

## Interview with Edward Bond

### Ian Stuart

Working with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon, November 16-December 4, 1992, for the first time since the 1980's Bond continued developing an approach towards acting. In an edited interview, given on December 23, 1992, to Ian Stuart, who currently teaches in the School of Theatre, University of Southern California, Bond discusses Theatre Events (TEs), his concept of the Central Situation (CS), the use of an actor's imagination and the practical application of these ideas to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and *King Lear*.

### The Central Situation (CS)

A character is written only as an aspect of the Centre and doesn't exist independently of that—so really all the language is referring to is not only problematic of an individual character but a problematic of the whole play and no character exists independently of this. If there is a person in real life you can say what is the purpose of that character's life or that person can even ask himself, "What is the purpose of life?" But you cannot ask any of those questions of a character in a play: you can't say what is the purpose of the character? The purpose of the character is to be in the play. That's all. If you take a character like Falstaff who appears to be very idiosyncratic and rumbustuous you have to be always aware that everything that he does is there in relation to those people in the play who are most unlike him or potentially most unlike him, such as Henry V. Everything that exists in the play is there simply as an aspect of the Centre.

### Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

Every scene in *Troilus and Cressida* is built on the idea of a violation. Because the play is to do with the violation of Helen, originally, then every aspect of the play, every scene in that play, every scene in that play, has a formal structure which is then interrupted by somebody coming from outside. If you

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take the Trojan council scene: Cassandra interrupts it, she rapes, violates, the scene. If you take the council scene among the Greeks then that is interrupted by a man coming from the Trojans. The whole play is built on violation. This is why the Greeks have Thersites and the Trojans have Pandarus. They violate the ethics and the normality of the scenes all the while. It is in the fourth line that Hector says (and he is the heroic figure of Greek mythology isn't he?)—yet one of the first things he says is "I'm like a woman." His violation is to veer, as it were, into being too human as opposed to being too selfish or too macho. Everything is to do with violation. That is why you have these extremes. That's why Thersites and Hector are brought together towards the end of the play. Hector then meets the most extreme violation, the most extreme degenerate violation, of what is possible in the context of the play of the highest heroic virtue: itself shown to be a violation. The two extreme violations are brought together. And then you have the extraordinary scene where for some reason or other Hector meets the perfect knight, the man with the perfect armour. I have never met anybody who has actually ever said anything useful about that. Why he meets this man. He is not even named, he comes from nowhere. He is the heroic ideal and he is killed, he is violated, by Hector. Hector then takes his armour and, just a few lines later, Hector strips and is then violated, he is killed.

What happens at the end of the play is, of course, that Pandarus violates the audience. He says, "Well I will be dead in two months but what I will do is give you my diseases." So the whole play is built on this idea. Of course they are all extreme characters—Thersites is an extreme character—but what you have got to bear in mind is that Thersites is there in order to meet Hector at a critical moment. I say he is there for that point. It is not necessarily so but the logic of dealing with the structures which are based on the Centre will bring those two people together at some time.

### Shakespeare's *King Lear*

*Lear* is a play that deals with falling.<sup>1</sup> It is to do with the difference between Lear saying, "Nothing can come of nothing" and Cordelia saying everything will come of nothing—which is virtually what she says. She says "Because I am good." It doesn't have to prove/demonstrate itself, it is there in its own right. But really goodness is *not* there in its own right. It is like the quarrel between God and Satan. Satan falls out of heaven and then God has to send Christ out of heaven on his own particular journey. But it's a con. The whole thing about the basic structure is to deal with falling. It is to do with Cordelia being hanged. Lear going to be hanged (he actually isn't.) It is to do with Gloucester falling off the cliff. Everybody's falling. The language is to do

with falling. The language veers crazily between the stars and the bottom of the sea. The metaphors keep swinging from one extreme to the other. It is not divide and rule but divide and fall in *Lear*. He divides his kingdom up and everything falls. "Nothing will come of nothing." How do you stop someone falling into that pit. The play negotiates that basic structure. Then it gets tied up with the business of what you see, the strange business of sight.

