

**THE MOTIF OF INNOCENCE: THE CENTRAL THREAD  
IN THE WEB OF CONFLICTING VIEWPOINTS:  
A STUDY OF THE SELECTED PLAYS OF TOM STOPPARD  
AND EDWARD BOND**

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this thesis entitled **THE MOTIF OF INNOCENCE: THE CENTRAL THREAD IN THE WEB OF CONFLICTING VIEW POINTS: A STUDY OF THE SELECTED PLAYS OF TOM STOPPARD AND EDWARD BOND**, submitted to the University of Calicut, in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is a record of original research work done by **PUSHPA MOHANDAS** during the period of her research, at the University of Calicut, under my supervision and guidance and the thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar titles and that the thesis as a whole in its approach to the subject, in its organisation and treatment of the material, and its critical evaluation represents independent work on the part of the candidate.



**Dr. M. DASAN**

**Certified bona fide work**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the following thesis entitled **THE MOTIF OF INNOCENCE: THE CENTRAL THREAD IN THE WEB OF CONFLICTING VIEW POINTS: A STUDY OF THE SELECTED PLAYS OF TOM STOPPARD AND EDWARD BOND**, submitted to the University of Calicut, in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of original research work carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. M. Dasan, Reader, Department of English, University of Calicut, and that, it has not been submitted either in full, or in part, for any degree or diploma to any university.

Place : *Calicut*

Date : *27-3-2000*

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## Preface

The motif of innocence has enhanced literature from very early times, perhaps it is in Shakespeare's romances, particularly *The Tempest* and Blake's poems that this theme receives a very broad and varied treatment. Shakespeare deals with innocence that has not been corrupted by vulgarity and fashion of human civilization and appropriate to the romantic situation in which the character is placed. Blake saw a near paradise in the world of children uncorrupted by experience and innocent of the troubles that await them.

On reading Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which was a prescribed text for my M.Phil course, I noticed that this trend of depicting innocence was back in vogue, after a short interval in favour of other themes, in contemporary theatre. Curious to explore further, I worked on Stoppard for my M.Phil thesis. In the course of my research on Stoppard, I chanced to read Edward Bond's *Saved* and *Lear*. The atmosphere of Bond's plays was totally different from that of Stoppard's. This was a world of violence. Further contemplation on these two plays of Bond led me to the conclusion that, however violent his characters, he was also trying to get across the message that human beings are basically innocent, that the violence was a device to shock

people into a realisation of the cause for this kind of a behaviour. I decided on a comparative study of the motif of innocence in the selected plays of Bond and Stoppard for my Ph.d. thesis. In spite of their different political outlook this motif brings them together in this dissertation.

The first chapter offers a general introduction to my topic and the plays that I have chosen for study. The second chapter attempts to bring out the subdued innocence in certain characters of Bond and Stoppard. I have tried to show that Bond's characters behave unnaturally as a result of ignorance and frustration. Their violence is as much the fault of society as of the individual. That Stoppard's characters are also victims of hostile circumstances and that inspite of the theatrical extravaganzas and verbal fireworks, at the core of his plays is the motif of innocence, also finds expression in this chapter.

Despite the changes that have come about in the modern theatre, I find that the themes and techniques seem to date back to the past. Hence, I have made a brief survey of the theatre of the thirties and forties before focussing my attention on the theatre of Bond and Stoppard in the third chapter. I have wound up the chapter exploring the semiotics of theatre employed by both playwrights and explaining how their different and similar techniques have helped to bring to the forefront,

the underlying theme of innocence in their plays.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the totally opposed political stands of Bond and Stoppard. My endeavour has been to show that in spite of their divergent views, they are similar in their plays in employing a common motif. The concluding chapter, while summarising the thesis, attempts to make a few comments on some later major plays by both playwrights, to show that their concerns have not altered much, either in presentation or in themes over the years. It is hoped that aspiring scholars will be encouraged to take up new aspects of the plays of Bond and Stoppard.

