political artist’s work that the artist wishes to exclude from his list of human characters is perhaps a personal matter for the artist to resolve outside public announcement. By Bond’s public pronouncing of this exclusion and using the pronoun “we” in this act of exclusion, the politically committed (and even those not) need to be concerned.

Brecht’s handling of the party worker in _The Measures Taken_ concerns Raymond Williams. “It is a willing rejection of goodness as it is immediately known” (195). Williams, in his discussion of Brecht’s significant misstep, mentions Orwell’s comment about Auden’s line in his poem, _Spain_, “the conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder” (qtd. in Williams 195). Auden’s statement can only be “written by a person to whom murder is at most a word,” Orwell states (qtd. in Williams 195). Williams finds Brecht’s dramatization of the political murder of the comrade a “reduction to a hard formalized gesture [that is] merely willful” (196). Trying to avoid an emotive response, it steps over itself and closes itself off to the necessary feeling. Williams realizes that here again, in the case of those who gallantly murder their comrade, is the old story of the grin-and-bear-it, honest criminal, the whore with the heart of gold - it is
the old “bittersweet amoralism, sharing with it a persuasive capacity to keep real experience at a distance” (196).

Perhaps it is the better course to give Bond the benefit of the doubt in his statement about the Boy and see that Bond is just not clear in his statements. Maybe Bond really is discussing a character trait, and not a character, that all humans must learn to leave behind. The question then becomes if this is a necessary action in maturing socially and politically. In this tact, there is the requirement of continuing to guess what Bond is thinking by defining the Boy in a specific negative way. A “best guess” Bond interpretation of what is incorrect about the Boy determines him to be an apolitical being, whose character is formed by his wanting to leave society and hide away with Lear. This interpretation is still difficult because the Boy expresses an immediate feeling, not necessarily a plan of permanent isolationism. After all, the Boy did hide from the recruiters for the king’s wall work but returned to live openly on the farm and live to destroy the wall another day.

Still, there is Bond’s suggested way to act while the purging is being done. The act is to be done “without guilt or rancour or callousness,” which seems to be separated from other method given by Bond, that the act is done without “socialized morality” (“Preface” 12). It is the latter method of avoiding socialized morality (Bond’s term for the corrupted morality of capitalism) that suggests there is no need for a conventionally ethical concern in performing the act. A new ethics is needed where some acts of violence are condoned. The other methods – “without guilt or rancour or callousness” - that Bond gives are for those who do not see ethical complications and need to
understand how best to accomplish the task in the appropriate psychological manner. It implies that to perform the act, it is best to just shut off negative emotions and accentuate the positive. What would such emotions be? Bond does not explain. A broader question remains: do we really want to get rid of part of our personality to serve the political will? The Young Comrade and the Boy’s individual character traits, their ethos, get the young men into trouble. In a just society, these characteristics should not receive the punishment of elimination. Perhaps it is better to keep an apolitical inner child so as not to perform political expedient acts unduly. To destroy the Gravedigger’s Boy is just as William’s states regarding the death of the Young Comrade: “It is a willing rejection of goodness as it is immediately known” (195).

The removal of the Boy falls within Bond’s general statement that sometimes violence can be necessary. As Bond notes,

Revolution is politics not utopia. For this reason it can’t avoid political necessity. . . . But that is the dark crux of politics – that a revolution must begin not merely by imitating its opponent, but by intensifying the opponents’ methods. . . . I especially mean that it is forced to use its opponent’s most crude methods (Notebook I 179).

Must the political operative then, in realizing a comrade is of a problematic nature, use crude methods for a while? This is the manner in which Cordelia conducts the revolution. Certainly Bond is talking about a fictional character when he mentions the Boy, but his thinking associates with his stated social theories. It is a new form of callousness - if it is not just the same old callousness of political expediency pure and simple.
Much less problematic than Bond’s elimination of the Boy are the still problematic political interpretations that critics of Bond’s plays employ when another type of interpretation provides a better fit. Holland’s early essay on William Gaskill, Brecht and Bond is example of this problem at work. His discussion of how the baby stoning in Saved, as a social gestus, requires that the audience focus on the social circumstances of the murderers and not focus on the murdered baby, indicates a change in overall focus from the ethical to an ideological point of view. In his essay, Holland infuses Bond’s early play, Saved, with Brechtian interpretation. Holland considers Brecht’s dramatic use of gestus as the key feature of Brechtian epic theatre. Brecht has called social gestus the “gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances” (On Theatre 104-105). Gestus, along with features like episodic structure, literalization of the drama and other Brechtian alienation effects, provides tempo in Epic Theatre. In Epic Theatre, individual acts or even scenes themselves extenuate their social character so that the “social laws under which [the actors] . . . are acting spring into sight” (Brecht, On Theatre 86). Gaskill, as a director at the Royal Court interested in Brecht, brought the idea of gestus to the attention of actors. The giving of a cigarette from one actress to another, he demonstrated to them, could be seen as “a social action, involving little or no emotion” (qtd. in Holland 28).

In most modern drama, Brecht believes the social function is what is most often eliminated from the gestic action (which, as Brecht notes, need not be social) (Brecht, On Theatre 104). The removal of the social function, according to Brecht’s theory of
Aristotelian drama, assists the drama in its goal of absorbing the audience into its plot, acting style, and characters. Brecht’s Epic Theatre, in contradistinction, emphasizes the social function in the gestus. Piscator, Brecht’s contemporary, argues the case for art turning towards the social, the political:

[M]an portrayed on the stage is significant as a social function. It is not his relationship to himself . . . to God, but his relationship to society which is central. Whenever he appears, his class or social stratum appears with him. His moral, spiritual or sexual conflicts are conflicts with society. . . . A time in which the relationship of individuals in the community, the revision of human values, the realignment of social relationships is the order of the day cannot fail to see mankind in terms of society and social problems of the times, i.e., as a political being . . . (qtd. in Szondi 67).

A commonly cited example of the social gestus at work occurs in Brecht’s The Caucasian Chalk Circle, when Azdak shows the fugitive Grand Duke, so he will not be caught by the police, how to act like a poor person rather than as someone of the upper class:

Finish your cheese, but eat it like a poor man, or else they’ll catch you. Do I even have to tell you how a poor man behaves? . . . Put your elbows on the table, and now surround the plate with your arms as though you expected the cheese to be snatched away from you at any moment. . . . [L]ook at it mournfully – because it is already disappearing – like all good things (Brecht, Plays 279).
How an object is used between two characters is Holland’s initial example of a gestus operating in Bond. Holland finds an example in *Saved* in the scene where Fred holds a fishing rod and Len does not have one. Len asks to borrow Fred’s because he cannot afford his own. The fact that Fred has a pole and Len cannot afford one for Hammond signals a gestus in this “opening note of economic dominance” (29) that Fred has over Len. Poor Len even needs help from Fred in placing a worm on a hook, but that the hapless Len has an economic problem is somehow key to interpreting the scene. Holland does not mention that Fred too is feeling the pinch, that Fred later in the same scene tells Mike that he is broke also.

Holland’s example of Fred and Len acting out a social gestus is not a strong one. It is more clearly at the sexual and psychological level that the fishing scene operates. It is Bond’s flirting with developing Len’s character as a sexual naïf, rather than his demonstrating economic implications in Fred and Len’s fishing together. Holland’s interpretation replaces the psychological with the social. His investment in the social interpretation of *Saved* further allows him to say that “[i]t is not emotionally but socially that the stoning of the baby is offered to the audience as repugnant” (29). Bond’s many statements that the extended torture of the baby is an aggro-effect to emotionally involve the audience are ignored in Holland’s statement. The baby is for Holland a social object. Therefore, he notes that “it is not the plight of the baby but of its murderers that is in question. The baby as object redirects attention to the social nature of the gestus” (Holland 29). Holland’s interpretation of the social gestus in the plight of the men who murder the infant, and not as the dire circumstances of the abused baby, has little value.
The only audience who might “socially” care of about the murderers would be social pathologists, perhaps criminologists, trying to comprehend the criminal mind.

Holland in his essay eventually moves to the example of Bond’s use of gestus in the corpse of George in *Early Morning* and the ghost of the Gravedigger’s Boy in *Lear*. Here the Boy’s ghost is seen, just as George is viewed in comparison to Arthur, as the unnecessary alternative to the more dynamic other, i.e., Lear. Both George and the Boy to Holland are too acquiescent of the social situation. Holland believes that Bond uses them as objects (32) which serve as a static point beyond which the protagonist can be seen progressing. As Lear and Arthur grow, the Boy and George deteriorate. Onstage the audience can see the winner in the contest of who is the more politically active. The social gestus – Arthur with a withered body attached, Lear letting go of a ghost - shows who is subordinate to whom. Representing the opposition to a political idea in the form of a ghost and a corpse, however, does not make the results seem especially hard won.

In his notes to his opera, *Mahagonny*, Brecht indicates the differences between Dramatic and Epic Theatre. Brecht states, regarding the production of his opera, that the mixing of the rational and irrational, the real and the unreal, in the work “did not stop us from introducing an element of instruction, and basing everything on the gest. The eye which looks for the gest in everything is the moral sense. In other words, a moral tableau. A subjective one though . . .” (*On Theatre* 36). In his essay, Holland acts the moralist looking for gestus everywhere. His essay suffers from not thinking of the subjective experiences enough, either within the characters themselves or in the audience’s reaction to Bond’s plays. In this he is following the moral seriousness of Bond, who desires a
rational, moralistic theatre that uses the subjective only as needed to pursue the social analysis.

In Brecht’s *The Measures Taken* and Bond’s *Lear*, the sacrifice of the two young men has the authors’ intent of a moral objective. The road to a socialist utopia is not an easy one. The purging of the ghost boy is emblematic of Bond’s dramatizing the fact that innocence must suffer in the wake of political action. In his answer plays, in the work more closely identifiable with Brecht’s epic theatre techniques, the necessary murder of innocents becomes almost casual events. In *The Worlds*, an innocent chauffeur, mistaken as a leader of industry, is tortured by rooky terrorists and finally shot to death by the last angry man of capitalism. In the epic trilogy, *The War Plays*, sacrifice of the innocent becomes a necessity of working within a militant, reactionary government. In *Human Cannon*, murder of the innocent becomes just a necessary part of the political process during a civil war. Bond’s murder of the innocent in these epic plays is based on his observation that capitalist violence is deep-rooted and that the left may need to fight fire with fire, a situation in which the innocent may be killed. “Right wing political violence cannot be justified because it always serves irrationality; but left-wing political violence is justified when it helps to create a more rational society . . .” (Bond, “Violence” 17). As Bond turns to the answer plays, neutrality in the political circumstances becomes impossible. Who is murder the innocent? In *The Worlds*, a young man aligned with the striking workers addresses the audience, “When they ask me to condemn terror I shall say: no. You have no right to ask. You are a terrorist” (84).
3.2 Nature and History

In Bond’s dismissal of the Gravedigger’s Boy, he commits an ethical error made in the name of political necessity. In this action, Bond loses sight of his own scientific principles, which the Boy’s life demonstrates. One of Bond’s scientific principles is his very strong belief that humans are not innately violent. “The idea that human beings are necessarily violent is a political device, the modern equivalent of the doctrine of original sin” (Bond, “Violence” 10). Violence to Bond is a biological mechanism that began with animals long ago in evolutionary history. Bond gives an example the animal’s violent response by noting that an animal reacts to threat with the response of violence. While humans have inherited this mechanism, violence is only a capacity in humans. Just as capitalism foments violence, socialism is for Bond the necessary state for avoiding violence.

The Boy in Lear is living proof of Bond’s theory that man outside capitalism tends to be non-violent. Perhaps he is a fluke, as Scharine states (201), but nonetheless his life, before he encounters Lear and the civil war Lear brings with him, shows itself as one not prone to the committing of violent acts. It is not that the Boy is not tested by circumstances. His reaction to the King’s wall-building, when it comes to his area, is not to partake in the insane activity, but to flee involvement. He does not however totally hide nor remain uninvolved. By making the Boy tell Lear about his helping in destroying the wall at night, Bond makes it clear that the Boy is an active presence on the land, as well as someone who naturally cares for his family and society at large. The Boy proves
Bond’s point: violence is not necessary when capitalism is not active. Kindness and moderation prospers.

Bond’s other key scientific principle that is forgotten in his disfavor towards the Boy is the essential biological need of the infant to demand care and nurturing from society. The Boy acts upon this principle; he feeds the hungry – he cares for the less fortunate. Lear’s very appearance when he arrives at the farm is that of a child in need, someone whom the more able Boy nurtures. Both radical innocents, the young and old men, could certainly survive in some other play. The boy’s exclusion from the political future is perhaps Bond’s prioritizing of his historicizing consciousness over what he scientifically believes to be man’s natural state. The Boy makes sense biologically, but he is in the way historically. In his biological theories, Bond does not totally follow Brecht’s epic theatre tenet that the human being “is alterable and is able to alter” (*On Theatre* 37). There is an innate essence in the infant and a scientifically desirable social state. Still for Bond, history, socialist progress in particular, appears to trump nature.

Szondi notes that in the creation of epic theatre, Brecht went deeper than Piscator by enthroning epic theatre with “the scientific principle” (69): Brecht “insists that the scientific eye, to which nature was forced to submit, should turn in regard towards those people who subdued nature and whose lives are now determined by its exploitation” (69). Brecht’s epic theatre envisions a new “audience of a scientific age” (*On Theatre* 25).

While the old Dramatic Theatre made the audience say, “Yes, I have felt like that too,” the Epic Theater audience say, “I’d never have thought it” (Brecht, *On Theatre* 71). Epic Theatre is experimental; the audience is perceived as the soon-to-be experts learning new
insights in the laboratory of theatre. Bond shares with Brecht the method of taking a scientific approach to subject matter, but in the case of Bond’s biological viewpoint, it is a different scientific approach altogether.

It is not just that Bond is on the bandwagon at a different historical moment, although this is the case. As he tells Peter Holland,

Brecht was an experimenter, an explorer. He did not answer all our questions.

The time between his death and the present has given us more experience, more history, to draw on. . . . [T]he leap in scientific knowledge allows us to look even closer at the nature of men and society (34).

Bond sees himself delving deeper than Brecht, finding in biology the basic concepts on which to build a scientific rationale for humankind. His foundation is the radical innocence of childhood. Even when the radical innocence of the child is corrupted by capitalist society, a spark remains. “[R]adical innocence cannot be totally corrupted, cannot be changed in nature (otherwise our intellect would cease to be able to apprehend anything)” (Bond, “Commentary” 257).

There is obvious difficulty found in Bond’s simplistic notions of human biology and of violence as a capacity evolved from animals. Logical thinking in itself discounts Bond’s argument that violence in animals only happens as a result of threat. Some animal species react violently without threat, for example, as aggressive behaviour during mating; think of the preying mantis. Some do not react violently when threatened; think of the American marsupials playing opossum. Terry Eagleton, while he appreciates Bond’s dedicated focus on the problem of violence, done in this “epoch of probable
nuclear destruction” (127), questions Bond’s scientific conclusions. “Briefly it’s possible to argue that Bond is too culturalist about aggression and too biologistic about love” (Eagleton 130).

In Bond’s idea of violence being a capacity in humans, prompted into action by the overly threatening, inhumane systems of capitalism, Eagleton finds a difficulty: “If society can make human beings violent, then it can only be catalyzing an already-existent biological potential, for no society can trigger a reflex of which we are biological incapable” (129). Eagleton is impressed by Bond’s attempt to anchor morality at the level of biology (i.e., a good culture recognizes the biological imperative of nurturing and shielding the vulnerable and emotionally needy). There is, however, the tunnel vision in seeing the child (or anyone vulnerable) as solely being a “love seeking creature” (Eagleton 131). As Eagleton notes, the child is also “murderously aggressive, paranoid, narcissistic and destructive” (131).

Bond, for all his interest in the oedipal complex, as exemplified in his interpretation of Saved as an oedipal comedy, does not utilize the oedipal complex as a part of his scientific evaluation of mankind. His is not a developmental biology. Eagleton remarks that Bond, in his rather romantic, reductive understanding of an infant’s expectations, is “pre-Freudian. . . . For Freud, the loving intimacy that subsists between the infant and those who nurture it is inseparable from egoism, narcissism and a fear or hatred of the intruding alien (in Freud’s system, the father)” (131-132). An individual’s break from “this clausrophobic biological love” (Eagleton 132) is his or her resolution of
the oedipal complex and the discovery of freedom itself, to “enter upon the stage of social morality proper” (Eagleton 132).

Bond is mesmerized by innocence and the child is his model. The child makes the most human of demands, the most innocent one: to be loved and cared for. Capitalism, with its promoting of violence, is child murder, through its unhappy nurturers, through its controlling, suffocating educational systems, and through its corrupting social morality. It is not that Bond does not believe in the oedipal conflict, it appears that the urgency of his thoughts about children requires he not lose his focus by continuing with an approach that looks at other stages of human development. For whatever reason, Bond does not get past the initial state of need.

Even with his narrow, fundamental biological assumptions, Bond impresses Eagleton with his attempt to move morality to biology, to morality being a biological imperative, a need of the body itself. As Eagleton notes, Bond, as “an old fashioned nineteenth century rationalist” (135), shows not just a weakness in his theoretical positions but develops some major insights within his vision. One such development for Eagleton is Bond’s reinserting “into social and political theory the biological ‘infrastructure,’ which culturalism has banished from it” (130). Bond’s use of crying in both Saved, where the infant is heard crying through an entire scene, and in Coffee, where the crazed daughter constantly expresses her hunger, signal with their chronic presence that there is a need to be met at level beyond language, beyond society, beyond culture. There is a biological, moral need and it will not go away. Bond, Eagleton notes, finds a
“nexus between biological fact and cultural value,” where political morality finds its base (131).