Another basic situation in *Lear* is to do with ropes, or constraints of various sorts, that have to be broken in various ways. (I think this is in a way true of all plays.) For instance if you take the blinding of the servant in *Lear*.<sup>2</sup> You have to say well look at the very beginning Cornwall says bind Gloucester, tie him up in a rope. Gloucester says you mustn't do that and the servants don't want to do it. The play could say he is brought on bound. He isn't brought on bound. Cornwall says to the servants bind him and the servants hesitate, they can't do it. And it takes a lot of stage business to get Gloucester actually tied up in a chair. It has to be shown. Then you say, "What happens to the servant?" Because Cornwall has broken a feudal barrier by tying up Gloucester. He shouldn't do it. What happens to the servant? Curiously enough the servant pushes the barriers one stage further because he is killed by a woman. That is very unfeudal. The women do not fight. It is somehow as if by breaking these barriers all the while the play keeps pushing itself. In a funny way the evil of Goneril and Regan becomes understandable. It is only a further barrier broken. Then what you do in order to try and restore that barrier. Your behaviour gets more and more monstrous. All it is is an attempt to restore an order that Lear at the very beginning destroys by cutting it up into pieces and saying well it can all be managed by people of good will. And Cordelia says well actually good will is really something very, very destructive because it just exists in its own right, it doesn't have any function. Lear says no that can't be right there must be some arbitration. It is as if Lear cuts his tightrope into three parts and says well have a bit of my tightrope. He falls. And the whole play is to do with that.

At the end in that extraordinary last scene "is she dead, is she not dead," after he has just cut Cordelia down from being hanged and killed somebody, while doing that, somebody else says, "Let it all fall down." It is one of the key lines in that last scene. So the whole play is built on this idea of falling. You could say this goes back to the child's fear if you wanted to say that. I wouldn't have any objection to that. But what I am saying is that to use the play what you have to do is always understand what the Central situations are. You will then find something which is very interesting. I want to make a huge thing out of the hanging of Cordelia and the fact that Lear has had to kill somebody in order to save this woman just before he dies. What I want to say is that if we can understand what the basic structures are then the play becomes useful for us in

a new way because a play is of permanent value *not* because it says something which is true for all times but because it is a structure in which new truth can be put. A play is permanent because it changes and only because it changes. If someone is saying something which is true for all time it becomes dead. It is like the Christian religion. Or the Greek religion which claims to say something true for all time. Then people lose the ability to do anything good and become more and more reactionary. The interesting thing about a good play, a play like *Lear*, is that it will produce certain basic structures which will enable you to look at a basic human problem, allow an existential and political problem to come together. The structures will be so designed that it opens up this problem, and exposes this problem, and what you can then do is use those structures to re-evaluate the play. That is why I say the servant's death is a very big moment in the play. It is as big as the blinding of Gloucester. Why is it in the scene, why does it happen in *that* scene, why don't you have a servant rebelling in some other scene? It would be possible. It has to be there when the blinding happens because that is one of the extreme structural situations. That will then spark off, necessitate, provoke, other structural movements in that basic Centre of the play. Anything anybody says will also relate to those basic structures in the same way. So even if you are in character it still doesn't tell you actually what to do with your character, or how to use your character, or what it is being used for by the play. If you look at Falstaff it is very obvious that he is there as a foil for some anarchic response to life that law and order will not tolerate. And that is how it would have been read by its audience. But one could actually change that reading now and say perhaps the libido needs its own luxuriance.

You see if I said the Central situation in *Lear* is to do with falling, you could say that actually that has something to do with the falling of a child. One of the basic instincts that all babies have is to clutch. But if that is so that still doesn't explain why it is tragic that societies fall. Or that people die. The baby may clutch as much as it likes, it will not stop it falling into its grave at the end of its life. To be reductive about things is not to be complete about things. To say that the basic fear of falling is because we were once people who lived in trees actually does not tell us *anything* about the collapse of industries or political systems. It is just that we are people with a certain if you like biological past, a certain cultural past, who find themselves in situations. Those situations have their own meanings. They can't be reduced. If you say that a lot of terror in *Lear* comes from initial fear of falling out of a pram. Fine. Terror is terror. It exists in its own right. At the moment we are not in danger of falling out of a tree we don't stop being capable of feeling terror. Reductive explanations have no real life-use. It does not stop people suffering when economic structures collapse.

### The Theatre Event (TE)

I would say that the TE is there to use the structure of the play to give its meaning for a contemporary audience. The structure of the play had a particular meaning for the writer when he wrote it but it is not necessarily the meaning for a contemporary audience. I think very often that they could be the same and therefore the original play and the TE of that play would come together. But you would still have an option about what you would choose to TE and what you don't choose to TE. Of course I tend to write into my plays my own TEs. But it is interesting how little one can do that because once the actor is there there is a dimension that you cannot fully accommodate in the writing however conscious you are of producing something for a stage. And the individual actors will come with individual possibilities and individual insights which will enable you to TE the play in another way.