My sincere and unreserved gratitude to Dr.M.Dasan, Reader, Dept.of English, University of Calicut, without whose scholarly guidance and patience this thesis would have suffered badly. His cheerful, ever obliging and encouraging nature made working with him a great pleasure. I am greatly indebted to him for setting aside his busy schedule and sparing time for me, whenever I needed his help. My thanks are due to Dr.N.Ramachandran Nair, Head of the Dept. of English, University Of Calicut for all the help he extended to me. With gratitude I recall the encouragement given by Dr.R.Viswanathan, Professor, Dept. of English, University of Calicut. I also record my gratitude to Dr. Narayanan, Sr. Gr. Lecturer, Dept. of English, University of Calicut, for providing me

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I am thankful to all the members of the Staff of the British Council Library in Madras, Delhi, Trivandrum, Pune and Bombay; the School of Drama, Trichur and the Library of the Dept. of English, University of Calicut, for providing me with all the available materials on Stoppard and Bond. My thanks are due also to the Staff of the American Studies Research Centre, Hyderabad, the Central Institute of English & Foreign Languages, Hyderabad and the library of the Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Calicut. I acknowledge my friend Smitha and her husband Mr.Rajendran, for sending me useful materials on theatre. My colleague Rajani is also gratefully remembered for all the help she gave me.

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## Chapter I

# Introduction

*A play is not really a piece of literature for reading. A true play is three-dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. (Boulton 3)*

Drama is a communal act, the representation of crucial actions by living people on a stage in front of an audience. The important stresses are on the theatricality of drama, that it is an art which requires performance on stage for its full impact; that it involves real people pretending to be imagined people and that it places particular emphasis on action of an intense kind. The drama, being a visible show is incomparable for those sudden turns of action which the eye takes in at a glance before a word is spoken.

Since the Second World War, exciting often confusing developments have taken place in the theatre. The post-war drama was marked out by its engagement with the present and with the working out of the important issues of the day like changes in world politics,

optimism for social change, change within the theatre itself and so on. It was a psychological theatre in which social issues were reconstituted as private traumas. The public world was increasingly presented as the source of threat and oppression. This thesis takes a look at the selected plays of two prominent British playwrights — Edward Bond and Tom Stoppard. While attempting to trace the presence of the motif of innocence through selected plays of both playwrights the thesis also brings forth the changes that have come across in presentation in British theatres.

The world Bond writes of is the world we live in. Most of his works concentrate on the action of human beings in complex situations. He is a skilful and self-conscious artist, well aware of his own aims, ideas and methods. Bond probably has formulated a social philosophy more systematically than any dramatist since Shaw. In his *Prefaces* and plays he interprets the function of contemporary unjust and corrupted British society in scientific, chiefly biological terms. Bond has been criticised for spending too much time developing the environment of his characters. What these critics failed to realise, I would say, is the fact that the background is the plot. He writes of a society, the structure of which makes things happen.

At the heart of Bond's view of modern society which is removed

from concrete, everyday life of real persons, we have isolated and powerless individuals reacting to an abstract world which in effect negates and annihilates their concrete existence. I feel that this concept of an abstract society is largely responsible for the extreme incoherence and fragmentation of human life, and for the senseless and self-destructive acts of aggression that pervades his plays. Bond's plays have frequently occasioned a storm of critical controversy mainly due to the violence it portrays. In my opinion, Bond intended to provoke an awareness in the audience and to make them acknowledge what they normally prefer not to recognize, through the violence. The shock he gives us is the **momentary thing** and what we are being shocked into is the **important thing**. Our experience of his theatre is often that of a shock of recognition rather than a shock of horror. It makes us realise that these characters who cause or allow violence must bear the burden of responsibility for the violent acts of others. Bond intends to present an analysis of the way in which modern society functions so as to help the audience to reconstruct their lives. My focus is on three plays by Bond — *Lear*, *The Pope's Wedding* and *The Sea*.

*The Pope's Wedding* is an intensely intellectual play. It has a sequence of scenes, for Bond's plays do not develop in the usual sense but group and regroup until their conclusions become inescapable. The

familiar scene with which the play starts turns out to be something horrifying. Scopey is a farm-worker with no sense of life outside the routine of getting up the next day for work. His friends, like him, have no solutions apart from going on to the next day. Scopey marries Pat, an eighteen year old orphan, who is also without a future. Eventhough, they now live together they continue to lead their separate lives as they had done earlier. While we accept the fact that there are thousands of couples like Scopey and Pat, we fail to realise that this kind of a life is intolerable. It is one of the most common of all contemporary human experiences. For Scopey and Pat, "life revolves around the job, the home, the pub and the monthly interest payments" (Worthen 469). At home, everything is predicted on scarcity and on private property. They both use property to establish some kind of desperate identity.

Having no future, Scopey uses Alen to look for a life in the past, because everything about the old man speaks of the passing of time. But it is all a false solution to Scopey's problems and he begins to suspect as much. Disappointed, yet still mystified by his fantasy of the tramp outside society, he kills the old man and attempts to take on his personality by wearing his coat and living in his hut. Scopey's flight from the pressure of being poor in an affluent society, is a flight out of reality. He gives up his job, friends and family in

order to reach out to Alen and to find a fulfilling relationship. He becomes frustrated, destructive and finally kills the old man and tries to communicate with his corpse. The philosophical yearning to understand the incomprehensible is a spiritual quest and the futility of it is denoted in making Alen empty and stupid.