Garner finds another example in Bond that shows a biological source for morality: his use of aggro-effects. In considering Bond and his aggro-effects, Garner sees the case of another post-Brechtian artist displaying on stage the body in pain. Other than as a possible audience stimulant for social action, there are reasons for dramatizing acts of physical torture. Garner begins his discussion by showing its scope, mentioning other artists, like Howard Brenton, David Rabe, and Caryl Churchill, who in some of their work have scenes showing the actor’s body suffering from violence and abuse. Here onstage is the “body tortured, disciplined, confined, penetrated, maimed, extinguished’ (Garner 161). There is some truth in Garner’s suggestion that presentations of torture are a reaction to changes in human consciousness, brought on by the realities of “Auschwitz, Hiroshima, My Lai, Cambodia, El Salvador, Beijing, Sarajevo . . .” (Garner 161). As modern history continues, Candide is taken from his garden, brought to the catastrophe Beckett places on stage, where the protagonist is reduced to an anonymous, manipulated, covered body, standing rigid on a small platform like a prisoner at Abu Ghraib, whose every move is to be controlled by the dictatorial director.

Garner’s discussion of Bond’s Lear begins by noting that “despite their relative paucity of stage props, Bond’s plays feel distinctively heavy on stage” (176). It is as if Bond’s moral seriousness adds more gravity to his dramatizations, based in part, Garner notes, by the amount of physical pain presented. The representation of pain is made early in Lear by the unnecessary shooting of the worker and by the dehumanizing torture of
Warrington, who is turned into a grotesque object, a terrifying object the audience watches lose his humanity, his corporeal identity, bit by bit. The audience, as in most Bond plays, is the only moral witness to the crime; these disfigured bodies do not transcend, they do not disappear, they remain painfully onstage. They belong to no one.

Garner notes that Bond’s obsession with the tortured body reflects his “radically biological materialism . . . that grounds the political and the economic in human corporeality” (177). At some point, all there is is the body, and, in the world Bond thinks humanity is living in, it is a body in pain. Onstage there are neither abstractions made nor interventions of explanatory dialogue that express the author’s thoughts, just the body of the dead, gibbetted girl, in Bingo, looking Shakespeare in the eye. The presentations are tableaus of humanity’s immorality. Actions go on around the tortured bodies and the actions are lessened by the bodies’ sheer presence. The chauffeur in The Worlds, kidnapped by mistake, surviving like a giant larva, enveloped in a large laundry bag that he has dirtied, is only of value as an image of his former self, a pawn in a political game. It is totally unnecessary that the man inside, struggling to get out, is suffering and finally shot to death in such a bitter a manner by the dethroned business leader, Trench. His natural struggle in his dirtied bag shows his economic and political worth as null.

The audience witnesses, if their constitutions are strong enough and they are willing, a stripping of the human in these exhibitions of pain. The human remnants present something much more difficult to entertain than Beckett’s characters still talking at the edge of despair saying, I can’t, I must. In the tortured, speechless Warrington, there is the end of hope, yet Warrington goes on. His attack of Lear shows his state of damage,
his inability to act in the physical world. He wishes to kill the despotic, foolish king, but what else is going on in his head? What could he say if he were able? Bond very often tortures a secondary character, a baby, an advisor, a chauffeur, a wandering girl, the better to add more crushing objectivity and to allow less distracting subjectivity in the scene. Before their eventual death, the tortured others are reduced to just their biological ability not to die, a metaphor how of unjustly, how insanely, society can lock down its citizens.

In the flow of sickening images, Lear himself suffers greatly as a physical being, as shown in the act of his blinding, another example of extended torture in the play. Much of Lear displays the trapped body, a body enclosed by walls, suffocating and imprisoned in many different ways by the great wall that society is building for its protection. The tortured body, entrapped in pain, becomes a metaphor for the length society will take to create subordination in its subjects. Garner states,

[The] instances of external imprisonment reflect a more fundamental incarceration on the level of the body itself: the perpetual enclosure effected by pain and the resulting cancellation of the subject’s ability to extend itself within the space it inhabits and thereby humanize the space according to its presence (179).

Lear’s political will in the atrocity exhibit continues to develop, despite the carnage around him, until he makes his sacrificial political statement by shoveling dirt from the wall. Lear, Bond writes, dies in the world to make it real (“Preface” 12). Garner thinks differently, “As consciousness contracts in the circle of pain and the bodied subject is
displaced by body as object, the subject/body/world continuum is characterized by increasing disengagement: the body towards thingness, and both subject and world toward a condition of disembodiment” (183). There is no guarantee that the body in pain will be resolved in future bodies living unbounded in a utopian new world. Lear does not tell of this world; only the author knows of it. In Brecht the measured representation of pain does not destroy rational digestion; in Bond the overkill of painful images leads to overall derealization, the paralysis of thought (Garner 182). To die painfully in Bond’s plays is to die in the world, to show it is unreal, contra to what Bond says of Lear (Garner 183-184). The world is derealized, a loveless place. The body in pain needs a human response – the baby in the pram, the Ghost Boy with the pigs, the chauffeur in the bag – Bond does not step anyone forward to help them. The Boy or anyone not politically engaged is dismissed from offering a comforting hand.
3.3 Bond’s progress with Brecht

“The good thing about Brecht,” Bond notes, “was that he was a liberator, in the sense that he restored to writers the whole world. You didn’t have to write about the little things anymore. The important things could be written about” (qtd. in Coult 83). Few post-Brechtian political playwrights have taken on Brecht’s basic narrative style as much as Bond has done. There is a major character who is the focus of the plot; there is a social world expressed generally, full of rather simple souls; there is a progression of the major character’s life and times; and, without Brecht’s alienation effects, the drama enfolds, now that montage has become the ordinary, in a rather routine fashion, albeit riddled by the bullets of the aggro-effects.

In Brecht’s defining characteristics of his Dramatic Theatre and Epic Theatre concepts (37), however, more of Lear’s stage effects fall in the dramatic classification than the epic. Lear’s stage embodies the event more that narrates it. Moments of even slight exposition provide the only narrative device. As Jenkins notes, Bond is not a polemicist (104), his talent lies in his dramatic use of images. Lear does not operate by argument, which Brecht sees as a feature of epic, but by suggestion, a feature of the dramatic (On Theatre 37). The protagonist being presented by alternatives in the form of a double, as Holland suggests (32), does not lead to any need for the audience to make decisions about which of the doubles presents a more valid life – that is taken care of by Bond. The critiquing feature of the epic is unneeded. Lear and the Boy do not argue about political involvement; they discuss whether to run away from the coming struggle between Cordelia’s government and the farm people. The two do not arrive at an
engaging level of debate. Bond’s distaste for conversational dialogue about abstract ideas, his favoring of concrete images and action over language, and his desire to not give away answers in his early problem plays also place Lear in the Dramatic Theatre category. His steadfast belief in linear development is a feature of the dramatic. In Lear’s “linear development,” epic “curves” (Brecht, On Theatre 37) are rare, as in the Boy’s ghost calling forward the ghosts of Lear’s daughters. Even here the action quickly returns to the straight line of Lear’s progression forward.

In his letter to Peter Holland and elsewhere in his writing, Bond champions cause-and-effect linearity. “It’s true that each scene must stand for itself as an aspect of the whole. But there must be cause and effect relationships between the scenes. This is necessary because life is ordered by cause and effect . . .” (Bond, “Letter” 35). The rationalist Bond maintains the principle of causality in his work - prose, poetry and drama - to an unnerving degree. Dramatic characters, especially when agitated, speak like logicians, utilizing basic causal statements: x causes y; if a, then b. Lear’s confrontation of Cordelia is an example:

Listen, Cordelia. If a god 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 (Bond, Lear 98).

Lear’s argument, which is not so much an offer for dialogue as a conclusion given, can be reduced to: “If a god made the world, we would not have problems. Because we weak people made the world, we have problems. If we have no pity, then we are insane.” The
audience, in response to Lear’s “argument” with Cordelia, is not given anything to analyze, a hope of the Brechtian epic artist.

In “Two Concepts of Society in Drama: Bertolt Brecht’s The Good Woman of Setzuan and Edward Bond’s Lear,” Hubert Zapf proposes that Bond’s work shows a different concept of society from Brecht’s. Zapf begins his essay by stating common characteristics in the two playwrights: the desire to promote political thinking, the employment of parable, the “the didactic reduction and moral evaluation of their subject matter,” and the use of montage in cutting the drama into short, episodic scenes (352-3). Zapf also mentions that both artists play down the personal within their characters in order to show their social aspects. “Accordingly, there is a certain degree of impersonality to the characters, who frequently serve to illustrate various social roles and public interests, conveying, often in their sheer numbers, the impression of a mass society” (Zapf 352).

Bond states that “[t]o have knowledge of a character – put it in its historical/social situation” (Notebook I 212). In doing so, Bond nonetheless adds a level of nervous emotionalism to the characters on stage. The Fourth Prisoner in Lear, who is given the stage direction to speak “efficiently,” still indicates his concern for his status in the new world order: “I’m the prison medical doctor. . . . I said I was in good standing with the government. I’m just waiting for more papers and then I’ll be given a post of more obvious trust and importance” (Bond, Lear 72). After making this statement as he begins Fontanelle’s autopsy in front of Lear, he repeats this hope of acceptance and possible promotion. His nervousness is part of his difficulty of his social position. It is
not unusual in Lear’s world. At times, Bond expresses concern for Brecht’s expressing characters by their class function, showing the mask but not the human struggling inside. In fact for Bond, the mask is inside the human and both the mask and the human need to be shown in art (“Dramatic” xvii).

There are scenes in Lear where characters, in losing their hold on their social role, feel an abstract power taking control of their lives. Bodice expresses her powerlessness as she becomes immured in the civil war:

War. Power. I’m forced to sit at this desk, work with my sister, walk beside my husband. They decide this and that, but I don’t decide anything. My decisions are forced on me. I change people’s lives and things get done – it’s like a mountain moving forward, but not because I tell it to (Bond, Lear 62).

Zapf sees Lear’s wall itself as embodying power, a dynamic, abstract entity wielding control over powerless people. Zapf defines Bond’s view of society as “abstract and anthropofugal” (357). “Abstract society becomes like an invisible wall of indifference between concrete human beings, alienating them from each other and from their own anthropological reality – and in that sense it is ‘anthropofugal’ in character” (Zapf 357). Lear in the initial scenes of Bond’s play is compared by Zapf as the equivalent to the bullying male Shui Ta in Brecht’s Good Woman of Setzuan. As Zapf notes, however, Lear’s shooting of the wall worker is a severe, irrational act, unlike those of Shui Ta, which though severe, are arguably not as lethal. Lear’s irrational act illustrates his obsessive madness in building the wall; his murder of the wall worker shows how little
concern he has for other human beings. Driven by outside forces, humans are pushed away from each other.

Zapf categorizes Brecht’s view of society as being “concrete and anthropocentric” (355). In comparison to the people in Lear, there is more of a sense that Brecht’s characters can at least face the opposition; it is not an abstract, unrelenting power. “The central conflict . . . is between the material level of the necessity for survival in a competitive world and the moral level of an original, altruistic humanity . . . “ (Zapf 355). Perhaps Zapf is basing his opinion on the presence of Shin Te, who, as the main character of Brecht’s play, performs concrete actions more prominently and for a longer period than that of her equivalent in Lear, the short-lived Gravedigger’s Boy. Certainly, in Good Woman, there is a different tone to the proceedings, based on a pervasive, mildly ironic sense of humor and a quaintness of location. In comparison there is a manic tone in Lear.

About concrete, anthropocentric society, Zapf states,

Society, in spite of alienation and moral deformation, is closely interrelated and, as it were, ‘grown together’ with the lives and actions of real people – much in the original, Hegelian sense of the ‘concrete’ (from the Latin concrescere = ‘to grow together’) (355-356).

In Bond’s defense, historic changes made since Brecht requires that he responsibly entwines them in his concept of modern society. A predominant issue for Bond is determining the contemporary social power of technology. In his preface to Lear, he notes,
We evolved in a biosphere but we live in what is more and more becoming a technosphere. We do not fit into it very well and so it activates our biological defences, one of which is aggression. . . . [A] species living in an unfavorable environment dies out. For us the end will probably be quicker because the aggression we generated will be massively expressed through our technology (10).

Bond’s remarks express a feeling of disorientation and powerlessness. Zapf’s belief that Bond presents an abstract and anthrofugal society certainly fits the beginning of Lear. As Lear progresses in his political education, there are, however, anthropocentric changes happening, as in the gathering of people who come to hear the blind Lear talk, however implausible that congregating might be.

Bond’s relation with Brecht is not a steady one. In 1970, he tells Holland that “Brecht is the most important writer of his era and his influence is rightly enormous” (34). The influence is readily visible in Bond’s epic work in the mid-1980s, in plays like The Worlds. On the very negative side of his relation to Brecht is Bond’s appraisal in 2000. In typically provocative words, Bond states in the essay, “The Seventh of January Sixteen Hundred and Ten,”

Brechtism [sic] lays claims to the highest function of drama. It must be judged on those terms. It patronizes the audience, is locked into an old paradigm of knowledge and hinders the creation of a modern theatre. Alienation is the Theatre of Auschwitz (Hidden 187).

Bond, in connecting Brecht to Auschwitz, is toppling a competitive artist unfairly. He does not recognize his own patronizing of the audience and his own use of conventional
paradigms. He is further blind to the possibility that his own work, especially his later
epic constructions, does not even rise to the level of Brecht’s later epic work like *Mother
Courage* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

Bond’s outrageous and naïve claim is based on leaps in logic. His essay title
refers to the date when Galileo peers through his telescope and sees the moons of Jupiter.
It is at this moment that “Auschwitz became inevitable” (Bond, *Hidden* 177). Galileo
becomes synonymous with all the technological changes in history that drove the world
towards modernity and made the social morality under capitalism able to create weapons
of mass destruction. Ideology, Bond explains, is how human beings understand the
material world. It is “the justification for injustice” (Bond, *Hidden* 175). Brecht operates
within this situation; all he offers is an instrumental rationality. He is using the same
alphabet as capitalist ideology, Bond believes. He does not let the audience create new
signifying letters.

Brecht’s great error, according to Bond, is in not letting the imagination be
confronted in his art. Bond in the essay is refining his dramatic ideas: it is the
imagination, and not reason, that is of first importance in the radical innocent, that part of
the human that cannot be corrupted by ideology and that gains ground for society in
living ideologically free. Good drama does not confront reason or utilize rationality
directly. It confronts the imagination, which like radical innocence, is considered by
Bond a very positive, very essential part of the human being. On one side of meaning is
radical innocence and drama; the other, ideology and death (Bond, *Hidden* 181). The
practical Marxism that Brecht utilizes has a rationality that is “spurious” (Bond, *Hidden

175
Meaning is changed only when value is related to a new idea, a new understanding: when imagination has a new meaning (meaning is our ‘being’)” (Bond, Hidden 183).

Bond’s essay winds down to its conclusion by discussing how imagination is confronted by drama – by the use of aggro-effects:

The dramatists skill is not imitating dramatic forms but enacting situations which are critical to ‘being.’ These situations are secured by violence . . . an aggro-effect. The violence may be physical, intellectual, comic, ironic. The violence disturbs ideology at the points which hold it together. . . . This is not alienation because the detail is used to have the effect of the whole (186).

Bond, as in other references to his aggro-effect, is impressed by its capability to move the audience and allow them to become creators of their own reality. “Unalienated drama forces the self to recreate itself. . . . Imagination has howled. The self has witnessed itself” (Bond, Hidden 186). Bond’s drama wants us to ask ourselves first who we are, not to respond to Brecht’s question of “what shall we do” (Bond, Hidden 187)? In Bond’s estimation, if we know who we are, we will know what to do.

The weaknesses of Bond’s essay are manifold. The insinuation that “Brechtism” and Nazism are alike because they both use technology, rationality, and promises of Utopia is disingenuous. Having shown their similarities, Bond groups them together, Neither Utopia (Nazism’s or Brechtism’s) has any reality. Marx decried the notion of Utopia: a politician must. A dramatist or poet cannot. Utopia must be implicit and
implicitly practiced in the work of art, just as in any act of honesty the whole of justice is implicit . . . (Bond, *Hidden* 184).

For the man who talks of socialist utopia in his essay, "The Rational Theatre," this odd lumping of Brecht with Brecht’s mortal enemies is wrongheaded in the extreme.

There are those, nonetheless, who can follow Bond’s lead, like Kate Katafiasz in her essay, “Alienation is the ‘Theatre of Auschwitz’: an exploration of form in Edward Bond’s theatre.” Bond, having begun to dig the hole, makes it easier for someone to start digging it deeper. Katafiasz begins by recognizing the shock of Bond’s statement by noting Bond’s elaboration of the statement in a letter to Rudolf Rach:

I called the theatre of the A-effect the Theatre of Auschwitz. Obviously I do not mean it in a simple sense. In a simple sense it is the opposite of true. The Nazis at Auschwitz would have exterminated Brecht . . . Brecht spent his energies and life trying to make hell-holes such as Auschwitz . . . impossible (Bond, *Hidden* 171).

Not that what the letter says matters much to Katafiasz, who, after making the reference, continues in her essay to explain how Brecht’s *is* the “Theatre of Auschwitz.”

Katafiasz, like Bond, seems to forget that what Brecht desires is a critical audience, an audience that would analyze what they saw onstage. Katafiasz’s concept of alienation effects as the “juxtaposition of literary imagination and social reality” (Davis 29) leads to her discussion of *Mother Courage*. Katafiasz’ complaint is that the audience does not how to interpret *Mother Courage* – is the audience supposed to see the lead character of the play in a sympathetic manner or in a critical manner? Responding to *Mother Courage* in both manners is not entertained by Katafiasz. It would ruin
Katafiasz’s argument, that as the authorial intent is for a critical approach, there is a problem for the audience performing it. If the audience does not read and interpret Brecht’s notes specifically - just as they might not read Bond’s on what his plays mean - they have the freedom of imagination and thought to respond as they please. For Katafiasz, however, the audience is confused: “[W]hen you pit reason (actor) against imagination (character), you put your audience in a double bind: although you appear to offer your audience a ‘democratic’ choice of discourses, one set of signs invalidates the other” (Davis 30).