Another possibility is that Lear comes on with the sword that he has to cut Cordelia down with. Which is a bloody sword. There are very interesting parallels between that sword and the sword that is used in the blinding of Gloucester for the killing of the servant by the woman. What I am saying is that we should radically TE that scene to give it its contemporary meaning. To point out that suffering is not good for you. I am not prepared to go and tell people starving in Africa that suffering is good for them. We don't actually believe that, we don't base our lives on that. And you can do this by using those structures—you don't have to violate the structures. Because curiously enough the structures are desperately and radically involved in that problem, it mattered to Lear, the structures will be there because they are the only structures suitable for dealing with that problem. You don't have to put a red nose on Lear, you don't have to make Lear hang his fool and all that sort of nonsense. You can use those structures that are there, TE them for a modern audience and then the play becomes electrifying.

### Beyond Shakespeare

A Central situation can apply to any play that is well written because the play has to have a Centre. That is the difference between a well written and a badly written play. It is like a child says, "Let's play a game." If a child plays a game it says, "Let's play fathers and mothers, or let's play cowboys and Indians, or let's play cops and robbers." The child doesn't say, "Well this is cops and robbers and now we are going to play this father and mother scene." It wouldn't make any sense. It would be the wrong Centre. Plays are not to be categorized in that simple way because the Centres of the play are often cultural

obsessions and so on. But basically yes. Every play has to have a Centre which is a structure which is there in order to open up the problematic of the play.

### **The Central Speech and the Theatre Event**

The idea of looking for the Central Speech is very good. One should also look for the Central metaphors. It is like the moment when the Fool comes on and he is making these horrible jokes about why do you have a nose it is to keep your eyes apart. The play is obsessed with eyes. And looking and seeing and failing to look. The Fool is immediately into this imagery about falling. So that it is very important to talk about the Central imagery of the play and understand how that relates to the Central structure, the imagery of the play is not arbitrary. It is spoken, as it were, by the Central Structure.

The business of TE is something which is slightly independent because if I talk about the Central speech, the Central images, it is, for example, that if you go to the bottom of the sea in *Lear* you can be pretty certain you are going to be at the top of heavens in a few lines. The imagery just swings like that—it constantly encompasses the map of the play. It often comes together in extraordinary ways. When the man is blinded he is left to servants. I said what's this business of getting some flax and whites of eggs. Somebody said well that's a woman's thing, a man can't understand that because that's to do with cooking whites of eggs. I said this is spoken by men. In any case it doesn't actually explain the very complex imagery because flax is what you make ropes out of, eggs are the whites of the eyes. And somehow you have brought the imagery of ropes and eyes together. It is said again as so often by the wrong people—because it is said by the men and not by the women who should be the nurses. When you start to examine the imagery in that way then you get opportunities to set up very powerful stage images because, for instance, I said perhaps what you should really be doing is the moment Cornwall and Goneril go off perhaps what you have is the servants going not to look at Gloucester but to go and look at the dead servant who is much more interesting to them. Gloucester will then be crawling around all over the stage and it's then that they say well let's do something for him. How can flax mend broken eyes? If you can make a stage presence of servants standing by the dead body of one of themselves, looking at their feudal leader who is blind and crawling around the stage, and then make the flax and eggs suggestion then you use the Central imagery of the play and I think what is happening on the stage is problematic for an audience in a good way. It makes them think.

If I talk about the structure in that way a TE is what gives you freedom over the structure because the structure is there but then you can TE it because you

can then push the structure around. You can TE anything on the stage but the structure will always be throwing up the major confrontations, the structure will always be dealing with the Centre of the play. The really basic structures, the plays that deal with really central problems, probably cannot resolve those problems. But to understand them creatively is what makes people human. The TE gives you freedom to use those structures in a way that is more hopeful for your audience.

The TE would define the work of the audience but only the audience can do that work. You cannot impose the play on an audience. It's not like saying if you like we will have this *Verfremdungseffekt* which will enable the audience to be like rational scientists and make rational judgements and consider the proposition rationally. Audiences can't do that. Everybody can be in that position where they say I didn't know what to do. That is often a very good situation to be in. What you can do is make it impossible for an audience to respond to something with its normal emotional responses. That the emotions of the audience will not be the servants of the audience. They will have to come to some arrangement with their own emotions.

There is a lot of theatre where the play serves to you. It is like a self-service thing but in reverse. That you provide your existing emotions for the play in a way. A sentimental play or one of those scenes from Arthur Miller where everybody cries because he loves me after all. These are scenes where emotions are used in a way that I think prostitutes an audience. What I am saying is that instead of pressing a button that I know will get a particular response from you, I will not let you know which button I am pressing. I think many plays, and this is a criticism I would make of Arthur Miller and why I think he fails as a writer—he now write plays that are banal—I think that it is that he knows what button to press. Well I press the wrong button not out of willfulness but simply because the arrangements between buttons and emotions are false. They are there, to go back to the politics of it, to get responses for the wrong reasons. In 1914 somebody pressed a button when everybody felt the right emotions even though they were often very different emotions. I don't think Rilke celebrated the outbreak of war for the same reason that German peasants celebrated it. What I want to do is to break down the connection between the button and the emotion.