Scopey, however is remarkable because he tries to behave as a human being in his situation: he wants a Pope's wedding with another kind of life where people talk to each other, where there is relationship and the chance to care, but he ends up an isolated lunatic. He is left in his hopelessness. The play prevents us from getting involved with anyone other than Scopey and tends to be a personal rather than a group tragedy. Although the characters with the exception of the hermit Alen, are very young, their futures are all too predictably mapped out. The occasional references to other elderly people reinforce the impression of a whole pattern of life into which all but Scopey, is more or less cheerfully resigned. "The characters around Scopey are there to illuminate him not to live vividly in their own way" (Worthen 470). Scopey's initial curiosity is perverted into futile aggression. He cannot be satisfied and neither can his capacity for violence. Finally Alen's world and the world outside are seen by Scopey as the same world. There is no mystery. It is this realisation that drives Scopey to murder. And then it is Scopey's refusal to accept

it that turns him into Alen. In the last scene he is surrounded by five hundred tins of food which Pat has continued to buy for Alen. The tins define the determination and also the hopelessness. The end is horrifying not just because of the month-old corpse on the floor, "Is 'ead's like a fish" (89); because that is how Scopey ends. He ends up an isolated lunatic.

In October 1969, Bond began to write the play which was to become *Lear*. It is a play which both summarises his work upto that point and indicates the path towards the second series of plays. *Lear* distinctly marks the movement towards the possibilities of action in order to change society and advances the debate regarding revolutionary activity by violent means. Both of these themes are implicit in the earlier plays but in *Lear* the discussion becomes the centre of the work. The play also begins to project the pattern of society. *Lear* is used as a cultural symbol, monarch and man, in order to investigate on a wider level than Bond had previously done, the workings of a structure built upon false perception and injustice. It is a play of rebellions, with the beginning of revolution by *Lear* himself in the last scene of the play. *Lear* looks into the reality which makes him build the wall, travels through grief and self-pity to embrace pastoral alternatives offered by the ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy, to a self-realisation during the autopsy of his daughters, to the status of "guru"

at the beginning of the Act Three and finally to an understanding during his last scene with Cordelia that words are insufficient in a situation beyond verbal redemption. He acts. His gesture is insignificant but its point is to demonstrate to the young people, Thomas and Susan, that oppression by coercion may only be countered by comparable means.

Lear is the first of Bond's central figures to take practical action in a play which most cautiously approaches the problem of the consequences and the risks of doing other than theorising. Individuals throughout his plays are forced to see what they are and what they have done, in order to begin to change. In the case of Lear, he has to realise what being Lear involves, how he is responsible for what happens and he dies trying to pull down the great wall which originally was to stand as a symbol of his closed mind and destructive achievements. Bond, in *Lear* does not seek refuge in stoicism nor does he answer the questions he raises, clearly. "His aim is to show clearly, to see feelingly and to understand what is seen" (Roberts 35). Bond writes in the *Preface to Lear*:

What ought we to do? Live justly. But what is justice? Justice is allowing people to live in the way for which they evolved. Human beings have an emotional and

physical need to do so, it is their biological expectation. They can only live in this way or all the time struggle consciously or unconsciously to do so. That is the essential thing I want to say because it means that in fact our society and its technology which more and more prevents it, all the time whisper into people's ears, "You have no right to live." Equality, freedom and fraternity must be reinterpreted in the light of this — otherwise real revolutionary change is impossible. (xii)

In *Lear*, the central image of the wall represents not only the omnipresent background but also the institutionalized public motive of the character's actions. Society has become a self-perpetuating power system above the heads of the people, forcing them into "irritatingly arbitrary and yet compulsive acts of aggression" (Zapf 358). This is the general atmosphere of the play. The Gravedigger's Boy as a representative of natural humanity is killed early in the play and reappears only as the ghost of his former self which has lost all real influence on the course of events. In a sense this human side of his lives on in the blinded Lear and in the community of deserters from the wall, that gathers around him towards the end of the play. The enemies against whom Lear builds his wall are ultimately unreal. Lear reacts not to the reality of the situation but to his own

life-long obsession with an abstraction. This abstraction makes him blind and indifferent, not only to the other persons, to the innocence of his victims but towards himself. Lear lives in an illusion of personal action and personal power, while, in fact, he becomes an instrument of the wall which eventually destroys its human creator.