Katafiasz sees her interpretation of the character of Mother Courage as the sole one. She dislikes the woman who acts so dignified at the play’s end and, at the same time, seems so beaten. What seems like an approach many actresses, not in league with Brecht, might give to the character’s final moments on stage creates distrust in Katafiasz:

“Mother Courage may think she can get back into business but we know better: we can see she will soon die. . . . The story discourse cannot be trusted . . .” (Davis 31). There are perhaps more audience members who don’t equate the final scene of Brecht’s play with the lead character’s impending death than do. Nor is the plot disrupted, as Katafiasz thinks, because the actress may chose a Brechtian approach to her acting, just as it may not be badly disrupted by the final alienation effect of the soldiers’ song. Nonetheless, Katafiasz continues her rationale for arguing that Brecht’s play leads to the death camp. She first notes, “Alienation takes away significance. Everything we see on stage at the end of Mother Courage is valueless, reduced to its instrumental value” (Davis 35). Although she cites Brecht’s quote that he intends for the audience “some exercise in
complex seeing” (qtd. in Davis 31), she divines that Brecht is only after critical analysis when he tentatively suggests, “[I]t is perhaps more important to be able to think above the stream than to think in the stream” (qtd. in Davis 31). The sad result of Katafiasz essay is she ups the ante on Bond’s troubling statement. She states,

What happens to our emotional response? Where does the feeling go? . . . . It is a surprisingly brutal scenario: when pity is made irrational we are in Auschwitz where human values do not exist. Far from empowering us, as some would claim Brecht intended, the process of alienation puts us in an ambivalent inertia: we either emote sentimentally, irrationally, or reason unfeelingly, genocidally (Davis 32-33).

Genocidal thinking as a result of alienation effects? This is not what defamiliarization normally stimulates on its own.
3.4 The turn to terrorism

In 1978, two Bond essays are published that define his current development as a dramatist and prose writer: “A Note on Dramatic Method” and “The Activists Papers.” A year later an epic drama is newly performed: *The Worlds*. At this time in his career, Bond finds attraction to epic theatre. “The form of the new drama will be epic” (Bond, “Activists” 108). The two essays’ theoretical concepts are demonstrated by Bond in the play. The play is the most provocative of the three, although, as is often the case with Bond, the essays are peppered with provocative, morally questionable ideas as well. *The Worlds* ends with a character’s speech that grates on historic reality in the 21st century, as acts of terrorism around the world begin to be a daily affair:

Well what world is it? The poor are starving. The rich are getting ready to blow it up. Terrorists threaten with guns? We do it with bombs. . . . And there’s worse than that. The ignorance we live in. We don’t understand what we are or what we do. That’s more dangerous than bombs. We’re all terrorists. Every one of us. . . . When they ask me to condemn terror I shall say: no. *You* have no right to ask.

You are a terrorist” (Bond, *The Worlds* 84).

The speech is made by Terry, one of the leaders of the striking workers. Bond has used such rhetorical overkill before - in Bond’s *Early Morning*, when Arthur, made mad by the folly of Victorian society, offers an overly emotional response: genocide for all mankind. Arthur uses the language of despair, when a person turns on himself completely and inveighs against all humanity. In regard to Terry’s words, they are equally over the top and surprising, showing Terry’s great frustration. Bond portrays Terry as an assertive,
knowing member for the striking workers: “[S]upposin I got . . . six quid in my pocket. . . . You say: I want three of them. I’m boss and that’s my profit. . . . No one shouts thief. . . . I take one back. But bein law-abidin I don’t nick it. I ask. And when he says no I strike” (Bond, The Worlds 32). Terry’s labeling of others, including the audience, as the real terrorists, made after his strike is negatively settled due to a bungled act by free lance terrorists, is an odd one coming from a savvy, politically experienced individual who usually keeps his rational, if rather dogmatic, head.

In “The Activists Papers,” Bond openly wonders how best to express the voice of the working class. Bond sees Hamlet and King Lear as “bourgeois epic characters,” who present not just themselves but are instead Everyman characters representing all humankind (“Activists” 126). The bourgeois epic character, someone who deals personally with a political situation, is possible in Shakespeare’s time, Bond believes. “We can’t use strikers in the way Shakespeare used kings” (“Activists” 127), Bond notes. A worker’s losing of a strike is not the same situation for Bond as the banishment of a king. The problem in Bond’s mind is how to present the current history of humankind within the epic form. It is a singularly eccentric turn of Bond’s mind that his idea of an epic cannot envision the possibility of a worker being the epic hero. For Bond, a striker in his or her thoughts and deeds just presents a limiting of scope. She or he do not meet Bond’s requirements for epic expression. Bond doesn’t want to write about Terry’s historic progress or focus on his interpersonal relationships. “We have to show the real mechanisms of history – the dreamtime is over” (“Activists” 127).
Bond envisions an epic that narrates history and history narrates. It is slightly akin to the epic Williams mentions his book on tragedy, that composes tales of the past, showing the episodic movement towards the golden age, which for Bond is the arrival of utopian socialism. Williams notes,

“A time of revolution is so evidently a time of violence, dislocation and extended suffering that it is natural to feel it as tragedy, in the everyday sense. Yet, as the event becomes history, it is often regarded quite differently. . . . The successful revolution, we might say, becomes not tragedy, but epic . . .” (64).

Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, with its poetic narration of Aeneas’ fateful progress from one event to another, sings of arms and the man as the mythic hero proceeds to the future that is Rome. Bond’s epic form will offer the audience the big historic picture of humankind’s progress to socialist utopia. “[T]he broad structure of history must be understood before the incidents in it can be given meaning’ (Bond, “Activists” 108). The audience does not need to know how Terry feels; they need to know how history feels (Bond, “Activists” 127).

It is the workers’ sensibility and moral strength that shape culture; it is not that Bond is losing sight of that. In his essay, he discovers a creative option for combining the worker’s voice and the voice of historic progress: he, the author, will speak through the character in a form of direct address he dubs “public soliloquy” (“Activists” 140). The idea sounds good to Bond on paper: “the author becomes the spokesman of the character” (“Activists” 140). However, the resulting didactic simplicity and ineloquence does little to awaken or stir the audience’s consciousness. Benjamin on his essay on epic theatre
suggested that in the new theatre being forged by Brecht, the stage should be like a dais, a site for a direct lecture to the audience (“Epic” 307). Bond’s soliloquies in *The Worlds* are not informative or stimulating lectures; they simply repeat Bond’s essay voice:

Anna: Listen. There are two worlds. Most people think they live in one but they live in two. First there’s the daily world in which we live. The world of appearance. There’s law and order, right and wrong, good manners. . . . But there’s also the *real* world. The world of power, machines, buying, selling, working. That world depends on capital: money (77)!

Anna, one of the terrorists who kidnap the factory boss, tells the audience nothing original, nor are the truisms told in an interesting manner. The words fall flat. The audience does not learn why Anna is a terrorist or what her terrorist organization stands for. The epic distance from the Anna’s situation fulfills Bond’s working with the epic form, but it adds no energy to the theatre experience.

There are not two, but three worlds functioning in *The Worlds*: the world of the affluent owners of the factory, the world of the striking workers, and the world of the terrorists. As in *Restoration*, where evil Lord Are is one of the more interesting characters, in *The Worlds* it is the chairman of the board, Trench, who is presented by Bond as the most dramatically alive of the characters on stage. Trench is overdeveloped. It is not that what is portrayed on stage as the world of big business is exceptionally dramatized. There is the usual business intrigue and cut throats toadying until their time to rise to power comes. There are the decadent, insincere wives acting out. As a dinner party after Trench’s loss of his job, he unveils some artwork to his former staff, who are
now the current bosses. Gone is the initial painting of Trench and his crew when Trench was in power. Instead he presents a “seaside photographer’s prop. . . A man flexes his biceps of one arm. . . . The other arm is around a girl. . . . Both have a hole on top of the neck. These are for heads to be pushed through” (Bond, *The Worlds* 47). This situation for some reason initiates mayhem among the corporate leaders and their wives. One man begins to cry; one of the drunken wives sheds her clothes. Hirst notes Trench’s similarity to Timon in Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*. “Like Timon, he invites them all to a party at which he insults them . . . “ (Hirst 152).

Hirst offers a possible reason why so much of the play is given to displaying Trench’s rise and fall: Trench is Samuel Beckett. Hirst quotes Bond:

I’d like him to be played a bit like Samuel Beckett. He represents that sort of liberal culture which is like the Bloomsbury group who were all the time being rude about the generals and the blimps who were in fact paying them and keeping their homes for them. Once the connection between the two gets broken then that culture becomes deeply reactionary because it is not a real culture. Bloomsbury is an incipient form of reaction. It takes very little to waltz from that to blackshirts (153).

In the play, there is the fact that Trench makes a gesture of hiring a painter to paint his business’ groups picture, but otherwise Trench is not aesthetically minded. He seems as far removed from Samuel Beckett or the Bloomsbury group or even liberal culture as it is possible to be. He is presented, when he is in power, as an affable but serious leader, the fatherly kind who tells the others in a show of corporate expediency.
Yes, at times we do harsh things. But we do it cleanly. For the good of the customer. With no malice. No pleasure. We push a man overboard and we sail on. But we throw a lifebelt in the sea behind us. We’re all brothers. Big brothers and little brothers. As in every family (Bond, *The Worlds* 13).

When Trench shoots the innocent chauffeur at the play’s end, there is no clear reason, within the play itself, for this action. Terry in a public soliloquy ironically depreciates the chauffeur’s real worth as a hostage for ransom and therefore as a human being: “Hundred thousand pounds? Waitin in drafty corners. . . . Ain done his health no good. Say ninety thousand. . . . Bad hearin. . . . Say eighty thousand. . . . Wife not too good. . . . Seventy thousand . . .” (Bond, *The Worlds* 72). By the time Terry counts all the costs to his life that the chauffeur accrues living as he does, Terry ends his speech, “Bloody hell – we owe you” (Bond, *The Worlds* 72)! For the businessmen, the paying of the one hundred thousand dollar ransom means good publicity. They can show their generosity and their decency to the public – the price is worth the image building opportunity it will give them. Because the business men can afford to be generous, they recall the incidents that make up this working class man’s life, his devotion to his family, his kindness to others, and his acts of bravery. He even rescued a child from a pond in an act of heroism. While the real man struggles to stay alive, the businessmen and union representatives ironically make sport of him.

The audience sees the poor man entrapped in a white laundry bag at the end of the play trying to escape, and via the description by fellow working class member, Terry, and the businessmen, the audience knows something about him. The aggro-effect of his
murder is a depressing bit of business, a totally unnecessary need to shock. In the larger
development of the play, the murder of the innocent man indicates nothing – unless it is a
statement of the fact that no member of society cares, but it is not clear that Bond cares.
Trench’s last speech about the chauffeur trapped in the white laundry bag does not aid his
act of murder:

That white worm. Crawling along the floor. Food shoved up its hood. Led out to
shit. Covered with a gun. What keeps it alive? A little thread of hope or cunning
or hate or malice. It doesn’t know the difference under the hood. Not that it
matters. . . . If you took off its hood it would hang itself. The white corpse (Bond,
*The Worlds* 80).

Is Trench, like Arthur, killing the man because he is mad at the world? Is he
demonstrating Bond’s point that we are all terrorists? Is he trying to ensure the
kidnappers will be pinned with a crime? Nothing is clear. The act does not aid rational,
social analysis. Hirst’s answer may indicate an old grudge. “The route Trench takes,”
Bond added, “leads to the philosophy of despair, of seeing no meaning in life, of
destruction” (qtd. in Hirst 153). Bond is showing that Beckett is the murderer.

The opportunity missed in Bond’s play as a piece of political theatre, as well as an
attempt at epic construction, is in not developing the workers in the play, in giving them
enough stage time. The best moments in *The Worlds*, much like in Brecht’s *The Mother*,
occur in the scene when some workers congregate to discuss the status of the strike. The
dialogue in their world is a relief after the arch, lengthy dialogue presented in the
businessmen’s world. The workers are discussing something necessary and difficult,
voicing different opinions of what to do regarding the strike. Bond theoretically desires the worker’s world to be the real world, and in the scene, he begins to craft something of interest. The worker’s discussion of the terrorist’s kidnapping of Trench is written to expose varying opinions. In a section of “The Activist Papers” discussing the public soliloquy, it is alarming to read that Bond thinks that the effectively crafted realistic scene of the workers “could be acted as a group public soliloquy. Whole characters or groups could be permeated with public soliloquy so that we feel they’re both in and outside their time and aren’t eternal prisoners of the present appearance of things” (141). It is the workers’ realism that is desired, not their participation in Lehrstücke.

Bond’s other essay of the time period, “A Note on Dramatic Method,” seems at odds with his meager presentation of the working class in The Worlds. “Art portrays present-day human beings who are conscious, or potentially conscious, of a utopian society – and who desire to achieve it” (xii). Bond sees the power of the working class in his essay. They are the ones who first experience new technology; they are the ones who create culture. In seeing this, Bond’s praise is off. The working class is often the last to experience a new technology. It is only because there is no culture created by the ruling class, in Bond’s definition of culture, that the idea of the working class creating culture makes at least some syllogistic sense. Culture for all social classes is normally not seen as a sole working class configuration. Bond gathers steam in his essay to deliver the hard difficulty: while people see themselves and the world through class eyes, they often view things from the ruling class point of view. They are not yet politically conscious. Playwrights like Bond must help them gain the proper perspective.
Bond, in “A Note on Dramatic Method,” follows an earlier idea of Brecht and Benjamin, in seeing new technology as a means for positive political change. “[A] changing technology creates new attitudes and knowledge in those who use it and benefit from it: self-autonomy in place of servitude, a technical interpretation of the world instead of a mythological one, a new image of the self” (“Dramatic” ix). Bond then proceeds to note that the problem for the working class is that while technology has made the ruling class “obsolescent” (“Dramatic” xiv), they still control technology. The essay jumps between the two worlds, the rulers’ and the working class’s, defaming one and praising the other. Ultimately it is the playwright who can best work to make sense of things. The world created by art can provide the “wholeness of understanding” (“Dramatic” xi). Because working class members may not be politically conscious enough, the artist will not just offer a recording of the event but an interpretation of it. Bond is discovering what Szondi calls the “epic I “ (6); he is leaving the Dramatic Theatre and interpersonal dialogue behind.

A much more celebratory epic play than The Worlds is Howard Barker’s No End of Blame. The play begins with a scene that shows a naked woman, a look of sheer terror in her face as she stands before a soldier with a gun. The setup is disturbing, but it does not lead to an aggro-effect. The woman is distressed, because she cannot understand the soldier’s language. He wants to paint her nude. He is tired of painting naked men, the soldiers he normally sees. The painter, Grigor, is the close comrade of the epic’s hero, Bela. While Grigor is attracted to painting the human body, Bela is a different kind of
artist whose work will be readily available to people via mass production. He is a cartoonist. Since his appearance causes the woman to run away, Bela obliging poses naked for Grigor. Though neither man is homosexual, a soldier enters and believes them to be engaged in a sexual act, since one of them is naked. A dialogue of jokes occurs between the officious soldiers and Bela and Grigor. Because homosexuality is a crime, the two men are to be shot.

Bela: I took my clothes of because – (Pause).

Grigor: Tell them!

Bela: Because I saw a woman. (Pause).

Officer: You saw a woman. Do you always take your clothes off when you see a woman?

Bela: I wanted to rape her.

Officer: You undress to rape someone? What are you, a poet (Barker, No End 79)?

Bela, in the style of the ridiculous rules of war, saves himself and Grigor by composing a poem with the help of one of the soldiers. An anthropocentric epic tone is set.

History, concrete history, activates Bela, usually for the better for the added humor when he is accompanied by his Sancho Panza, Grigor. In the fashion of the Brechtian announcement of the scene by placard, each scene displays a cartoon of Bela’s, which criticizes the historic time. As Bela moves in the epic from young soldier in the First World War to an old man in the present time in England, the audience watches the struggle of the artist as he draws cartoons that bother the establishment, be it the 1920
university in Hungary, the new Soviet Republic arts community, the community under Stalin, the English newspaper during World War II, or the present day of corporate ownership of the newspapers.

Bela’s work is deft. It does not concede to the party line. Barker gives Bela a character; he is a fallible human witness and actor in history who does not give in easily to folly or indifference. There is not the sense of efficiency and impersonality to the establishment’s approach to the problem of Bela’s independence as is displayed towards the Young Comrade in *The Measures Taken*. Nor is it like the approach Trench takes to those who get in his way in *The Worlds*. The audience is treated to a situation in which everyone is struggling to make sense of things, especially in order to allow Bela to be part of their group. An example is in the scene where Bela criticizes Lenin and is brought before his artist group:

Second Comrade: I think there’s only one principle that we ought to be rigid about, and that is - do we as artists, serve the people? That’s the only one, I think.

Bela: Yes.

Second Comrade: You agree with that?

Bela: Yes. (First comrade lets out a sigh of relief).

Fourth Comrade (turning to him angrily): It’s quite obvious he believes that!

Don’t insult him! Would he be here if he didn’t believe that (Barker 95)?

After a lengthy, often humorous dialogue that shows the typical communication gaffes within a committee, Bela still states his disagreement with Lenin. He is hurt by the attention this garners from his associates:
You have created a most terrible effect, quite unintentionally, the terrible effect of making me, who is so small and insignificant, a hero, a colossus towering over you, you who are so much better than me. . . . aren’t I vain enough already but you want to make me a saint. . . . You should not do that. It makes me ashamed . . . (Barker 97).

While Barker in his play, it can be argued, does not have a bona fide working class hero, his protagonist’s credentials negate the possibility of his being seen as a member of an artist elite. Bela is a man of the people; the cartoons do not make him rich or remove him from the cares of everyday life. Bela can be adamant in his maintaining his ethical position in the social situation. When his best friend, Grigor, wants to flee Stalinist Russia to find someplace in nature to live a free and unfettered life, Bela tries to shame his friend from going. He does not believe in a place where people can escape in order to return to nature and a golden age.