## Imagination

Theatre is the use of the imagination and you have to say why is it that people have imaginations? The only way that a child can come to terms with the world is to imagine it. There are lots of things around it. It has a table, it has

things to eat with, it has mothers and fathers, it has windows and doors, it has schools to go to and all the rest of it. But it has nothing where these things exist. There is no relationship between these things. It has no maps. It has no tables of statistics, it has no books of laws, it only holds these things together by imagining them in some way. By giving them imaginary meanings. Somebody says in *Olly's Prison* that a mother pretends to eat the child's food, her mouth actually waters and if you didn't do that then there would be no civilization.<sup>3</sup> If we did not use our imaginations we could not use the brains we have got, we couldn't use the human mind to reason. We have to imagine. And once we imagine we get a cultural imagination. Children imagine things, they are culturally imaginative, they learn imagination as they learn a language. Just as they grow so they learn to use their minds in imaginative contexts all the while. Later on perhaps they are encouraged to lose their imagination or to hand their imagination over to somebody else to use on their behalf by using patriotic symbols or religious symbols or things like that. What you are always dealing with is the imagination. Now the imagination knows exactly what it is like to stand there and watch your daughter being killed.<sup>4</sup> You have just got to imagine it. There is nothing in the play [*The Changeling*] that either the audience does not know from its own experience, exactly, and that the actors don't know. They know exactly what it is like for Hecuba to go mad. They know it exactly—it is in their imagination. What you then have to say to the actor is that you think that you are playing your character. You are not you are using your imagination which you have been developing since a child, when your whole world was imagined.

If the actor says I am acting my character then I can say to the actor you are using your imagination, then it is not so difficult. We have a common ground but we have changed the meaning entirely because we will then not go looking round for social/realistic explanations. It is like a lot of Stanislavsky. One of the most striking things in Stanislavsky is when that man puts all that paint on his face and becomes this strange thing. He doesn't know quite what has happened.<sup>5</sup> It actually contradicts Stanislavsky's theory because the imagination seems to have gone into some unknown territory. Now I don't want to collapse that into Lawrence's "it" or some abstract Freudian pit or something like that. I want to say no, the imagination is a social structure, it is created by a child in a home, social environment in relationships to power. It is the mediation of the individual, the vulnerable individual, in a world of forces that are strictly beyond its control. I can only reach my hand out that far. If I am very powerful I can point. But the imagination is like a hand that can do anything. But it is like a hand, it is not arbitrary, it is doing things that are desired by the doer and they are desired by the doer in the same way that Shakespeare desired to write *Lear*.

The two come together. And therefore when you are imagining the play what you are doing is exactly what Shakespeare did. When you say well let me do my character, you have to say no you must do what Shakespeare did. Then you will actually get into the world of the play, the imagery of the play, you will then be able to start using the play for yourself and then you will be able to use the play for your character because then your character will start to do surprising things.

### Extreme Contrast

One wants to write about the extreme situation, even if its the extreme middle as it were. But there is no point in writing about anything if it doesn't produce some insight and the insights come out of extreme situations don't they? Even if it's the daily hum-drum there is a sense in which this is an extreme situation. I also think that to be totally anything is an extreme situation. For instance if you were doing a play that was really about the routine of somebody's life and so on you either say well look something critical is going to happen in that life or else one will say nothing happens it's just routine. If it is just routine its madness and then that is extreme. But if you go back and talk about the structures of a play, the Centre of the play is always an extreme situation. That is why it is necessary to write the play, and that is a matter of extremity itself. It is probably a situation, a confrontation, that is not solvable. And the structures of the play will gravitate towards being extreme exposures of that Central situation. The structures will be so devised, or really virtually they will devise themselves, out of a need to understand, they will expose, test, as severely as they can the nature of that Central situation. I think that is all to do with acting the extremity. (Extremes meet in the Centre?) What happens is there is a settling for some medium response to a situation, but I think acting should always push the situation to its extreme state of whatever it is rather than accept that comfortable median way of doing things. Then what happens is that because the need for some extreme statement is felt you get the sort of throwing out of frantic energy which is just energy for the sake of energy really. I heard someone saying that the play *Moby Dick* was wonderful because the actors showed such energy.<sup>6</sup> And I thought that was exactly the sort of theatre that I would object to. The energy is there to hide the absence of the imagination. The extreme may be still and small—Blake saw a grain of sand in an extreme way, it recorded the laws of time and geology.