Barker’s use of dialogue within the epic construction is more than effective; it is a pleasure to hear. He partakes of the ironic tone of Brecht in his dialogue, but is more humanized, more playfully volleyed back and forth among the characters onstage, less stiff and didactic than Brecht, more spontaneous and less socially gestured. Exposition indicates not just Bela and Grigor’s situation but also Bela’s historic, if ironic consciousness. Although neither man has killed a soul in the war, Bela says to Grigor: “[W]e have just butchered two million Russians, a million Italians, a half million Poles. . . . we have trod on babies’ brains and caught our boots up in the entrails of old women . . . .” (Barker 77). Bela makes this statement to chide Grigor in a very rhetorical, deeply
ironic way for stopping him from chasing the escaping female model. Why, he jokes, does Grigor have the ethical need to stop Bela’s lust when all the great waste of human life has occurred without anyone stopping that? Barker’s epic jokes hit the target more that Bond’s solemn public soliloquies. At some point in the continuing crises of history, it is fine to laugh at the mess that both the world and the individual find themselves in and still be committed to changing it, as Barker suggests through his character of Bela.
3.5 Moral Callousness

More disturbing than Bond’s dismissal of the Boy in Lear is his approval of the main character of his epic play, *Human Cannon*, and her slaughter of others in the name of political expediency. Set in the Spanish Civil War, *Human Cannon* presents its main character, Agustina, as larger than life. In some ways, she is Mother Courage of Brecht’s play, embracing and dominating life. In other ways, she is the exact opposite, a woman with full political consciousness, an ant-fascist Communist who is an expert at political action. She exemplifies Bond’s idea of the epic character: “In epic theatre the individual’s involvement in society is seen to be a full involvement in himself” (“Activists” 129). Agustina is the revolution.

*Lear* is called by Woodis a masterpiece ironically, in that it is a play for masters, for men. It is not for women, who are portrayed negatively in the play (Bennett 50). As in *Saved*, main female characters in *Lear* have negative roles; male characters, positive. In Agustina Ruiz, Bond proves his appreciation of women. In a letter to Rosa D’Amico, he reacts to her proposed research topic which states that generally in Bond “[o]ne character in the play has redeeming features and this is invariably male . . .” (Bond, *Letters II* 198). “This is simply untrue,” Bond responds:

My female characters are often involved in political action. . . . Both Agustina Ruez [sic] and Martha [in *Summer*] have argued their case: neither are callous or imperious. If they are calculating, perhaps that is because they are far-sighted . . . . Agustina is both aggressive and loving (*Letters II* 198).
The use of violence against the innocent and uncommitted is here approved with no explanations needed. There is didacticism in the play, as there is in Bond’s other epic constructions, but in *Human Cannon* the rationale – and hence the dialogue - are easily historically placed. Agustina operates in a historic moment where for Bond there is a clear, politically good side (the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War) and bad side (the fascist side); the case has already been proven. Bond can now feel free of the uncertainties of current modern society. “It is a truism that in our present society no one can afford to be human and no act is purely good” (*Notebook II* 196). In revolution, violent acts are readily given ethical definition. Bond engages himself differently in *Human Cannon* in writing about a noble, historic cause. “[I]n open class war the role of the artist is clearer. The situation polarizes roles for everyone” (“Dramatic” xvii).

There are none of Scharine’s Bond Innocents in *Human Cannon*. The closest that comes to a dramatization of a young person finding his or her place in society is in the character of Marco, the young Republican sentry who leaves his post in order to join the other young sentries who go looting during a village uprising. He, however, is a minor character, a puppet in the action. *Human Cannon* is a propaganda play. The Spanish Civil War ended in fascist victory, but the projection of political resilience placed upon Agustina and her family is Bond’s manipulation of history. It is, unlike *Bingo* and *Early Morning*, not meant to be an ironic or fantastic adaptation of history. Bond simply shows what he deems is the noble Marxist cause undertaken in a very favorable, although very naïve, light.
*Human Cannon* is what Noel Carroll, in his essay “Art and Criticism: An Overview,” might classify as an ethically suspect artwork: “Ethically good artworks afford the opportunity to gain moral insights; ethically suspect artworks palm off defective moral views as if they were insights” (361). In its intoxication with its own righteousness, *Human Cannon* qualifies as an interesting example of an ethically suspect work of art. Bond’s depiction of the Ruiz family as members of the Republican Popular Front requires the audience to have the same political orientation and limited knowledge as Bond in order to savor the play’s meaning. Otherwise the audience is simply watching the play at a remove, critiquing the propaganda play form.

*Human Cannon*, couched in the epic, uses epic direct address and images glorifying the Ruiz’s actions to embed Bond’s propaganda about the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. After blowing up a church during its reopening ceremonies and thus killing and maiming innocent adults and children, Agustina waxes poetically:

> I watched the black smoke rush into the sky  
> Then heard the thud –as if it wished to make sure I knew the bomb had exploded  
> In the distance the voices sounded like children’s  
> Cars hooted then silence  
> The smoke drifted over the village till it was a thin black veil draped in the sky  

(Bond, *Cannon* 102).

Bond may explain in a letter to D’Amico that Agustina is not imperious or callous, but that is how she comes across in the play. Bond presents Agustina at her trial as composed, wily. Bond gives Agustina and the village women who support her a good
didactic response to make when the prosecutor asks who performed the terrorist act of bombing the church. No one points the finger at Agustina. The women respond and say it was the town itself – “Estarobon” (Bond, Cannon 112). Excited by their solidarity, the women hoist Agustina above them. Bond presents her as the image and voice of the human cannon:

Destroy them! Their world! Cruel! Pull it down! Lift me! Higher! His head! Point me! His Head! Head! Head! On him! Destroy him. . . . Gun speaks! The bomb – who put – the church? It speaks! Not Estarobon! Fool! It was Spain! Spain!”

(Bond, Cannon 115).

Bond notes that Human Cannon is one of his favorite plays (Letters III 112). Spencer applauds the play as a “festive celebration of societal and communal values” (200). Before her final capture, Agustina and her family find happiness and freedom in the social interaction of the people holding the Republican cause. “Everyone looks happy. . . . No one works to make someone else rich. . . . [T]hey walk as if they owned the earth . . .” (Bond, Cannon 57). Rather rare in Bond’s work are statements made of utopia realized. The people may be trapped in a munitions factory, but they create a socialist government where schooling begins and social welfare is practiced. Society partakes in a golden age. Bond mentions in an early essay, that “Humans need to live in a way they evolved . . . (to be able to) express . . . this need in many ways: aesthetic, intellectual, the need to love, create, protect and enjoy” (“On Violence” 10). The description of socialism in flower in Human Cannon does not rhythmically bring enough of its own dramatized emphasis to make up for the violence meted out by the Ruiz family in the play. For those
enjoying its simple propaganda, it is perhaps celebratory; for those not, the play remains offensive and naïve.

The play builds on one violent act after the other, like many of Bond’s war fables, but in this play it is moral callousness, more than political action, that is being preached. The callousness begins at the start with the dead Ruiz infant being bathed by its mother. Agustina is always practical; she will sell the dead baby’s clothes. Not given a name, referred to as “it,” like the infant in Saved, the dead baby performs in Human Cannon the totally different function of indicating the mother’s political consciousness. The baby will not be named, Agustina tells her daughter, because “[I]t wasn’t born in a human world, it was born in this world” (Bond, Cannon 40). It is not that Agustina does not grieve, it is that her sorrow shows an alienating knowingness and a questionable emotive power: “The pain doesn’t stop after you give birth, it turns into grief when you bury it” (40). The last pronoun in her statement demonstrates Agustina’s calloused distance from the baby she will bury.

Agustina’s husband, in Brechtian direct address to the audience, tells the audience the argument of the story: “When the machines are owned by those who don’t use them everything becomes a weapon and the world’s filled with enmity” (Bond, Cannon 39). His statement flies abstractly over what proceeds, although it shows a grasp of a familiar Marxist idea. A world filled with enmity and confusion might begin to excuse the morally questionable acts undertaken in the play; civil war is hell. Bond’s argument, however, is not that morally unquestionable acts in time of warfare might happen accidentally, but rather that they are politically necessary. Unblinking coolness is shown
when a farm couple must be executed by Nando so that in his escape from the village, he need not worry about their informing the authorities. Just tying them up will not do. Supposed humorous wiles are on display when Agustina, in washerwoman disguise, befriends and betrays a fascist soldier guarding a cannon, using her daughter to have sex with the man as she uses the cannon to blow up a factory. Rational decision making is shown when the young Republican soldiers who leave their post to join the other village looters are shot to death as Nando shouts “Learn how to live!” (Bond, Cannon 54).

Marco, the young sentry who survives this act of justice, tells Nando later, “Thanks for the lesson” (Bond, Cannon 97). Is the lesson Marco learns not to leave your post? Or is it to follow the whims of your leader? Bond theorizes in a discussion of epic theatre that “[a] private soldier can’t represent a historical pattern, as interpreted by socialism, in the way a general can represent it as it’s interpreted by capitalism” (“Activists” 127). The play’s focus on Agustina and her husband as leaders of their partisan group complicates Bond’s point – is blindly following a leader, socialist or not, the way that anyone should operate? Does Agustina in her actions indicate the proper historical pattern?

It is not readily surmisable that since the play occurs within the framework of a real historic event that the violence in the play is therefore permissible. The real history of the war, via any complicated or even basic facts, is avoided in Human Cannon. Events are schematized to broad historic generalities (if not downright myths), not particulars. Bond totally ignores any of the many complications occurring in the war, any misdeeds done; the play is blind to history. In Lear, the civil war had a different theme: war leads
to madness. In this play, war is sanity itself. Forget the Red Terror and even greater, more atrocious White terror of the Spanish Civil War. Forget the in-fighting and betrayals within the Republican side. Forget the secret prisons and propagation of lies on both sides to cover sins. Forget the war as the site of totalitarian practice runs by the Nazi and Stalinist governments. It was the “dehumanization of the enemy which made the war so terrible, along . . . with modern weapons and the tactics of terror aimed against civilian populations,” Beevor says about the war (425). In *Human Cannon*, Bond practices the opposite of Kantian ethics; the means are justified by the end. In fact, for Bond, the cause justifies everything. As he notes,

[C ]onfusion arises because in the past social change was studied in universities, military academies and theological seminaries of the old societies. There all violent change (even their own when they had to use it) was seen as bad because it disturbed the status quo. They classified by method not cause and this was misleading (“Activists” 116).

In times of war the innocent can be caught in the crossfire. To aesthetically present their deaths in such situations as not tragic, but instead morally correct, with no sense of regret, is disappointing. When Nando tells Marco about the enemy’s killing of a member of the Republican side, he is the worst of hypocrites. “When you hear of these things you realize we are all in danger” (Bond, *Cannon* 97), he tells his young comrade. This statement from the man who has callously killed both members of his own army and also villagers that might cause difficulty for him shows an incredible lack of self-consciousness. If Bond cannot, perhaps the audience can comprehend, that despite the
valorization by the author, the Ruiz family is perpetuating violence just as much as their opponents. It is a puppet show and Bond’s use of logic makes the puppets not only unethical but also illogical as well. Nando tells the audience that the first tool was a weapon – and later blames weapons on capitalism. Were the cavemen being capitalists when they created the first weapon or is there something more to aggression than its being a result of capitalism? Neither Nando nor Bond say.

*Human Cannon* is not an improvement over modern epics like *Mother Courage*. The farm couple in Brecht’s play show a variety of emotions when Kattrin sits on their roof and alerts the town that the enemy is coming. They are startled, angry, and afraid; they try to pull her off their roof. They then support her courage for being on the roof. Finally, they honor her when she is shot by the enemy. In contrast, the politically ambiguous couple in *Human Cannon* squirm and are simply shot as if they were the enemy. Bond simply sees such actions in his play as part of an overall “study of goodness – when the good woman . . . kills others who’re normally excusable through ignorance” *(Letters I 139)*. The parson in *Mother Courage* is portrayed as an easygoing joker who hangs on to Mother Courage and cites the Bible when it won’t offend anyone or cost him anything. He does not get shot nor have his church bombed as the priest does in *Human Cannon*, just because, like the priest, he plays two ends against the middle.

Mother Courage and her children can veer towards the unethical in their daily lives but it is the immorality of the European war machine that needs being stopped more than they. The Ruiz family members in their daily life are to be considered moral exemplars, but their actions seem just as unethical as the system they are fighting. Bond
envisions a new sensitivity at work in socialism: “[W]e cannot be human without moral, discriminating sensitivity. It expresses understanding of history, society and the world in subjective terms. How can we be rational and human without that” (“Activists” 142)?

Apparently the sensitivity is forgone during open class warfare. In *Mother Courage*, Brecht wants the audience to see that allowing oneself to constantly be wronged by a political system needs to change to start questioning that system. In *Human Cannon*, Bond wants the audience to see that doing wrong, while jarring, can be beyond question.
3.6 Paradoxes in Sacrifice

Humans’ sacrificing one of their own becomes ritualized in Bond’s 1985 trilogy, *The War Plays*, three plays written about a nuclear apocalypse and its aftermath. The concept of sacrifice, besides being a theme in the trilogy, is constructed as an important philosophical point in Bond’s essay that is a commentary to the plays. In the third play of the trilogy, *Great Peace*, the current government requires each soldier to find an infant and kill the child. Babies require nurturing and, in the post-apocalyptic world of the play, food is running out. The number of hungry mouths to feed must be lessened. The soldier’s decision of which baby to kill strikes Bond an important concept, signifying a paradox of the human condition itself. In his essay, “Commentary on *The War Plays*,” Bond describes how he used the same paradox at the University of Palermo, where he describes his paradox to university students:

A soldier returns home with orders to choose a baby from his street and kill it. Two babies live in his street: his mother’s and a neighbor’s. His mother welcomes him and shows him her baby. He goes to the neighbor and she shows him her baby. He kills it and goes home (247).

Bond asks the students to improvise the situation themselves and decide what they, as the soldier, would do in this situation. As each of the students acts out the scene, one after the other, they kill their own mother’s baby instead of the neighbor’s. This is the paradox Bond calls the Palermo Improvisation. Bond backs up the results of the improvisation in his essay by recalling what really happened in a Nazi camp for prisoners of war. A Nazi soldier is asked to kill his imprisoned, communist brother. He refuses, thus sealing the
death of both his brother and himself. If he had killed his brother, he would have live to continue to serve his political cause. The paradox of who to kill occurs in extant human reality.

Bond considers the “paradox . . . never absent from our mind. It is the crux on which humanness is poised, an expression of the radical innocence that makes us human” (“Commentary” 251). Bond once again in his dramatic career utilizes the death of an infant to prove an important point. In his commentary, he asks the reader to assume he or she is going to need to be a baby killer. In this situation, it is not to demonstrate the madness of society and to see oneself as potentially guilty of killing a child, as Bas suggests the audience do in regard to the baby’s murder in Saved. Here the audience is asked to see the involvement in an intellectual way, from a philosophical perspective:

The paradox confronts . . . unjust authority’s agent or teachings – and puts at risk those who alone or together act out the consequences of radical innocence. The risk may be taken for much or little, but it puts everything at stake because the action is philosophical. That it is philosophical is of great importance to theatre (257).

Radical innocence is becoming a more revolutionary and assertive force for Bond. He recognizes how radical innocence places itself on the line throughout history. Christian martyrs for Bond are early examples of innocents who sacrifice themselves in attempting to change the status quo. They rationally help change history. In Bond’s epic plays, radical innocents become more active, more responsive to historical imperatives.
In *The War Plays* and their commentary, while themes and ideas are most often reprised and reasserted from former work, Bond is developing new terms and redefining some old ones: radical innocence, theatre events, and metatext. “We live at a turning point,” Bond exhorts, “People on and off stage need a new freedom” (“Commentary” 299). It is not that Bond is totally dismissing his former strategies or ideas. He is adding to them. Along with (not instead of) the biological rights of the infant, there is radical innocence; along with the aggro-effect, there are theatre events; along with social analysis and its dramatic markers, there are philosophy and metatext.

To start with the last of the terms, the metatext is the audience’s interpretation of the play. In the scene where the son kills his own sibling, a metatext is available for interpretation. Bond recognizes that the son is trained to kill. Even by submitting as a child to his mother, he is being trained by society to respect and listen to authority. His arrival at the point where he kills a child is interpreted, by Bond, as the metatext: “[I]t takes a lot of culture to make us killers” (“Commentary” 314). The text is the action performed on stage, nuances may indicate a subtext, but a subtext is not what Bond wishes to utilize in his work. The metatext happens in the audience work, it is their social interpretation of what they observe on stage.

Bond believes that philosophy is not interested in psychological motives, but in prime causes; the social reasons, not the personal reasons. In a sense, metatexts help compose sound socialist philosophy. Subtexts, however, are not philosophical in nature. Bond notes that there is no subtext, no reason why the soldier should select his own sibling for sacrifice. Subtext for Bond leads sometimes to pathos, as shown in the
messenger boy who comes to see Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot* (“Commentary” 316). Philosophy is illuminated by art but art is not philosophy’s servant. In drama, what Bond calls the TE, the theatre event, is shaped by the philosophy of the work of art. The Theatre Events shape the play for the audience. When done well, keeping the philosophy of the work of art in sight, the Theatre Event makes “metatext and character one” (“Commentary” 316). The writer prepares the possibility of a Theatre Event, the attuned actor creates the performance, e.g., how to best portray the son interacting with his mother when he first returns home to kill a child. Done badly, there is no Theatre Event to offer the audience; done appropriately, the audience comprehends the metatext through the Theatre Event.

Bond’s lengthy essay intellectualizes his case. Working within a university community at the time, there is no blaming in the essay of the closed minds he formally saw therein. There are still the demons of the absurd theatre to mention. Bond still offers his views on Shakespeare, how, for instance, the audience should focus on the servant that is murdered in trying to protect Gloucester rather than Gloucester himself. There is still the inability to see a debt to other artists, especially Brecht. There are still the proclamations of his ideas as the best ones with which to approach theatre and life. In the essay, Bond does acknowledge in one specific case the provocative rhetoric he uses. He notes that while society places humans in a fantasy environment, machines “impose reality” (“Commentary” 269). In the essay, the machine, that is, technology creates the individual:
Society evolves as a relationship between, on the one hand, past cultures and their form of ownership, and on the other, modern technology and the changes it brings to subjectivity and culture. From time to time the changes are so radical... it is as if machines created a new species of human being (“Commentary” 265).

To temper the rhetoric, Bond does note, “I write in a provocative way about our relation to machines; it could be less provocatively but I want to stress our vulnerability in the world our machines create” (“Commentary” 267).

In a 1934 essay, “The Author as Producer,” Walter Benjamin provides an artistic position towards technology that offers initial steps compared to Bond’s leaps at the time of The War Plays. For Benjamin, the new tendentious artist, in joining the struggle of the proletariat, needs to create art that does not just show the “correct political tendency” but also the appropriate “literary tendency” (“Author” 221). The latter, Benjamin notes, can “consist either in progress or in regression in literary technique” (“Author” 223). The politically committed artist, in choosing the former course, takes the current productive apparati and utilizes them in his art. Piscator comes to mind as an example in his use of film and mechanical equipment to help animate the performance onstage. The author does not just create, he produces: the audience of experts that Brecht mentions – producers in their own right - find a fellow worker in the artist. Workers who are electricians, engineers, mathematicians, and laborers, anyone involved in current means of production, are stimulated by the display they observe onstage. Moreover, Benjamin notes, the writer is best whose work encourages other writers. Such an author “is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second, to put an improved apparatus at
their disposal” (“Author” 233). Brecht exemplifies for Benjamin the author as producer. Brecht’s epic theatre is the sort of theatre, Benjamin states, that “instead of competing with newer instruments of publications, seeks to use and learn from them, in short, to enter in debate with them. This debate the epic theater has made it [sic] own affair. It is, measured by the present state of development of film and radio, the contemporary form” (“Author” 234).

Bond goes beyond Benjamin by enlarging technology’s influence on human behavior; technology makes the man. In some of his writing, however, Bond shows that technology is a barrier to human growth instead of a catalyst. In the “Commentary on the War Plays,” this concern lurks in his mentioning of the vulnerability of humans in the technological world. Still, the essay is in large optimistic regarding technology. Technology initiates change in the social environment, requiring humans to think in a new way. Not using technology is a mistake as Bond sees it; it is avoidance of humankind’s evolutionary path. In her essay on Adorno, Brecht, Lukacs and Benjamin, Wright compares the four in regard to their ideas on technology’s effect upon art and society:

Brecht and Benjamin were *theoretically* right in believing that the new technology would radically alter the production and reception of art, but they were over-optimistic in hoping for the desired political effect. The relations between work and audience did not change in the way they foresaw. It was Adorno and Lukacs who proved to be *historically* right: technology increased rather than decreased art’s vulnerability to commodification (87).
Bond’s stance is similar to Benjamin and Brecht’s in seeing an overall positive effect in technology, especially under socialism. Brecht and Benjamin see the artist harnessing the new technology; Bond sees technology harnessing the artist. Nonetheless, Bond incurs a similar problem as Benjamin and Brecht in his over-optimism. Technology at the general level, if not at the level of artist technique, is not currently creating the desired political effect, Bond recognizes. Both humans and art are vulnerable. Bond’s belief that humankind is at the infant level at harnessing technology (“Dramatic” xv) and that someday humans will stop playing with their toys, their bombs, and proceed to a more mature stage is once again Bond putting all his eggs in his socialist utopian basket. Later it will all come to pass.

The future in The War Plays is, however, grim, yet ultimately humankind begins to use their radical innocence to create a new society. Set in the time after the nuclear holocaust, the first play is epic in structure, with distinct scenic units, lengthy public soliloquies, and songs that interrupt the action. The lead character is a mangled man, the Monster, who was ripped from the womb during nuclear bombs’ destruction of the planet. The Monster tells the audience that in reality he does not exist. The play occurs in a fantasy, as if somehow the Monster survived his deadly birth. In the dream play his existence imitates life as it might be lived had humanity survived the nuclear end of days. Bond furnishes lengthy public soliloquies in the play so that the characters can poetically recite Bond’s apocalyptic visions:

Monster: When the rockets destroyed the world everything whistled

Every hard surface and hard edge whistled
Mouths of medicine bottles and whiskey bottles

Cornices of law courts and office blocks

Cracks in rocks

Whistled in derision (Red, Black and Ignorant 4-5).

The Monster’s pretend family is composed of himself, his wife and their son. The young son hears of a job opportunity in the time of want. A Theatre Event occurs when the son hears someone crying under some rubble: a woman, who is more qualified than he to take the job, is trapped. The paradox becomes whether he should help the woman escape from the rubble or not. If he does help her, he will lose the rare opportunity to work and survive in the post-apocalyptic world.

His decision is self-serving; he selects his needs over the needs of the woman. The metatext begins to be that people are desperate in times of profound crisis and will ignore their fellow humans. Interrupting this idea is the appearance of the father, The Monster, who changes the situation: “The world isn’t just! / Justice is made by people” (Bond, Red 25)! The Monster sets the woman free, leaving the son to bemoan his fate of unemployment. The monster’s public soliloquy shows the difficulty of his decision:

In bad times it should be human to do good

But in bad times good cannot be done

When there is too little to go round to give to one is to take from another (Bond, Red 25-26).
Bond’s poetry gives little assistance to the play. Weighed down by its moralizing and dry, prosaic wording, the poetry sounds as stiff and unimaginative as Brecht’s *Lehrstücke* monologues.

The play continues through a series of minor paradoxes, one of which is the question of whether having books during times of great poverty is appropriate or not, and settles on the Palermo paradox: the boy returns as a soldier who must kill someone in the area to scare the inhabitants so gravely that they will not respond to the coming famine by rioting. Should he kill the old neighbor man or someone else? Much like what happens in the Palermo Improvisation with Bond’s students, the son kills his own father. The father is glad to be chosen and he praises the son in his final words, as well as confronting the audience:

Democracy isn’t the right to vote but freedom to know and the knowledge based on knowing

Your democracy is the way truth is suppressed and freedom hustled away to prison

What is the freedom you gave me?

Two fists of ash

(He throws the ash on the ground).

Where is the freedom in that (Bond, *Red 40*)?

As Marc Robinson notes, the shock of Bond’s earlier plays has been replaced by adages in *The War Plays*; Bond “defeats his theater” (25). “All of Bond’s plays possess a harsh utilitarianism – the sparseness of his design contributes crucially to the shock of his
narratives – but in the late plays such a style makes Bond’s preachiness more imposing.

With puritan aesthetics, there’s nothing to absorb the brimstone din” (Robinson 25).

Gaskill sees Bond in his later work trying to follow in Brecht’s footsteps, but “Brecht was a more naturally a poet and his Marxism was adopted in Germany at a time when it would have been impossible to take any other course” (125). Gaskill feels manipulated by later Bond, not caring for how Bond’s “reach-me-down Marxism is being spelt out” (125).

Reinelt, on the other hand, favorably sees The War Plays hearkening back to Brecht’s Lehrstücke and also to his use of the parable. Müller, in his own struggle with the didactic dramatic form, sees the overall value of the parable as an initial building block during “a transitional period,’ when the function of literature is undergoing changes . . .” (qtd. in Kalb 37-38). For Müller, the parable, if utilized in a period that is not transitional, does not function well:

   It becomes marginal. It has a (sinister) future: when the chances are missed, what was a plan for a new world begins differently anew – as dialogue with the dead. In science fiction, which trivializes catastrophe into punch lines, it circulates a trivial form (qtd. in Kalb 37).

Bond’s didactic plays become out of step with the world. Reinelt says about the War Plays that “(l)ike the Brechtian Lehrstücke, they are overtly ‘learning plays,’ in that they represent the current society and the social conditions of war in order that we may involve ourselves in the process of theater-as-learning in order to act to prevent the
conflagration” (53). For the majority of the audience, what can be learned from Bond’s 
*The War Plays* about nuclear war is not engaging either in its ideas or in its presentation.

The middle play in the trilogy, *The Tin Can People*, concerns a group’s growing 
madness as survivors of the nuclear apocalypse. In what is a very confusing supposed 
stroke of luck, the poor victims are in a sense in heaven, as they have located huge stores 
of canned goods which they can use to survive. What is troubling about this lucky break 
is that it appears neither Bond nor the survivors have ever heard of an expiration date. 
Near the end of the play, much like the decadent people at Trench’s farewell party in *The 
Worlds*, the affluent survivors lose control. They become agitated from a fear of a nuclear 
plague and start eating mass amounts of food. Their trust in their canned goods has turned 
to madness; out of control is capitalism’s concept that “more is always better” (Reinelt 61). The play,” Reinelt writes, “is an extended Brechtian gestus of this social relation, 
the equivalent to the scene in *Mahagonny* of eating to death and of the *Threepenny Opera 
Song*, ‘Food is the first thing. Morals follow on’” (61).

If Bond is cognizant of this debt to Brecht, it is a sign of growth, for in the 1970s 
Bond, not really understanding Brecht’s irony, condemned the *Threepenny Opera Song* 
for placing food before morality (Holland 27). In the dramatic events in the play, the mad 
response by the survivors to their tin cans is told to the audience through the First Man’s 
recital of the events:

I went to the street – asked for food

Them: opening tins – wasting food – covered in it – they looked turned inside out

– as if you could see what they were made of
Threw stones at me – stones smeared with food: is this how they feed their beggars?
They shouted – dirt poured out of their mouths: are they the people who shit from the face?
They’d’ve eaten me but too full to run
They set fire to the stores – reeked – an army’s kitchens (Bond, *The Tin Can People* 86-87).

Having destroyed their economic security, the survivors join the First Man to begin anew. The group is able to envision what the future generations, if they exist, will live like:

“They’ll look back at us and say we lived in prisons. They’ll live in justice” (Bond, *Tin* 97). Robinson remarks about Bond’s work in the *The Tin Can People*:

By fabricating cozy scenes of cooperation and falsely redemptive endings he sinks into sentimentality. . . . [H]is play, written to dispel the habitual nihilism of spectators faced with a less appalling world, risks provoking their cynicism (25).

Two major paradoxes are offered in the last of the trilogy, *Great Peace*. One is the Palermo Improvisation paradox, in which the Woman’s son selects his own sibling over a neighbor woman’s to kill. His mother, the Woman, is later seen carrying a bundle of rags seventeen years after the infant’s death. She is in the wilderness; she has gone mad and thinks a bundle of rags is her child. She has lost all social understanding, all her humanity; she leaves a live baby to die in the wilderness in preference for her rags. She is also witness to the mass suicide of the soldiers under the man who was a part of the initial murdering of the infants. They go mad and kill themselves in front of her. Finally, she
begins to have some sense of humanity when she assists a mother whose growing daughter runs away to find help. In the second paradox, when the daughter arrives and a society of survivors is discovered, the Woman refuses to join them. The paradox of choosing isolation over social life in a new collective Bond sees as riveting.

The paradox is demanding, but it is the foundation of our lives. When the Woman abandoned the baby to die she drew the plans of the city for it in the dust. She goes away from the city to be one of its foundations. I wanted her to come back, but it was not time (“Commentary” 363).

Reinelt views the play as a parable, which indicates at its end that the survivors will create a new “community for one another, beyond property, beyond blood, toward peace and justice” (72).

Jenny Spencer, more in line with Bond’s desire to create Theatre Events in the play that will engage the audience, sees the trilogy “not an extended political parable, but rather an opportunity for interpretation that exercises the meaning-making power of the viewing audience” (245). Reinelt’s After Brecht demonstrates, with its discussion of many British artists influenced by Brecht, the idea Benjamin asserts, that Brecht is the author as producer, who induces other dramatists to produce. Bond’s ability to act similarly, to provide a “productive model,” Spencer surmises, “is important work for future audiences to decide” (246). It is also a decision for new dramatists to make. In this regard, it is not Bond’s use of Theatre Events, metatexts, radical innocence, or other features of his dramatic philosophy that are being imitated so far; it is the hyperrealist
dialogue of *Saved* and Bond’s violent aggro-effects, as recreated in in-yr-face theatre, that so far have been the measures taken in new dramatists following Bond’s strategies.
Chapter Four: “We are all bastards but we don’t deserve this.”

4.1 Leonard

In his career as a playwright, Bond walks through the decades of late modernity witnessing the follies of civilization. “The man who cries wolf must constantly shout louder and, in an analogous way, capitalism has had to drag its hell up out of the ground and set it in our midst” (10-11), he realizes in his early essay, “On Violence.” Bond watches the citizenry devolving into barbarism and anomie. He finds himself among the living dead, “society as a wilderness inhabited . . . by ghosts in chains” (qtd. in Hay 43).

“In our western democracy two things are corrupted: the working of reason and the working of emotions” (Bond, Notebook II 308), he writes in 1987. The affluence of the age does not help: “The real world breaks down and we invent a world of fantasy and violence” (Bond, The Hidden Plot 4). To be true to himself and to society, the playwright faces an arduous task. He states in 1990, “Plays must not retreat to the mystic or merely existential – must be true socially, truer socially than ever. To reduce to the social residue, the limit, which is the marker of reality” (Bond, Notebook II 314). There is great irony when Bond considers his struggle: “I write such trash. I know it but can do nothing about it. Dramatists such as Miller write with such competence. Their subjects allow them to be competent. My subjects do not – if you write of my things, you will be incompetent” (Bond, Notebook II 313).
After his epic plays end with *Human Cannon* in 1986, Bond begins to write his postmodern dramas. “Our theatre results from the ruins of modernism . . . [which] has lost its functional purpose” (Bond, “Modern” 99), he explains in a 1997 interview. “Brecht and Beckett’s theatre is no longer of use to us. Their theatre is the theatre of ruins” (Bond, “Modern” 99). Out of the ashes of modernity, Bond, in his 1992 postmodern play, *In the Company of Men*, resurrects the character type Scharine calls the Bond Innocent, that “existential optimist clutching at straws” (34). The play’s young protagonist, Leonard Oldfield, follows the line of Scopey, Len, and the Gravedigger’s Boy from Bond’s earlier plays, exhibiting a young person’s initiation into a dysfunctional social environment. Leonard is another experiment, a “radical innocent, who will take on the guilt of repeating the crime, but (?) [sic] in a new context, which changes the act’s meaning . . .” (Bond, *Notebook II* 267).

In Bond’s postmodern play, Leonard acts as deceitful and ruthless as Edgar in *King Lear*, not innocent at all, a bastard out to take control. Leonard is a step for Bond in fusing the good and bad young male characters into one (e.g., Len and Fred in *Saved*), in making a more complex dramatic persona. For Bond, Leonard is a tiger cub cutting his teeth in an aggressive capitalist jungle. Leonard’s ardent nature flashes through his callow acts of corporate maneuvering. Of the young men characters in the play, he is the golden boy facing Bond’s world of postmodernity. He is not unstable like Bartley, the young drunk working as the family servant. Nor is he defeated like his peer, Wilbraham, who is remarkable only for being a total business failure at a very early age.
The world of postmodernity that Leonard finds himself in, as described in Bond’s essay, “Notes on Post-Modernism,” recalls notions from Baudrillard’s 1970s essays, such as “Consumer Society.” As Baudrillard notes, consumer society is one in which “the system of needs is the product of the system of production” (“Consumer Society” 42). Thanks to mass production, there is an overflow of goods and information available to the consumer. Bond sees affluent consumer society reacting to production’s prescribed wants; it replaces a society based on humans trying to meet their biological needs. Humans, once encouraged by society to be producers, are now encouraged to be consumers. Thanks to society’s reliance on mass media, a world of images replaces reality. There is no need for utopia in a world where humans believe they are already in a heavenly dream world. Marx has been outwitted by Walt Disney.

*In The Company of Men* is an example of how Bond as a dramatist meets the challenges of postmodernity. Leonard’s needs, as well as Bartley and Wilbraham’s, are never met. All that the older men, the father figures, value is the cash nexus. An insatiable desire for the power and prestige of wealth and ownership is what the old men offer to the young as goals to set their sights upon. As Bond describes the situation in postmodernity, “the sacred has become the commercial” (“Post-Modernism” 24). The older men, like Trench and his peers in *The Worlds*, are the holders of the sacred rites and treasures. The young are weak, lost in the living hell that Bonds sees as the postmodern world. “Our society,” Bond writes, “is a frenzy of media and ad-imaging, of cutting-up and refashioning – but we can only catch glimpses of ourselves in the blades of the scissors and knives” (“Post-Modernism” 27).
What the young men see in themselves is far from attractive. Bartley is a failure at everything he attempts. While in the navy, he dips his bread in someone else’s blood that was left after a minor accident at the mess table. Bartley is required to undergo psychological evaluation. Embarrassed and confused, he acts out the scrutiny placed on him by stabbing a fellow sailor in the eye. Removed from the only job he ever liked, he lies to Leonard’s father about what happened and becomes the family butler. Leonard’s father’s charitable act in hiring the addled Bartley is the sort Bond sees operating in postmodernity. “We buy the right to be unjust and our good conscience and our self-esteem” (Bond, “Post-Modernism” 27).

The young Bartley represents the working class in the drama. Despite his drinking and oafishness, he is the most thoughtful of the three young men, the one most able to see situations interpersonally. It is he who realizes Leonard’s gun is loaded and prevents the slaying of Leonard’s father, Mr. Oldfield. By taking the blame for the gun being loaded, even though it was Leonard who loaded the gun, Bartley is found guilty of gross negligence and is fired on the spot. For the rest of the play, he is continuously pushed further down the social ladder; his final act onstage is one of regrettable, desperate criminality. He becomes the man the older men think he is.

More pathetically and self-consciously suffering a string of social humiliations is Wilbraham, another business man’s son like Leonard, but one in constant financial panic. He becomes a stooge for the old power-brokers, reduced to doing as he is told in order to stay alive. When he cowardly assists in trapping Leonard in a costly business failure, that ultimately leads to Leonard’s demise, he says,
Im absolute scum. You cant possibly forgive the harm I’ve done you. I destroyed myself and now I am used to harm others. . . . And there you are innocent! I was so ashamed. I had one hope: he’ll see Im scum. Surely he wont trust me? O god he’s so innocent he does! I reek of deceit – fraud – dishonesty – filth (Bond, *Company* 363)!