If I can give you an example of what I mean by an extreme situation. The crucifixion. It must be very boring actually to watch a crucifixion because nothing much happens. And I think after a couple of hours you would say well let's come back later on, then it will get more interesting. From the actor's point

of view, from the TE point of view if you look at a crucifixion, what is it that the crucified can do? He can move his feet, his hands and his head. That's all the crucified person can do because the rest of the body is weight over which he has no control. It occurred to me that if I wanted to show the extremity of crucifixion, if I wanted to TE the crucifixion in an extreme way, I would show the movement of the hands and feet. Now those movements would necessarily be very small, there wouldn't be a frantic energy, but because they were in a particular situation the movements of the toes which will never again walk on earth—they should be feeling for the earth. It is a very painful thought. And that after somebody has been crucified for five or six hours, twelve hours, or whatever, that the fingers should move is a very painful thought. What is even more frightening is that the fingers would be trying to remove the nails from the hands. That is the TE of a crucifixion—to make it clear that the fingers are reaching towards the nails. There is no hysteria there, no shouting, no screaming. Just the fingers trying to bend back and removing the nails which fasten them to the wood. It seems to me that is an extreme situation. To ask an actor to do that properly, to show that properly, to know exactly what the fingers are doing, that requires a great amount of skill, a great amount of observation, a great amount of imagination. Because it's not like getting your fingers caught in the door—and if that were shown it would serve no purpose.

Imagination is not there to reproduce what has been experienced but to experience what is not in experience as it were. That is true of the child's game. I don't want you to think that by imagination one has got to go back to some wonderful fecund ability that the child has called the imagination or even that you could get back to that. You can't get back to that anymore then you can get back to the babbling of a child and call that rhetoric. Your imagination has developed through experience. What you are getting back to is, I suppose, the ability to need (yes) and use the imagination. I think that the imagination is very repressed and is also something that is the last thing to be free in communities. It would be politically possible to abolish overt chained forms of slavery, of covert salaried slavery, but I think the last thing it would be possible to free human beings fully in is their imaginations. Nevertheless, that is the utopian element in art, that it is the use of imagination and that it is always necessarily present in art even in forms that are coopted by authority. It is necessarily an exercise in freedom, always. Because whenever that is used even by authority it has to allow some element of freedom for it to work. What one wants to do is to free the imaginative ability in an audience. Imagination combines emotion and reason together. The purpose of TE'ing theatre is to free the audience imaginatively in the end. You have to find ways of encouraging actors to use their imagination.

**Turning Theory into Practice—Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida***

The first thing I did at the workshops was to take the Trojan conference scene, that is the one Cassandra interrupts.<sup>7</sup> We had nine actors.<sup>8</sup> I divided the scene up into nine units so that an actor has to read a character's lines and maybe go on into the next character's lines. Or sometimes you would begin in the middle of a speech and end before it ended, each actor would have his or her set of lines. This caused some disquiet because I was told this is what actors did not do. They couldn't do this because they were necessarily character-based. I said all I want to do at the moment is to re-study the imagery and to understand why, in a sense, the scene is so incredibly badly written. It is absurdly badly written and you have to say why. It gets so contorted and all this about furring your gloves with reason, it is so desperate in its imagery that I wanted to understand why this was so.<sup>9</sup> What it was that the author was searching for, why was it necessary for him to write in this way because it seemed to be so incredibly incompetent, why write in this verbose and difficult and, yet, curiously, precise way. The scene is usually dismissed as learning how to get through all these people talking. Once you realize what they are actually arbitrating in the scene it becomes really a very exciting scene. I said let's read the scene and look at the imagery. We did this for quite some time and they kept repeating it. And then I did various things. We had cut Cassandra out because I wanted to use that, that is the violation of the scene and I think that this is a very basic thing. So then we occasionally shouted lines of Cassandra over the others. Then I made them talk the scene and I made some of the actresses go round sort of screaming because I said this woman has been screaming for ten years so what's a scream then?—it might just be a wail. In production one might put her under the table or one could make them hear the noise before the audience heard it and they would all start cringing all over the place and it is only later that this woman would come in quietly moving, groaning, keening, whispering. What do you do after ten years of protest? She needn't be screaming. Also I wanted them to bear in mind the nature of the discussion in relation to this woman who was saying, "Don't do it, don't do it." All their arguments are arguments about why you should violate. Notice how Hector even violates truth by deceiving so as to get to the truth! We did this for sometime and we were working on other things as well so we would come back to this occasion.