“We’re bastards but we dont deserve to live like this” (Bond, *Company* 353), Wilbraham says. The line is the theme of the play. Imperfect, flawed young men are trapped in dysfunctional, dehumanizing world that does not let them fully grow up. The older men survive in the social system but at the cost of their humanity. Worst of the older generation, perhaps, is Dodds, who betrays both Leonard and Mr. Oldfield by aligning himself, while in Oldfield’s employ, with his business rival, Hammond. Dodds is like Hubbard in *The Worlds*, ready to do anything to get ahead, loyal to no one. In the unscrupulous business world that Bond paints, it is not surprising perhaps that, after the betrayal of the Oldfields, Dodds is still in their employ. Bond has Dodds explain his reason for betrayal to Leonard:

Greed. . . . They say when a dog’s whipped it bites everything except the whipper. No, it bites everything except the whip. . . . You’re the dog who’s learned a few elementary tricks. Two things you mustnt trust: god and the servants. They know too much about you. . . . While Im drawing up Hammond’s paper I’ll draw up another one in my favour (Bond, *Company* 402).
Bond uses the character of Hammond to demonstrate the great reach of corporate greed. Not just wanting to maintain his food business, he looks forward to taking over Oldfield’s munitions business to add to his holdings:

The next century will be a great gaping mouth – wide as a continent – with rows of missiles for teeth. Out of that mouth there’ll come a great roar of food. . . . People must eat. First its need – then greed – then fear – and then you’re back to need. And that’s why people will always need weapons. . . . Once it was guns and butter. Now it has to be both. They can never be parted again. That’s the Great Pieta I see for the twenty-first century: guns and butter (Bond, *Company* 383).

Bond gives the character of Hammond some humanity by Hammond’s showing an interest in Leonard. He sees something in the young man, a certain business savvy, yet Leonard does not respond to Hammond’s offer to link up with the old maverick. Hammond is an eternal, rapacious figure whom Leonard, in his last act of suicide, is unable to kill.

Leonard’s father is a more benign Hammond, a man of puritan work habits and focus. For Oldfield, it is not the case of desiring more corporate growth, but maintaining a good product line and a good corporate image. He is the humble servant of the servants. He tells Leonard, “I never had any ambition – it would have got in the way of my mission. The leader’s life is service. There are no rewards – and it gets harder” (Bond, *Company* 340). With Bond’s worldview always focusing on humanity’s unnecessary violence, it is natural for the playwright to have the protagonist’s father be a munitions
factory owner. A suspicious nature is for Bond part of the territory for such a business man. Oldfield says,

When you make the guns you must be more alert than the soldiers who fire them. They need allies not enemies: we need enemies. We cant trust our allies, they’re our commercial rivals – we cant trust our workers, they’re like scavengers on the battlefield . . . we cant trust our government, they use our rivals to beat us down (Bond, *Company* 335).

It is amazing that after Leonard hears his father talk of the munitions industry and Hammond express his corporate plans, he still desires to be part of their business empires. He is a new radical innocent who wants to work with the heads of the status quo; he is not like Arthur in *Early Morning* who knows a farce when he sees one.

Is Leonard Bond’s post-modern hero? Bond’s essay on postmodernism considers postmodernity as the current historic time in which a threefold structure of “people, technology, and authority” (1) operate in tandem. As in former essays, technology is seen as the spirit that moves the social world. Authority organizes technology in social arrangements that assist people as they interact with the boundary, the outer world. The boundary is Bond’s term for the outer world that is given definition by people and, especially, authority, which gives the world meaning. Bond’s new model offers a way for humans to understand history and their own humanity. Bond believes that the human brain has a Faustian overcapacity that desires to interrogate the boundary as well as the triad of technology, people, and authority. In his very lengthy speeches to others and his
desire to be a success, arguably Leonard’s behaviour does indicate an overcapacity of thinking.

The purpose in Bond’s essay for the threefold model is to locate postmodernity. During most of human history, Bond believes, human behaviour has been based on meeting physiological needs (“Post-Modernism” 4). These needs were the “foundation of technology, organization, and morality” (Bond, “Post-Modernism” (24). The heaven and hell of postmodernism, with its lack of needs and its preoccupation with wants, causes a serious crisis. The boundary is gone; the overall power of the economy, “the invisible hand” (Bond, “Post-Modernism” 28), has taken over – it cannot serve as a boundary for human interrogation and growth. Utopia in postmodernity is no longer a possible vision. The economic systems of wants create an “iconography of perfection” (Bond, “Post-Modernism” 25), beautiful images removed from the real and more valuable than the real. In postmodernity, utopia is not envisioned since everything, if not perfect now, has the ability to be fixed – there is science and technology to adjust the picture and control the lights.

On the scene of Bond’s postmodernity appears the character from paradise lost, the devil: “We are in heaven but cannot get out of hell. . . . Once we destroyed the images, now the images destroy us. The icon of goodness has become the lord of evil. We may, if we can survive it, stoically endure the situation; or we may create an ideology not of fictions but of the real. And that is the resurrection of satan” (“Post-Modernism” 25). The devil, for Bond, is introduced into postmodernity to explain technology’s errors, notably situations of terror unleashed upon humanity in eco-disasters and modern
warfare. Bond warns of a fourth element being possibly added to the triad of people, authority, and technology: “the devil will not be a medieval apparition invoked at need, but an autonomous robot-satan with a permanent seat at our councils” (“Post-Modernism” 31).

Baudrillard’s 1970 essay, “Consumer Society,” paints another harrowing picture of postmodernity. The Industrial Revolution, with people moving from rural communities to become wage slaves of industrial production, continues its development with people becoming subservient to a consumer-based society. Human perspective changes. Baudrillard gives an excellent example of a change in ethics with William H. Whyte’s comment, “Thrift is un-American” (qtd. in Baudrillard, “Consumer” 51). Like Bond, Baudrillard’s rhetoric is devoted to the big picture. The ambience of the shopping mall, with all it offers – work, leisure, nature, culture – offers a seemingly endless availability and accessibility to people. Baudrillard writes that the “the super shopping center . . . brings together all the gods, or demons, of consumption. That is to say, every activity, labor, conflict and all the seasons are abolished in the same abstraction. . . . The eternal substitution of homogeneous elements alone remains” (“Consumer” 35).

Bond finds something to end this beautiful nightmare: drama, in his model of text-subtext-metatext that he mentions in his essays. Bond’s Theatre Events that stimulate the audience’s response will make “alienation narrative” (Bond, “Post-Modernism” 32). They will engage the audience in discovering the play’s metatext, the interpretation of the event that creates a philosophy based on human justice. The future postmodernity will have for Bond the possibility of a “technology without an economy,” i.e., a world without
capitalism ("Post-Modernism" 29-30). A new paradox will also develop: “A just society would not need democracy because democracy would be implicit in the working of its technology” (Bond, “Post-Modernism" 30). Utopia as a concept will vanish, not as it has been replaced in early postmodernity by a fraudulent image-world, but because in Bond’s just society “we will have real political responsibility (Bond, “Post-Modernism” 32). A new iconography and a new iconoclasm will develop, necessary for the “mind’s need to humanize itself” (Bond, “Post-Modernism” 31).

Despite his theorizing that the new drama will assist in changing postmodernity for the better, Bond offers In the Company of Men a very old-fashioned, very garrulous play. His fascination with capitalists continues; the only working class person is poor Bartley, who brings minimal social perspective to the play. Bond also continues placing one character in the spotlight as the exemplar of positive action. Jenkins finds “In the Company of Men . . . rambling, self-indulgent . . . “ (114). Bond is not able to bring corporate society up-to-date in his 1992 play. It is compared by Innes to Shaw’s Major Barbara, and, unfortunately, it seems to take place in the same turn of the 20th century historic framework. The ideas expressed are old truisms about business and, except for the final aggro-effect, the actions are all old dramatic set pieces.

Dramatic conceptions in the play seem flawed. The dramatic question being asked by Leonard to Bartley, to kick the chair over on which he stands ready to hang himself, is puzzling. Couldn’t the always capable Leonard jump off the chair and kick it over himself? Does he need to employ a drunken man he already has damaged? Leonard does not seem in the same situation of the Young Comrade in The Measures Taken who needs
help in ending his life. Bond seems so keen on giving Bartley a paradox, should he kick the chair out and gain some money or should he just run from the idea, that he does not make it plausible that Bartley is even needed to do the action at all. Minor events from the past also describe actions that seem unnecessary for the characterizations or the plot. Does the audience or Leonard need to know that his stepmother cut herself when he came to live with her as a baby so that she could reenact the act of giving birth? Since nothing else is discussed about the stepmother, why bother talking about this bloody action?

Similarly, the language is overly descriptive and prone to odd conceits. The six character ensemble talk too much, all in the same style. The businessmen’s talking at each other in long speeches offers Bond a chance to speak his mind, but it leads to a feeling of the characters haranguing each other for no reason, as if the listener onstage was new to the planet and needed to be told in lengthy generalities what life is like on earth. For example, Hammond tells Len, in offering him a job, “Peace caused more misery than all the wickedness of war. Peace was the time when people trembled – went without – and sweated to arm themselves for war – that’s more history” (Bond, Company 383). Leonard especially is doomed to lengthy speeches at the other; it is not consciously ironic that he talks so much to his father that, when his father dies, he fails to notice. The play is an opera of truisms and clichés trying to pass for profundities.

Bond in his essay on postmodernism projects a postmodern theatre “that will not be scripture, but there will be discipline in it, just as there was in the stages of the threefold relationship: but truths will harden not into dogma but into ambiguity – and then the clues will be oracles” (32). While early plays, Saved and The Pope’s Wedding,
seduce the audience with their final ambiguous moments, Bond’s later plays, like In The Company of Men, do not offer Theatre Events that create mystery in the metatext. If Baudrillard argues for a post-modern seduction of the text over its interpretation, Bond still prefers what Baudrillard calls the “latent discourse” (i.e., Bond’s metatext), not what Baudrillard calls the “manifest discourse” (“On Seduction” 149) which plays on the surface. Bond wants the new postmodern drama to be iconographic as well as iconoclastic. The image of Leonard, hanging to death from a rope and trying to shoot his business rivals, seems as iconography just another straw to clutch, not an inspiring example of man trying to change his future. As iconoclasm, the image is contrived in its signaling the evils of capitalism. The death of Leonard does not seduce the audience; it only further illustrates what they already know.

The intriguing, unsettling and ambivalent dramatizations in In the Company of Men and also, in another play labeled by Bond as postmodern, Coffee, are the dramatizations of the relationships between parent and child. Despite all the garrulous language and basic, melodramatic situations, it is Leonard’s love for his father that gives the play dramatic value. Reinelt mentions that a successful production of the play was offered by Alain Francon. In the production, the absurd style of Beckett was brought forward: Leonard acts like a child, swinging his legs over a chair, talking “boyishly,” treating the others as “grownups” (Reinelt 73). No wonder Francon chose the idea of identifying Leonard as a child. It is the cry of Leonard, wanting to be his father’s son that strikes a dramatic note. It is an embarrassment that Leonard must make, an acknowledgement of wanting to belong – even in a world of folly. Bond does not give
this demand for love, that pleading from his radical innocent, its own speeches. Leonard embeds his worries in Bond’s lengthy attempts at Shavian opinions: he worries his father is too tired to talk, he worries he goes too far in expressing himself.

He tells Oldfield, “You’re my father. I didn’t deserve your kindness when you took me in. I wasn’t anyone - I lay in my shit and cried. . . . I grabbed. I shut you inside my body. The body shuts up tight – like iron in cement. My mother left a ghost, I found you” (Bond, Company 394). Until the father’s death, the son and father, within the lengthy speeches, fight against and for each other, causing each other pain and worry. The subtext of a parent and child’s love for each other displays in short circuited flashes – not enough to make the drama sound, but again, as in many of his later plays, the interpersonal, emotional element shows the dramatic promise.
4.2 Olly

Bond mentions his shock in a letter to Simon Atkins that a teacher responded to his play, *Olly’s Prison*, in a negative way: “One of the teachers said I obviously ‘got a kick out of seeing young people done in – and out of violence in general,’ I find the remark deplorable because it is a teacher shutting doors. . . . It is a reductive and not a creative response” (*Letters IV* 31). *Olly’s Prison* contains lengthy scenes of violence and abuse against the young. Two young people die before Olly arrives in Part Three of the play. First, sixteen-year-old Sheila is strangled to death by her father, Mike, for failing to talk to him. When Mike, later in prison for his daughter’s death, tries to kill himself, a young prisoner, Smiler, hangs himself using Mike’s rope. It is the third young person, Olly, who is the reason for his friend Smiler’s imprisonment. Smiler cut out Olly’s eye in a bar fight. Olly, now drunk and aimless, holds no grudge. He is an easy tool for Mike’s enemy, Frank, to use in retaliation. Frank blinds and almost beats Olly to death in his attempt to frame Mike for the mayhem. It is very easy to take the teacher’s remarks as the appropriate ones to make in regard to this brutal, rather heartless play.

In a letter to Rudolph Rach, Bond explains the title of his play: “‘Olly’ is made up of the elements of the conventional match-stick man. So the name suggests a contemporary ‘Everyman’ . . . O is for the head, Y for the trunk and legs, and two l’s for the arms . . . gives you Olly” (*Letters II* 218). Olly is not the usual Everyman figure. He gains the status only rhetorically, at the play’s ending. He is a secondary character, the only young character in the play that does not die from violence, but is instead reduced to a blind, abused creature, whom Mike projects will end up a penniless drunk. Olly is
Everyman in the sense that Bond, through Mike, uses his circumstances to indicate Mike’s epiphany about society. Telling Smiler’s mother, Ellen, that it is Frank, the law and order maniac, who is responsible for everyone’s abuse, Mike ends the play:

Frank murdered my daughter an’ your son. ‘E wasn’t there when it ‘appened – didn’t ‘ave t’be. ‘E did it – just as ‘e blinded Olly. For the same reason. ‘Ow can I make anyone understand that? See the connections. They cant. That’s why we go on sufferin. Olly’s prison. ‘E’ll never get out. We’re all in it till we understand (Bond, *Olly* 69-70).

Bond expects the audience to accept actions and ideas contradictory to their ethical value. Policeman Frank is portrayed as an insane, law and order fanatic, yet the leap to blaming him for Mike’s murder of his own child is a questionable step to take. Bond’s point, again in one of his plays, is that the socially moralized like Frank cause the problems in the world. Mike’s murder of his teenage daughter for not speaking to him is an absurd, immoral act, especially a barbaric one to commit against a teenage child who normally goes through a time of not wanting to talk to her or his parents. Ultimately, rather than blame the oafish, jealous and self-righteous Frank, the audience might blame the playwright, who, after showing scenes of violence towards children, especially Mike’s killing of his daughter and Frank’s brutalization of Olly, audaciously tells the audience what connections they need to make to really understand what happens in the play. Long ago in his career Bond railed against the audience condemning the murderers of the baby in *Saved*. The violence active in the stoning of the baby, he wrote, “is not done by thugs, but by people who like plays condemning thugs” (Bond, “Preface” 6).
Olly's Prison he maintains the same moral condemnation, but, unlike in Saved, he expresses his opinion within the play. Bond’s statements against the morally smug are themselves morally smug. Mike’s statement provokes, but in a dogged, nagging way that Bond does not seem to ever get past as a playwright.

In In the Company of Men, Bond separates the generations in the business world and keeps the older generation on top. In the working class example of Olly's Prison, the older generations also are the survivors at the end. Making the man who kills his child the rational spokesman of the play is controversial enough, yet there is no dramatic energy in the play, other than in the pummeling of Olly. Nor is there significant character buildup given to Mike or Ellen, so that the audience might better understand Mike’s epiphany and Ellen’s silent agreement. Additionally, had Bond pitted Mike against his own generation and had the struggle been between Mike and Frank, the play might have broken an overly familiar pattern in Bond of oversimplifying and underdramatizing the social problems at the heart of the play.

In Hanif Kureishi’s Outskirts, two men of the same generation commit a terrible act of violence against an immigrant passing by on the street. The play alternates in scenes of past and present time, showing the lives of the young Del and Bob as aimless teens out to find some excitement and showing the present time where the two have grown up, Del to become a teacher, Bob to become an unemployed, bitter man interested in white power. The play shows what Olly's Prison does not – a real difficulty occurring in the modern world, where there is a right wing response by those like Bob feeling left behind in the new affluent society. Kureishi’s play does not make Bob appear a total
yutz, as Bond portrays Frank, and does not equate everything wrong in the world as being Bob’s doing. Del’s guilt about his beating the immigrant long ago, as well as his expressed sorrow at losing his friend to social madness, is much better at showing a historic problem than Bond’s abstract analysis, where one of the criminals is saved, absolved of guilt in murdering his own child, and the other is not, damned as a self-righteous goon and (philosophically) as a serial killer.

Robinson misses the former Bond, who used to resist the “urge to clean up the mess in his plays” and is disappointed by later Bond, whose “politics has led him to some unseemly, untenable conclusions” (25). Several messes are made in *Olly’s Prison*, yet the stirring of concern, fear, and anxiety in the audience is shut down by the playwright’s myopic focus on Mike, especially in relation to the other characters when he is released from jail. In the scene of Frank beating Olly to blindness, the play displays the intense, exaggerated violence of in-yer-face theatre; the terrible mess, however, is cleaned up by Mike’s epiphany of its social significance.

The easily-used Olly is asked by Frank to smash up Smiler’s mother’s home, something Olly does despite the fact that Smiler’s mother is a friend to the boy and gives him shelter when no one else does. It is the combined smashing of the living room by Olly and the bashing of Olly by Frank at the same time that give the play a sudden jolt of negative energy. Both Olly and Frank have lost control. The loss of control does not continue in Bond’s play to create its own theatre madness as it does in the works of in-yer-face dramatists like Sarah Kane nor does the loss of control ebb and flow as in Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* to show some progression of the characters. Almost
like in an old police drama, once the mayhem has occurred in *Olly’s Prison*, the play returns to a morally stable world, seen in the loving relationship between Mike and Smiler’s mother, and given a final moral to cap the evening with: capitalist morality is the real mess. Bond’s aggro-effects offer in-yer-face theatre practitioners a mess that they will update in their new work.
4.3 Successors

In writing in 1990 about the regrettable change from Bond’s early work to his most recent work, like *Human Cannon* and *The War Plays*, Marc Robinson remarks, “I long for Jimmy Porter’s return. How refreshing his snorting, disruptive presence would be just now” (27)! Less than three weeks after John Osborne’s death, disruption appears at the Royal Court with Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*. The play, with its quick turn to staged sexual impositions and absurd images of violence, indicates, just as did *Look Back In Anger* and *Saved* decades before, that a great dissatisfaction with the times is occurring. In Kane’s model, it is not an outward explosion like that made by the very vocal, badgering Jimmy facing a maddeningly indifferent world. Nor is it in the vein of social realist drama like *Saved*, catching the audience in the shrapnel of the implosion within a damaged society. *Blasted* is an implosion of personality, an interior stream-of-consciousness escaping into the outer world and losing control.