Around the room I had got a lot of props from the theatre like chandeliers, some sort of strange dome that you could sit in, costumes and bits and pieces, all the sort of stuff you would expect from a huge wardrobe like the RSC's. A lot of it was actually quite big, tables stood up on end and things, and quite elaborate candelabra stands that are taller than a human being. A coffin I remember too.

And then I said after I had talked about the text in various ways, right we are going to sit around and I want you to read this text, which they were now quite familiar with, and the moment will come when you want to do something. Don't force it, don't aim, don't try and guess whatever you do, don't try and impress me, when it happens just do it. So we went round and they did various things. Somebody stood up, somebody threw their book. They all did something except one person who said well nothing happened. And I said alright let us try it again. He read the text and nothing happened. I said, good then nothing happening is what happens, its now it is important to you, just remember that. Go out into the room and all of you find an object, any object that is there. What you have got to do is remember what happened to you at that moment because that was your imagination working, all you have got to do is go and explore that in relation to an object. Just explore it in relation to an object, spread it over the object, feel the object just try and always retain that feeling that made you do something and you will use your imagination. It has no character. It is not angry, not this or that. Whatever you did just call back to your imagination. That you can act is because there is something in you that required you to do something. That is what required Shakespeare to write the play and that is what requires you to act it. Interestingly enough the man who said nothing had happened was one who got the most profoundly involved in this activity. He said "nothing happened and I will face this in relation to an object." Then I let them to do this and it lasted for about ten minutes. Then they came and sat down and I said alright let's read the text again. And they read it and said, "Oh I noticed this for the first time and that for the first time." That happened later on. Earlier I said, before we sat down, "I want you now to experience this self which I called the dark mirror. You could see anything in it and as you needed to see nothing at that moment we will say it is just a dark mirror. And I said get that very, very clearly, establish yourself in that imaginative situation. I didn't say move or anything like that. Just be that impulse which made you move initially, which you then developed in relation to an object. Now you don't need the object but you can just be with it. Eventually what I think you can do is to create another self and say that's myself and I know it's there. But I said that's your imaginative self. And now, starting from that self, feel the emotion of—I will give you a series of emotions. First of all you establish yourself very clearly as your imaginative self, as the imagination, and then you move into the emotion. In other words you don't have the emotion to begin with, you become the imaginator and out of that you get the emotion. So you are not the emotion, there is something prior to that which imagines.

I then gave them various things—one was hate, one was envy, one was love, and again first they went into their imaginary self and they then experienced

the emotion by spreading it over, relating it to, handling it with their object. So instead of it being an emotion they have got they spread it over an object: feel the weight of it, drape themselves over it or explore it in certain ways. Sometimes, when we were doing hate, they would do this for five minutes and then I would say, "Let's hate a pin." And what is the part you hate the most, is it the top, the shaft, and I made them be specific. I said I will now tell you the most awful thing in the world to hate. It is a spoon—imagine you are hating a spoon. And I stopped them straight away because I wanted to put various ideas in their head. The spoon could wait.

At the very beginning I said this: this imagination is why you are an actor. Eventually you have got to show us on the stage why it is that you act. That is what great actors do. Their imaginations are okay. I said to them now get up and walk around the room and I know you can see but just pretend you cant. When you come to an object don't shut your eyes forget that you can see, just explore it and, without using your eyes, find out about the object you are relating to. If you can find out what that is. I thought this was using their imagination in another way and polarizing it because I know in a certain sense they can see but also they have got to use other senses to apprehend the object. What I was trying to do was break up the usual set patterns of seeing and thinking. I was trying to give them exercises in imagination. I have described only some of the exercises. They were beginning to get in that situation of not being angry but as imaginers choosing to be angry because they could then understand that when you talk about anger there is a huge range of angers. No two angers are alike.

What I was trying to do is to get their imaginations working so they could not only experience their imagination but to always experience in these exercises the passage from I the person who imagines, I the imaginator, this is my need to create which is that dark mirror that they develop out of that initial idea. (There are probably other ways of finding it, probably other ways of beginning it, but I thought this was a good way of beginning it.) To get out of that into then passing into an emotion rather than just straight into the emotion because then I think it enabled them to realize the complexity of choosing. I mean why is it that a miser should get angry if his money is stolen? Well you can say he is annoyed that he has lost his money and this makes him angry and he wants his money. But then there must be an initial stage of why the money matters to him and it is only the imaginator that knows about that. You might say in real life that in fact it is the imaginator that is possessed by the money. Acting is not the same as real life, it is something different. They were then beginning to find a new use for the text. They could start using this elaborate imagery of the text in a new way.

*King Lear*

The week we spent on *Lear* was at first a bit frustrating for the actresses. Unfortunately Shakespeare does not provide many parts for women—I have been more thoughtful in that respect—and I had rewritten the text of *Lear* so that for instance both Goneril and Regan are together in the blinding scene.<sup>10</sup> Actually I think the scene is written wonderfully well in Shakespeare because the woman says "blind him" and immediately leaves the stage. Which is wonderful in itself. It's like she says the unsayable and then doesn't stay to see it in this play of blindness and sight.

The big scene of the blinding worked wonderfully well. They got to it very quickly and suddenly the whole play was there—that was what was astonishing. I got them to do "Walking to Siberia" which is that all the actors stood in a line and they were to go through all three scenes and just say their text as they went through, to each other together, if they heard lines then to repeat them if they wished or go back over lines or whatever. The idea was that they were exiled people going on this long, long, long journey and to be aware of having to cross this continent. Slowly they spread out and started to go round slowly in this big circle and then lines would be shouted and repeated. It was wonderful. A very extraordinary thing happened. One of the actors who tended to be a very physical person and needed to touch everyone a lot, he was almost hanging on Lear's back. As their situation got more and more extreme they split up and that actor went off on his own an inch at a time but very rapidly, tap-tap-tap. We had this one figure and then all the others gravitated together and got closer and closer together with this other figure circling around in space. Again it was simply a group using its imagination and the imagery it created was wonderful and, because their imaginations were working very well then, they had created this strange feeling of one isolated person lost in the middle of Siberia and the other group huddling together. We found that they could use this sense of isolation in the last scene but we needed more time.

Also I did other exercises. I got a huge mountain of rope. One thing about the RSC is that you say you want some rope and they say how much? I said a lot and they come up with this pile about eight feet high. Then I invented a story and I said what I want you to do is go and either tell the story or tell another but use the rope—this is Lear's hair because the play is obsessed with the whiteness of his hair and imagine that you are using your father's hair and explore the hair in relationship to the story. That didn't work too well because the first story, invented by an actress, was very articulate and it shouldn't have been. It was articulate and therefore it was a barrier that was providing a lot of knowledge about folk stories. With hindsight I think I would have said think of your

favorite recipe and explore that in relationship to the rope. So I could just get this feeling of being entangled in his hair because his hair is also the rope in the play. They keep on about his hair and this is also to do with the rope imagery. He somehow gets entangled because his head is caught in this net of ropes in some way, which the characters then try to ennoble but it is also a prison. I also made them fight over the rope and see how much they could get, like dividing the kingdom to get as much of their father's hair or as much of the rope as possible. Rope in Shakespeare's time is a much more potent image than it is for us. It is like a motor car. So much work is done with ropes, hauling and carrying, and now we use electricity or other forms of power. Horses use ropes to pull their carts, reins, and so on. We are not as aware of ropes. Boats, full of ropes, farmyards, full of ropes, to talk about ropes is for us like talking about cars or roads or something. This is really just to get the image being an abstract thing on the page but to get a tactile thing with its own dynamics and they are implicit in the use of the imagery on the page, it is not an abstraction.

I pointed out that the play itself is basically a very realistic play. Its totally grounded on social realism. Everything could really happen yet in the last scenes there are two miracles. One of them is when someone says I am terribly sorry I do regret having seduced somebody into hanging Lear's daughter. The folio and quarto disagree over what happens then, because a man goes out and three lines later he comes back and he has got from that room, found the secret cell where these people are going to be hanged. He has witnessed the hanging of the daughter and witnessed Lear killing the hangman and cutting his daughter down. This all happens in four lines—it is not possible. The man is sent off to stop the hanging and four lines later Lear enters with his daughter. It is the one thing in the play that is not possible. Of course I can think of reasons. The actors all came up with explanations but they were all rationalizations—such as he went the wrong way—but still he couldn't have seen it which means either it is another officer and so there were witnesses to the hanging, though the text says there couldn't be—or—well it gets more absurd the more you think about it. Shakespeare is lying—his imagination needs him to tell a truth.

There is a moment in the last scene where everybody ignores Lear and then somebody says look, look, but you don't know what he is doing.<sup>11</sup> The text doesn't tell you. I thought we are into the basic idea that nobody can be saved from destruction—the fall is the fall—the hanging is the hanging—Satan is kicked out of heaven and there is no resurrection of Christ—the play makes Lear die in illusion—he thinks his daughter is alive and she isn't. I thought that I would do a TE on that. Lear would be wandering around with the rope and talking to imaginary people and just showing them in a rather sort of glucose stupid way the wonderful knot that he had cut which would save his daughter's

life. He would just sort of mime because he was mad just talking and smiling to these people. We didn't actually do that because we only had an hour in the end on this scene and so what the actor did was to put the rope round his neck and try to hang himself and they had to stop him.