*Blasted* presents aggro-effects, still violent, but gone sexual and more deeply personal, and, more importantly, formalized into being the main flow within the theatre experience. A few of the men in *Saved* enjoy baby killing generally, perhaps, but they appear only briefly in the play. Out of control violence returns to its dormant state in *Saved*, not like the sexual violence incurred by the characters in *Blasted*, where it is a non-stop business. *Lear* and other Bond dramas display a repetition of aggro-effects that punctuate the drama. In *Blasted*, violent acts seem for a while the dramatic themes themselves. In a sense, *Blasted* is a theatricalization of the pornographic imagination. It dramatizes sexuality as a means of dying in the world and sexuality as a power struggle.
between combatants, both of whom lose more than win. Susan Sontag’s essay on the pornographic imagination shows the state of the imagination in the modern Western world:

The ludicrousness and lack of skill of most pornographic writing . . . is obvious to everyone who has been exposed to them. What is less often remarked about . . . is their pathos. Most pornography . . . points to something more general than even sexual damage. I mean the traumatic failure of modern capitalist society to provide authentic outlets for the perennial human flair for high-temper visionary obsessions. . . . The need of human beings to transcend “the personal”” is no less profound than the need to be a person, an individual. But this society serves that need poorly (Styles 70).

In Blasted, Cate and Ian arrive at a hotel room and Ian indicates in his talking to Cate what a sarcastic, bigoted prick he is. Cate, half Ian’s age, seems like Beppi in Stallerhof; she is naïve, unworldly, a pathetic object of an older man’s lust. The sex act is simulated onstage when Cate faints and Ian takes advantage of her. The play begins its presentation of sexual acts onstage, made all the more violent and damaging when a soldier appears and rapes Ian and eventually sucks Ian’s eyeballs out of his head. There is something ludicrous in the details of Kane’s play, just as there is in something ridiculous in an earlier milestone of in-yer-face theatre, Brenton’s The Romans in Britain, where a the Roman soldiers’ rape and maiming of a young Celt includes discussion of the purple welts on one of their own bodies as well as the complaint that the young Celt had piles. Mostly what is visible is Cate’s pathetic state as chronic victim, Ian’s state of angry,
dying bitterness, and the soldier’s despair, his mind flooded with the images of extreme violence happening during war.

At the end of Blasted, after the Soldier has blown his brains out and Ian has eaten a dead baby that Cate has brought into the room, Ian’s head protrudes from the floorboards. He is dead but somehow is revived enough for Cate to feed him sausage as the play ends. A regressive, infantile state is arrived at – a state that has been on display before in theatre. Master Pozzo’s slave Lucky has uttered its language:

> Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Pucher and Wattman of a personal God quaquaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divined athambia . . .”

(Beckett, Godot 45).

Others, less damaged than Lucky, retreat to it in times of commiserating pain, as Jimmy and Alison do at the end of Look Back in Anger. Jimmy comforts Alison,

> We’ll be together in our bear’s cave, and our squirrel’s drey, and we’ll live on honey, and nuts - lots and lots of nuts. And we’ll sing songs about ourselves – about warm trees and snug caves, and lying in the sun” (Osborne 96).

Kane’s calling of the pornographic imagination to the stage infers the bad news that the baby in Saved knows: the infantile is not welcome in the world. States of irrationality are dangerous; they evoke violence in an unhappy culture. Perhaps there is some knowledge of this in Bond’s constant emphasis on the rational infant, the infant calling for reasonable accommodation in the world. Could Bond be protecting the infantile status with a rational cover, so it will not be bludgeoned to death? The dead Ian
and the damaged Cate end on the floor in the relief of mutual community. That it takes all
the sexual bashing in the world to get there indicates Kane’s estimate of a terrible price
tag to being childish and to being human.

The young writer Kane, says, “I wanted to do things that haven’t been done, to
invent new forms, find new modes of representation” (qtd. in Sierz, In-Yer-Face 92). In
Blasted, Kane does not affect something totally new. The play recalls Beckett, Pinter, and
Bond - writers Kane and her critics have recognized as influences (Saunders, Love Me 24,
55-56). Like early Pinter, Blasteds begins with an initial moment of realism that unravels
as the play continues. It also seems Beckett-like, when the dead Ian pops his head out of
the floorboards. The comparison to Bond is mostly in the short, blunt language and the
use of violence. Bond sees his use of violent images assisting the audience to better
understand what is historically happening to the characters on stage. The violent end of
Leonard and the beating of Olly are created to provoke a social analysis. Aggro-effects in
plays like Lear, Coffee and Human Cannon, however, are subsumed by the theme of total
war. The shocks are cushioned by the audience’s understanding of the historic situation
of war. Similarly, Blasted’s sexual violence, grotesque as it may be, is subsumed by the
theme of pornography.

Both terrains of total war and pornography are not unknown to many audience
members, albeit their exposure is not always a direct involvement. In an early essay,
Sontag notes that pornography experienced without lust can turn to camp (Against 278),
and in her essay on the topic itself, pornography, interpreted socially and intellectually,
leads to Sontag’s discussion of human consciousness, its limits, its historically and
socially damaged state, and its connection with the morbid. Kane is dramatizing the sexual in the latter manner, but it is possible, just as with some of Bond’s work, that the play might be experienced, especially in the wrong production, as a huge joke. (How not to make a naked man eating a baby doll seems not silly is an example). As Sontag mentions about the camp sensibility in her “Notes on Camp,” “[w]e are better able to enjoy a fantasy when it is not our own” (Against 285).

Overall, hasn’t the audience experienced the storyline in *Blasted* before, of a young subservient girl getting the upper hand over her master and finally loving the now disfigured object of her domination? Does it add value that the story is now told via detached, sexual images of violence? Kane’s play recalls popular female revenge dramas of the time, like William Mastrosimone’s 1982 *Extremities*, where a rape victim captures and torments her victimizer. It also recalls popular postmodern fiction, like that of Kathy Acker, with its interest in sexual behaviour, including infantilism. Notably, Kane does not get away from telling a story and the story, like the simplistic ones in some pornography, is ultimately a tepid experience, framing the action and somehow making the action safe and predictable. That is, Kane’s play is limited because it is ultimately a known narrative at work, a very underdeveloped narrative just as Bond’s can be, as *In the Company of Men*. Like Bond, Kane has something to say and, yet, for all the violence, it is really nothing new, despite the disturbing techniques. To experience physicality on the stage and delve into psychic depth, Butoh Theatre, with is regressive, Artaudian fluidity, perhaps offers the better deal.
Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking*, appearing a year after *Blasted*, presents another in-yer-face theatre major work, one that offers less fantasy and more realism in its display of sexual communication than Kane’s play. Ravenhill opens up a dramatic theme Bond utilizes in plays like *Saved*: the desire of characters to avoid contact with each other. The evasions of Pam and others to Len’s incessant questioning seem based on their desire to avoid their own history, which has been damaging in the past and projects a dismal, routinized future. The reason for these isolating tactics is not given until the end of the play, when Harry explains why people do not talk in his home. Ravenhill’s characters, in a play of more interpersonal connection, still want, like the characters in *Saved*, the maintenance of their own individual version of the status quo, but they are willing to talk about it.

The most significant reason for not connecting to others is given in Ravenhill’s play by Mark, who is seen initially in the act of pushing away from the former relationship he had with Robbie and Lulu. Like Pam at the beginning of *Saved*, he wants anonymous sex. When he meets the young Gary, with whom he attempts to have a casual sexual relation, he is much more able than Pam is at explaining his situation:

> Listen. I want you to understand because. I have this personality you see? Part of me that gets addicted. I have a tendency to define myself purely in terms of my relationships to others. I have no definition of myself you see. So I attach myself to others as a means of avoidance, of avoiding knowing the self (30-31).

Just as characters talk to each other more easily in Ravenhill’s play than those in *Saved*, they are also better able to actively progress than the characters of Bond’s play. Mark is
much more conscious of his problem of his lack of self identity than Len is in Saved, although it is not certain if Mark is saying things his therapist has given him to say or not. At the end of the play, when he tells of a dream, a fantasy in which he is able to free the mutant he has bought, Mark ends his tale by not taking responsibility for the mutant’s fears about gaining his own individual freedom. By letting the mutant go, Mark is thus alone in his own identity; he has let his own fears go.

*Shopping and Fucking* has much more comedy and pathos than Saved. With its depiction of the Gary, who has been sexually abused by his stepfather to the point of wanting a similar sexual abusive relationship to continue with his ideal lover taking the part of the stepfather, the play exposes to the audience a chilling presentation of how child abuse latches on to its victims. Here is the world of little stories not large ones, where, for instance, those hearing of Gary’s terrible life are not ready to step in and offer years of therapy and support, as they might in a television drama. The characters are flying by the seat of their pants and slowly learning as they go. As Robbie tells Gary about the chance of Gary’s ever meeting his perfect protector/demon-lover:

> I think we all need stories, we make up stories so that we can get by. . . . I think a long time ago there were big stories. Stories so big you could live your whole life in them. The Powerful Hands of the Gods and Fate. The Journey of Enlightenments. The March of Socialism. But they all died or the worlds grew up or grew senile or forget them, so now we’re all making up our own stories. . . . [W]e’ve each got one (Ravenhill 64).
The young people of *Shopping and Fucking*, struggle in postmodernity, where Gary hopes that someday people can have sex as holograms together so that there will be no need to even bodily meet your sex partner and where Lulu envisions happily a world of different foods available in frozen dinners. It is not that they don’t perform shocking or too personal acts of sex onstage, as Kane’s characters do. It is that there is also the extant real world to contend with. As productive members of society, the young learn from their experiences. Lulu and Robbie learn that they are much more effective workers at selling phone sex than at drug dealing. They are jumping into their world just as Barbara and Cussins jump into the munitions business almost a century before in *Major Barbara*.

Personal progression is not an easy thing to do, as Sarah Kane notes about writing her plays: “I’ve only ever written to escape from hell – and it’s never worked – but at the other end of it when you sit there and watch something and think that’s the most perfect expression of hell that I felt then maybe it was worth it” (qtd. in Saunders 1). In his later, postmodern plays like *Olly’s Prison* and *In the Company of Men*, Bond cannot follow the young playwrights into hell. Nor can he utilize their experimental verve or change from aggro-effects of bodily torture to aggro-effects of extreme sexual imposition. In-yer-face theatre is sensational theatre and therein lays a difficulty. “‘Sensationalism is predicated on insensitivity. The idea is that dulled audience response must be jerked into life by whatever violent means necessary.’ But . . . ‘sensation merely entrenches the insensitivity it is supposed to challenge’” (Sierz, “Still In-Yer-Face,”” 22) Eyres notes. Kane has said, “It is important to commit to memory events which have never happened – so that they never happen. I’d rather risk overdose in theatre than in life” (qtd. in Sierz, “Still In-Yer-
Face” 20). The response is jejune, unpracticed: what in-yer-face theatre practitioners fail to realize is that the modern audience has seen enough – it is more a question in theatre of how they see enough
4.4 Imprecision

In his essay, “The Semiotics of Literary Postmodernism,” Douwe Fokkema places Bond alongside heavyweights Pynchon and Barthelme as examples of postmodern writers “celebrating imprecision” in their various works, creating works of “fantastic fabulation” which “mix levels of narration, fuse different worlds of experience and seem to undermine the referential function of language by offering too much of it” (Fokkema 36). Two features that Fokkema mentions stand out in regard to Bond’s work: the creating of fabulations within his social realist plays and the offering of “too much” in his use of language, as in Olly’s Prison and In the Company of Men.

The most notorious of Bond’s fabulations is Early Morning, whose “dramatic force . . [comes from] the inventive shock of the whole fable” (Cohn, “Fabulous” 189). The appearance of fantasy in the midst of realist representations happens in other works of Bond as well, such as the appearance of the ghost in Lear and the scene changes in Coffee from a bare room to wilderness to Babi Yar and back again. A dreamlike quality is affected in many scenes in Bond’s plays, such as the scenes of Shakespeare in the snow in Bingo and the people in the wilderness in Coffee. Nightmare effects also come forward, especially in aggro-effects, evidenced in the feverish pitch of the violent bashing of Olly in Olly’s Prison and overly theatricalized killing of the baby in Saved. For Bond, fantasy exists within the rationality of theatre logic.

Fokkema’s suggestion that Bond offers too much, too imprecise language in his plays seems perhaps an odd statement to make, especially in regard to his early plays. In Bond’s statements of his artistic intent, he expresses distrust in interpersonal
communication, the linchpin in Szondi’s concept of Modern Drama. Dialogue in Bond’s work is mixed. Dialogic rhythm in his epic plays is disrupted by Bond’s use of worn-out methods of exposition, his inclusion of idiosyncratic poetry, and the intrusion of often left field political messages. With his discordant use of language, his reliance on images over words, and in his use of awkward aggro-effects, Bond does seem to be over-communicating in *theatre language* to the audience, imprecisely throwing everything but the kitchen sink at the audience in his attempt to get his messages across. In his later plays especially, it is dialogue in itself that is “too much.” *In the Company of Men* requires the most patient of audiences to absorb the characters’ lengthy speeches. In *Olly’s Prison*, it requires a great suspending of belief to follow the expressed moralizing logic of the play.

Imprecision, as a postmodern response of the modernist goals of “precision and authenticity” in the artwork, are part of the postmodernist “denial of semantic and syntactic stability” (Fokkema 36). What Lamb calls the “theatre of the inarticulacy” (32), a theatre he connects with Bond, resides in Fokkema’s idea of postmodern imprecision. Fokkema’s idea of a somewhat inarticulate postmodern theatre places postmodern drama in opposition to Szondi’s construct of Modern Drama, which insists on an “absolute dominance of dialogue . . . of interpersonal communication” (8). Szondi’s model defines the Drama itself as absolute, a thing onto itself, “conscious of nothing outside itself” (8).

“[T]he whole world of Drama is dialectical in origin. It does not come into being because of an epic I which permeates the work. It exists because of the always achieved . . . interpersonal dialectic, which manifests itself as speech. . . .

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[D]ialogue carries the Drama. The Drama is possible only when dialogue is possible” (Szondi 10).

In postmodern drama, interpersonal communication is problematized. Bond’s personal distrust of interpersonal dialogue, so strongly evidenced in Saved, indicates indifference to dialogue’s absoluteness in Drama. Language no longer defines character. Characters move from firmly stating an opinion to dropping their opinion later for no apparent reason. In her reaction to her son’s suicide in Olly’s Prison, Ellen sounds like a serious advocate against society’s maltreatment of juvenile offenders. “I know what he’d done was bad. It would’ve been different – he’d have grown out of it. But they put them in these places. Like living on the edge of a cliff. They make them worse” (37). Later, she is in bed with child murderer Mike and when he pronounces himself free of responsibility in his child’s death, the former angry mother says nothing. What happened to her voice? How also did Mike achieve the knowing voice of thinking social morality caused all the deaths and maiming of young in the play? The words and characters do not connect.

Interpersonal communication is taken away by the author’s intrusion of his ideas into the individual’s voice, such as in Mike’s statement that we are all in Olly’s prison, and, in The Worlds, in Terry’s statement that we are all terrorists. Dialogue becomes discordant. Certainly in Modern Drama characters can make abstract observations, but they are utilized within the continuing dialogue, not just ignored as givens by the person listening on stage. Just as he does not care for the interpersonal dialogue of Modern Drama, Bond does not care for Brecht’s literalization of drama, where the audience “reads” the drama via asides, direct address, signs and songs - the theatrical equivalents
of footnotes and references amplifying the literary text (Brecht, *On Theatre* 44). Of options left, Bond selects the rather old-fashioned one of adding his opinions within the dialogue, often in a clumsy ways. Similarly imprecise is Bond’s attempt in his epic works, like *The War Plays* and *Human Cannon*, to give the characters poetry to say in direct address to the audience. Bond’s poetic voice is not exceptional and the result of its insertion in his plays negatively postpones the dramatic flow.

Considering Bond as a canonical postmodernist like Pynchon or Barthelme has its difficulties. One difficulty is that it requires ignoring what can be known of the artist’s intent via his essays. In an interview with Ulrich Koppen, Bond states,

> The introductions are the keys to the plays, they are the determinants of the plays, yet they are not the actual plays themselves. The ‘Introductions’ give you more or less the bearings or orientation, the way you should look at things. Critics tend to turn my plays upside down. It is for that simple reason that I sometimes feel the necessity to explain the approach to a play in the form of a guiding ‘Introduction’ (“Modern” 99).

If this is the case, the essays in all their volubility never discuss the intent of performing postmodern imprecision. The essays are adamant and righteous in their hatred of capitalism, their prophetic belief in a socialist utopia that will end violence, and their proposing the proper dramatic means of creating effective socialist theatre. They champion rationality. Even ambiguity in the Theatre Events of the postmodern theatre is to be “hardened,” not be too loose.
It is a toss-up, then, if Bond’s imprecision in dialogue is based on intent or disregard. Dialogue, despite its inconsistencies, helps craft images and actions, instituting Theatre Events. The difficulty people have in communicating, as seen in Saved through Olly’s Prison, is because they are in the prison of capitalism, not the prison of language. “[T]he normative language we use to survive in capitalist society . . . is fouled by its involvement” (Bond, “Dramatic” xv). Characters react in spurts to each other. Interpersonal dialogue is not serious debate, argument, disagreement, or the offering of an alternative opinion. It is not a means of socializing. Characters verbally lick their wounds to indifferent (or numb) others. Verbal descriptions are stilted, as if from a memorized report. Anger sounds instructional. Intending to assist, the author lends characters his voice – as with other utterances, no one onstage responds.

Pavis prefers in her essay, “The Classical Heritage of Modern Drama: The Case of Postmodern Theatre,” to discuss “Postmodernism in the theatre [rather] than postmodern theatre . . . a rather vague term” (18). One postmodern tendency Pavis mentions is, if not the depoliticization of drama, at least an “extreme distrust in the face of all [political] inheritances, especially that of Marxism” (Pavis 18). Pavis quotes Lyotard’s “‘disbelief in the face of metanarratives’” (19) to describe the postmodern tendency to move away from totality and party-line coherence. In Shopping and Fucking, Mark’s discussion of the end of the big narratives and the continuance of the little story speaks of this tendency. The second tendency Pavis cites in her essay is the postmodern “defiance in the face of work as totality” (19). In regard to the first postmodern tendency in theatre, Bond’s work is not on board, founded as it is on social
analysis. As for the second tendency Pavis mentions, however, there is some connectivity in that Bond’s work does seem to present “fragments of an anticipated whole” (Pavis 19).