I thought that what the scene does is it brings together this strange imagery of the feather, he asks for a mirror but gets a feather and the feather is the rope, the hair, the flax. It is a very basic image that is used throughout. I thought we would either use the sword he'd just killed a man with or the rope. And I thought the one that was the most telling was the rope. He should be like a beggar saying *take* this from me, take this truth that I give you and one would know that the irony is that there is no truth at that moment. It is a play of despair because it has to resort to a feudal solution.

### Projection of a Double

This idea goes back to the exercise where you start out from a moment which requires some action. I think the way to do this is after considerable relationship to a text, just reading it through and working on it in the way I have described. When you have got that initial movement then you can out of that start identifying yourself as the person who is the imaginator. I think that is what I do as a writer. Instinct is something like sexual desire or fear. The imaginator is *not* any of those things. The imaginator is something which is prior to them because it is that which says why are these things of interest to me, why do they matter to me? So in a way the imagination is a question and it is that question which provides illumination.

What I want actors to become very aware of is this facility they have of being imaginative creators. You think well aren't actors that anyway? I have to say no they are not and less and less because they are hemmed into interpreting their character and saying shall I imagine what my character had for breakfast. And although I can see there is certain logic in that—presumably your character did have breakfast—I think the limitations of that are gross because I think you must also say what is my character's imagination? Not what he had for breakfast. My character has an imaginary life, my character projects itself into actions. As there is nothing there called the character the only place you can go and find that character is find the play that projects the character, find the Central situation, find the Central images, the Central speeches, find the need which gave rise to the play. You have to create your character not copy it.

The author's imagination will have gone into the Centre of the play so the Centre of the play produces the author's imagination. That would have been what he was writing the play for, presumably. I mean there are bad plays which

are just clever plays that don't have anything that has a Centre. And then you have got a different problem—you have to say how do I make this play interesting. But you also ought to be able to say to yourself why is it that my character wants to say these interesting lines and probably if you say this the play will shut itself tight. But I think it's like something inside the pocket it always betrays its presence even though there is an attempt to hide it. The effort to hide it betrays what is there I think.

The way I had approached the TE was that it was part of the imaginative world of the play. But I realize this was creating a problem for actors. They thought we are required to do two things: They were asked to play the character and then asked to perhaps deliberately distort the character in order to play the play. That's not right but I can see that was a possibility. But once it is understood by the actor that really when he is playing the character what he is doing is playing something called the imagination and it is only the imagination that can make the character real—it is obvious when you think about it. But actors actually don't think about it. They think they are playing the real character or they are getting to the reality of their character. And I have to say no, you are getting to the imaginative reality of the play which is then projected into your character. What I now think it is important to understand is that the TE is also the use of the imagination. I think you pose yourself a particular TE problem but the imagination then provides its answers. Either you reach it step by step or very often, because the imagination has no rational ground, you suddenly see the solution like that. Very often the solution would be very obvious, they would come from your knowledge of your contemporary life. But it is still an imaginative use so there is no discontinuity for the actor between the imagination used to play the character and the imagination you use to play the TE. They are the same. It forms a bridge between the TE and the character.

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## Notes

1. *Lear* is a reference to Shakespeare's *King Lear* rather than to Bond's own play of that name.
2. Bond refers to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Act Three, scene seven.
3. *Olly's Prison*, written for the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1991, was transmitted Spring 1993. Bond subsequently made revisions to *Olly's Prison* which allowed the play to be staged. The text of the television and theatre versions were published in one volume by Methuen Drama, 1993.
4. Bond refers to *The Changeling*, by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, in a production by the RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1992/3.
5. Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1959).

6. A musical adaptation of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* was produced in London, 1992.
7. Edward Bond and Cicely Berry, *The Other Place*, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon, November 16-December 4, 1992. The scene Bond refers to is Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Act Two, scene two.
8. The RSC actors who took part in the workshops were: Jonathan Cake, Ron Cook, Bella Enahoro, John McAndrew, Trevor Martin, Susan-Jane Tanner, Sophie Thompson, Jack Waters, Emily Watson.
9. *Troilus and Cressida* by William Shakespeare, Act Two, scene two, line 37.
10. *King Lear* by William Shakespeare, Act Three, scene seven.
11. *King Lear*, by William Shakespeare, Act Five, scene three.