There has often been the feel of an awkward, underdeveloped, and contradictory narrative at work in Bond, from Saved to Olly’s Prison. But unlike the postmodern writing of say, William Gaddis in The Recognitions, there is not the pay-off of the imprecise in doing a sufficient job in engaging the audience in its pastiche. Perhaps social realist dramas just don’t do well in being imprecise, not in telling the audience too little (which Fokkema categorizes as overprecision (36)) but in offering them a variety of unconnected facts, dialogue, and perspectives, where character is portrayed as socially and psychologically damaged, without self-centering ethos. Holland is able to see the parts working together:

The construction of the plays . . . disavows the coherence of character: they destroy conventional theories of dramatic causality in terms of individual motivation as the factor promoting action. . . . [T]hrough the series of scenes, Bond offers successive interconnected perceptions of the world, viewed socially and morally (30).

From a social and psychological perspective, the scenes often are effective, but morally the presentations are often questionable. The clumsily imprecise, especially when it affects the dramaturgy of social realism, makes the hand of the playwright come into view, making his or her output seem amateurish and invasive, based on a personal ethos.
4.5 Ethics and Comedy

When Harry and Len meet briefly at the end of *Saved*, the topic of Fred is brought into their conversation. Len says of his old friend, Fred, after returning from his prison stay, “Yer ain’ seen what it done t’ ‘im. ‘E’s like a kid. ‘E’ll finish up like some ol’ lag, or an’ ol’ soak. Bound to. An’ soon. Yer’Il see” (Bond, *Saved* 126). The same negative, judgmental sentiment is offered by Mike about the blind Olly at the end of *Olly’s Prison*. The protagonist must be ready to drop kick the other to the waste pile in the cold world Bond presents. Lear must drop the Boy; Father and Mother Ruiz must kill innocent bystanders; Shakespeare must ignore his daughter and servant’s son; Trench must kill the chauffeur; after the nuclear apocalypse, soldiers must kill their relatives. Acts of disloyalty and disregard are many. Bond works with the material he finds and, because of his pessimistic beliefs, all he finds are corrupted individuals fouled by the world of capitalism. Only one at a time can he find someone to save.

In Bond’s dramatic vision, the king who murders workers nonchalantly is just as likely to be saved as the honest young man who farms in the hinterlands. The young man who watches a baby’s murder is redeemed when he fixes a chair. Mike, who strangles his daughter for not responding to his neurotic demands, is a hero; young Olly is a discard. Correct political action, the significant spirit, bloweth where it listeth, selecting any subject, regardless of former crime. It is not that a thief should not be saved; it is the single-mindedness of the author in his redemption of one thief among the many that rings hollow. Len’s speaking ill of Fred is another disappointment in regard to Len. Len’s condemning words only further diminish Len, whom Fred tolerated and did not drop,
even with Len was being a great bother. The aggro-effects are not the only thing with which Bond assaults the audience. He assaults them with the casual immorality of his protagonists.

A very crazed bunch living on the Aran Islands appear in Martin McDonagh’s 2001 play, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. The slightly pudgy, long-haired seventeen year-old Davey is cast into a world of violence and ignorance. Blamed for killing a maverick terrorist’s pet cat, Davey and his acquaintance, an older man named Donny, survive a series of violent acts brought about by the return to their island home of the professional sadist and terrorist, Padriac. The handsome young Padriac, Donny’s son, only loves his pet cat, everyone else he will torture if needed - or even if not needed. In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh makes a comedy out of terrorism. The evil Padraic and Davey’s young sister, Maired, belong to a splinter group of the Irish National Liberation Army that has only Padraic and (eventually) Maidred as members. Both Padriac and the young Maired torture and kill people at the drop of a hat, but they are the most devoted of cat lovers.

The island offers isolation and poverty to Davey and Donny’s families. The young man and the old man are the comic foils of the play, and, ultimately, among its sole human survivors, besides a surprise animal. It is difficult to tell how much of their inane, comic behavior is based on fear of Padraic or is just the result of a basic stupidity, a natural *Urdummheit*, given to hyperrealist characters like Kroetz’s Beppi in *Stallerhof* and absurd characters like Lucky in *Godot*. With Padraic’s arrival, Donny and Davey are
deemed responsible for the death of Padraic’s cat. Tied up and about to be shot to death by the practiced Padraic, Davey offers a suggestion, “You could get another cat” (37).

If we are all terrorists, as Bond provocatively posits in The Worlds, in McDonagh’s play we are all nitwits. After confessing their crimes to Padraic in their taking care of the cat– Donny admits that he did sometimes feed the cat Frosties - the two poor souls are about to executed when other terrorists arrive to kill the embarrassing loose cannon, Padriac. Eventually saved by Maired, who blinds the terrorists and helps Padraic torture them, Donny and Davey witness one grotesque blood-letting after another. Still on the hook, they are saved when the two terrorist lovers quickly fall apart. Padraic killed Maired’s cat by mistake and Maired ends the honeymoon period by killing Padraic. Kitties are more important than people to terrorists in this play; the terrorists are a bunch of comic, pathetic fools. Perhaps McDonagh finds in his play a way to end terrorism – by laughing at terrorists at length. Terrorists probably won’t stop committing their acts, but those of us that are not terrorists have found ammunition to laugh in their faces. Those of us who are not terrorists, when we act politically, can also perhaps laugh at ourselves, thanks to artists like McDonagh. We can breathe and allow ourselves a little bit of negative capability, think of the somewhat absurd road ahead, and press on towards our goals, taking time to make infantile noises to our pet cats on the couch.
Conclusion

After preparing some unproduced work, one play in the fashion of Beckett and another in the fashion of Brecht, Edward Bond began his career at the Royal Court Theatre with a series of plays with a young male protagonist, the most noteworthy play being Bond’s *Saved*, where the young protagonist Len enters a world of terrible social damage. *Saved* merged Beckett with social realism. In short scenes that seemed like improvised skits, the characters in *Saved* communicated in a dialogue style of cross talk patter. The play did not seem to follow realist plot development nor did it fall into a vogue of Brechtian alienation effects. *Saved* was an impressive work by a young playwright. The play was jarred by the intense baby bashing scene and this grotesque moment, distinct from the stylized, sparse dramatizations of the play, meant something to Bond. The audience, he somehow thought, was not able to think politically about this dysfunctional family: the shock of the child’s torture was to snap them to political consciousness.

It became apparent that the next young male character, Arthur in *Early Morning*, was going mad from a dysfunctional political system rather than just his intensely damaging family situation. Bond decided to begin to dramatize politically. Bond’s position as a political playwright became clear and, for many, it began to become painfully clear that his position showed an angry frustration with modern capitalist society as well a desire to bluntly make some very rudimentary statements about morality.
and violence. Lear as a character ended the exploration of society via a young male protagonist. In Lear, the most unlikely of characters, a despotic old king, was to be saved, the sole character to be given a political education. The young man here, the Gravedigger’s Boy, was a handicap. Both the young man in Lear and Shakespeare himself were enemies of the people. Bond in his essays saw both going against the need for a politically active socialist movement, which seemed on inspection a mere upgrade to Soviet communism, one not based on a total repulsion of the Leninist-Stalinist regimes even though Bond fashioned Cordelia after Stalin in his play.

After trammeling Shakespeare and showing how reactionary the young can be in Bingo, Bond ultimately turned to epic theatre, where his work foundered. Now taking on Brecht, he saw his epic dramas as going beyond Brecht in creating a more engaging form of epic theatre. No young person was to be the focused protagonist in these plays. Bond began to show a reoccurring problem with his autodidactic style. His plays and essays misread Beckett, Shakespeare, and Brecht. His epic work was like the worst of Brecht, more like Brecht’s suspect Lehrstücke or his agit-prop praise of Communism, The Mother. As he continued, Bond believed he was finding his voice and his philosophy. His essays became more and more boastful; his theories on theatre, complicated as they were in presentation, became more lightweight in their singularity.

In Bond’s later, postmodern work, the young male protagonist returned. Leonard seemed to bring some relief to Bond’s black and white worldview, but he was smothered in dialogue, in an oratory style of communication between characters that was barely interpersonal. The baby’s cry in Saved became the cry of Leonard for his father, but here
it was briefly heard under all the businessmen’s chatter. Why was Bond so attracted to the ruling class he did not like? Why in plays like *In the Company of Men* and *The Worlds* did old capitalist business men require so much attention? Rock-bottom was hit in *Olly’s Prison*, when the audience is to learn from a child murderer how to look at the world in an abstract political way. Mike cannot be forgiven for killing his child just because he can translate it as the fault of capitalist society’s improper morality.

The dissertation expresses disappointment with some of the work of Edward Bond. Hume writes: “The abstract philosophy of CICERO has lost its credit: The vehemence of his oratory is still the object of our admiration” (495). Would that the same could be said of Bond. His abstract, rational socialism is naive and dogmatic; it has lost its credit. Bond’s doctrinaire approach to Marxism led to difficulties for this urgent man, who felt that permanent disaster was around the corner and only his utopian socialism could save the world. In crying fire at the coming apocalypse, Bond quickly took rationality-based, defensive positions, not seeming to realize that his rationales, his ideas on how to stop the fire, were old hat theories and suppositions, which came across in his dramas and essays as trite platitudes, sometimes poorly thought out, questionable ideas bordering on illogical non-sequiturs. As a theatre technician, he could not abandon the methods he used to express his vehemence: his clumsy direct addresses to the audience and, especially, his aggro-effects, so repetitive in his work and often mechanical in their performance. If the audience goes to a Bond play, they expect some scenes of torture. The surprise element is to be expected. Bond’s vehemence, unlike Cicero’s, is not overall an object of admiration.
My dissertation challenges those who unquestionably praise Bond’s ability as a playwright and theoretician. A provisional feeling of promise in his early work, seen in Bond’s *Saved* and *Lear*, did not lead to fulfillment in his later work, but rather the end of his two most promising dramatic elements: the use of a shorthand, interpersonal dialogue that had its own engaging rhythm, without need for intrusion of the author’s voice, and the development of skit-like situations, that suggested that even the humdrum of daily life was out of control. Bond’s political ardor eventually hardened his dramas into rote, rationalist expressions about the dangers of capitalism. His aesthetic experiments collapsed often into pale copies of what was not the best in Brecht: the staging of the scene in faraway locales and times that allowed for an easy, patronizing colonization of an exterior world; the focus on a single main character among secondary support characters and a dazzlingly simplified “society” of extras – all made in the name of political theatre; and the intrusion of authorial messages that showed no finesse in execution or fineness of thought. Bond in his work followed the political bad poetry of Brecht’s *The Mother* rather than the less didactic, more open expressiveness of his *Mother Courage*.

In conducting dissertation research on my topic, I discovered more favorable writings about Bond than negative ones. For writers like Jenny Spencer and Tony Coult, a great modern artist is made visible in Edward Bond. As the dissertation shows, arguments can be made against Bond and his favorable critics’ unconditional claims to his brilliance. An example of a favorable criticism is Graham Saunders’ essay, “‘A theater of ruins.’ Edward Bond and Samuel Beckett: theatrical antagonists,” which easily
sides with Bond and his “dialogue” with Beckett. Saunders has no trouble in seeing Bond correct in all his provocative statements about Beckett (which the dissertation challenges). Saunders’ essay goes with a common flow, based on a notion that the best modern art is political art. All other art is either dismissed totally or judged as being in the opposite political camp, as if it were lazily (or sneakily) taking the stance of a Neville Chamberlain. After all, what does Beckett’s drama do, Saunders notes, but “ultimately propose a condition of stasis as a rationale by which to live” (‘Ruins’ 70)? Waiting for Godot is not a design for living, although it can show the design of the way we (sometimes) live now. A task in the first chapter of the dissertation is to explore the relation of Bond and Beckett, in order to explore Bond and others’ single-minded approach to political art and art in general.

Saunders does not quail in noticing how Bond also cites Brecht and Shakespeare into his essays for their similar artistic faults. The middle chapters of the dissertation look at the three dramatists and come to an opposing realization: Bond is not the modern socialist equivalent to Shakespeare nor does he appropriate what is best in Brecht, for that matter. Saunders’ paper does what many essays I have researched fall to doing. Bond is to be championed; Beckett, or Brecht, or Shakespeare, is the losing opponent. There cannot be even a draw. Certainly I recognize I am using the same rhetorical methods as these essayists in opposing Bond: I select quotes and give examples that show Bond’s weaknesses and expose the muddled, negative temperament he directs at a host of better artists, just as favorable Bond critics do with Shakespeare and Brecht. In creating my argument criticizing Bond, I admit to feeling as justified as those who write in favor of
Bond – an admission of my drawing a line in the sand. I want political theatre to be engaging and cognizant of many perspectives. I believe that dramas like those of Bond, especially in his later plays, do not further political drama but aid in ending their use, giving political theatre a dull and mind-numbing name.

Marc Robinson’s “Breaking the Bond with Edward Bond” became a helpful essay for the dissertation by noticing the problems in Bond’s work, that the “messes” Bond once attempted to show in his early plays were too readily cleaned up, arranged, and discounted in his later plays, which represent the majority of his dramatic output. Works like those of Garner (Bodied Spaces) and Oppel (a comparison of King Lear and Lear) also helped to broaden my understanding of Bond. General dramatic theories, like those of Szondi, Brecht, Brook, Williams, and Lukacs, gave my research a further widening understanding of dramatic art and its usage by Bond.

The dissertation’s topic of charting the course of the young male innocent began to show, as my research continued, the narrowing limits of Bond’s artistic and political merit as he progressed as a playwright. Bond is unfortunately a god-like playwright, shaping his Adam in order to make him fail, with a weak Eve somewhere around, and the snake wearing a capitalist hat. What was encouraging in Bond’s early work was his restraint in not applying his obvious preference for moralizing didacticism. Bond’s characterization of young male character could thus perform more dramatically in an artistically created void: the nervous, ultimately cowardly Len in Saved, unable to get past his chameleon approach to the other, and the breathing young spirit of hope of the Gravedigger’s Boy in Lear, someone participating in life against the odds. Bond’s
struggle to not give the audience answers was soon lost, and, although there could occasionally appear the young male character again, as in the ardent, lost little boy of Leonard in *In The Company of Men*, Bond opted for didactic theatre and characters that were to be sacrificed in a random fashion as Bond saw fit. His attempts at epic theatre, like *The Worlds* and *Human Cannon*, were ethical calamities, the former shifting blame like a fire hose that escaped from the firemen, shooting a strong, watery blast indiscriminately; the latter calling for moral callousness as a given, setting a fire that brought about the killing of the innocent in the name of utopian socialism.

Because of his understanding of how capitalist society has ruined all humans, the clay Bond molds resulted in his shaping only sinners in the majority of his work. (*Human Cannon* is an exception). A necessary misanthropist, his misogynist tendencies were not special, just of the same cloth. No young woman character is ever the protagonist in the plays researched, not even visible unless she is a mother or wife. Eventually as research continued, Bond’s drama became identified: it was just a Calvinist crap shoot. Who will be saved and who will not was the author’s sovereign decision, nothing for the audience to imagine. Character did not matter. The young male character became just another possible sacrifice, like the infants in Bond plays who show the hellish nature of the capitalist machine. The sinner, Mike, who kills his own teen age daughter in frustrated rage, becomes one of the elect at the end of *Olly’s Prison*, spouting the word of the grand design. Olly, like the Son in *Bingo*, who suffered great damage and yet is still alive at the play’s end, is not to be helped. He is just an example of depraved soul, another failure to shake off.
Formally, the cat and mouse game of omniscient author and an assumed politically doltish audience begins to wear. Ultimately the author shows his or her position and the audience winces or nods. In Bond’s case, the authorial position is simplistic Marxism, historically naïve group think. To assume that aggro-effects are needed to wake the audience to these ideas, long since dropped historically as well as intellectually by many, creates misguided scenes of torture. To assume that aggro-effects will engage the audience later, after they have left the theatre, is wishful thinking and a further show of artistic hubris. With the sacrifice of characters based on authorial whim and aggro-effects used to shock and somehow educate the audience, Bond’s drama becomes repetitive and problematic. Other writers of the period seem more able, more flexible in the artistic tools and more flexible in their political thinking. It is not, however, that Howard Barker’s play, Seven Lears, for instance, is a better play in response to Shakespeare than Bond’s Lear. Certainly Bond’s work has moments of value, which hopefully the dissertation clearly shows, especially in the case of Saved and Lear. It is that others’ works show an agile growth of ideas and approaches, like Barker’s No End to Blame, which, as an epic construction, is superior to any of Bond’s work of his epic period. The dissertation thus suggests that other socially committed artists, experimenting in the difficult enterprise of creating political or socially conscious theatre, have taken much more useful approaches to their subject matter. Hanif Kureishi’s Outskirts speaks more of the prison we are in than Bond’s play about Olly does. Caryl Churchill’s sad tale of the young girl in Top Girls awakes the audience’s social conscience in ways Saved does not even care about in regard to child abuse.
A quote from Brecht and a note about him indicate what is problematic about Bond’s political theatre. The quote: Brecht’s compliment about Shakespeare, stating that Shakespeare’s work is “pure material” (Heinemann 230). The note: when Walter Benjamin came to Brecht’s office, he saw a donkey statue with a note on it written by Brecht. The note said, “I, too, must understand it” (“Conversations” 206). Brecht and Bond’s desire to speak to the supposed ill-informed, when they follow this notion of making sure the donkey understands, leads to regrettable theatre, throwing out their pure “material” in their dumbing it down. Bond, the dissertation concludes, eventually misused his material in his vehement reaction to society and audience, becoming a political playwright known, somewhat ironically, for a theatrical effect and not for a significant message. He remains a disquieting figure, an artist who wanted to reach out to the living, breathing audience in front of him, but was unable, perhaps unwilling, to do so.
References