The situation at the start of Bond's plays are directly responsible for the situations at the end, eventhough, the plays often begin quietly and normally: When we see the boys at the beginning of *The Pope's Wedding* or Pam and Len at the start of *Saved* or the calm opening scene of *Bingo*, we tend to accept them as normal situations. But Bond is working out his sense of the horror and deficiency of what can be seen everyday; for instance Scopey's lunatic situation at the end of *The Pope's Wedding* with a month-old corpse on the floor beside him, follows implicitly from his reaction to the life we see in the first scene. Eventhough one fails to see this direct relationship on the first reading or viewing of the plays, the theatrical experience would encourage one to get over the initial reactions and see something else instead. Audiences, at first, tend to see one thing to which they have a shock reaction and to stop there. The usual complaint is that in Bond's plays, violence erupts spontaneously and gratuitously. Bond always wants to see things more fully than our normal habits allow us to and so to realise what we need. In short, the violence—

or the apparent abnormality — is designed to provoke an awareness in us. We recognize things in the same way as the characters on the stage.

Eventhough, *The Sea* is considered to be a tragi-comedy it is mostly concerned with suffering and hatred, and the fact that people find it hard to bear humiliation and self-exposure. Through a series of isolated scenes, Bond “offers successive interconnected perceptions of the world, viewed socially and morally” (Holland 30). We find a pattern of progression in the play initially in the interaction of Willy and Rose with Colin’s death, which eventually translates into their interaction with each other. In their struggle to deal personally with Colin’s death, we recognize a story structured in a traditionally comic way: two young people find each other and face the future together. Although Bond uses the story of Willy and Rose in a traditionally comic way, he does not tell it directly, instead he develops a parodic frame within which their action develops and gathers meaning. One such frame is created in scene four where the rehearsal of a dramatization of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice holds our attention.

The death of Colin dominates the play’s mood as it does the moods of Rose and Willy. Within the humorous society the comic mood is threatened by characters who unexpectedly cause us to

sympathize with them. The ending is also ambiguous. The comic elements are not consistent enough to be predictable so that the comedy constantly threatens to collapse. Bond has used the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice to establish a way of thinking about the world which Willy has entered. Bond bloats the myth out of recognition and leaves it to our imagination like "a corpse to serve as an ironic frame for the story of Willy and Rose (Roches 486). What begins as a myth told within the confines of the sea becomes the framing myth within which the action of *The Sea* is confined. Bond says that the structure of *The Sea* was influenced by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The image of the sea conveys the idea of conflict and resolution. The storm is a destructive image which reflects both social and personal conflicts and the sea is able to resolve these images into a powerful community (Hay & Roberts 145). This conflict and continuity are evident in the comic action of *The Sea* but they are not aligned, neither can they be expected to be brought in the same line in a society which Bond sees as disintegrating. To do so would be to control the shape of the play at the expense of truth. Bond, in fact, goes to the other extreme, refusing to control the characters and events of *The Sea* and creates an anarchic world, struggling against an imposed order. The image of dramatic life becomes as anarchic as the image of life itself. Bond makes his world too indeterminate and eccentric to control.

In the counter plot, Hatch's deterioration into madness is presented. Structurally he is related to the long line of obsessive comic characters who have no hope of redemption, who must be isolated and defeated if they cannot be transformed and assimilated into the new society. Hatch is obsessed about an invasion by Martians. He is, as Evens says of people in general, "cruel and boring and obsessed" (*The Sea* 14). He sees Martians where he could have seen human beings. But his feelings relate to his position as a draper in a community where Mrs. Rafi dominates, hating her fellow-beings and putting as many of them as possible through performing her church pageant. The play makes us see his obsession and madness as a natural reaction to his situation. Condemned and abandoned by the entire community except Hollarcut, Hatch is isolated as their scapegoat. In this action we see the triumph of the disintegrating society. Ironically, it is not his conflict with Mrs. Rafi's demonic world but his ready adjustment to it that brought about his defeat.

It is remarkable how each of Bond's plays is a kind of commentary on the one that precedes it. It is little wonder then that *The Sea* contains Bond's most coherent thinking about tragedy, reminding us of *Lear*. Rose, whose fiance has been drowned asks Willy: "how can you escape from yourself, or what's happened to you? or the future? It's a Silly question" (*The Sea* 43). Both *Lear* and the *Ghost*

had made us ask it. Willy answers:

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

ROSE. An owl starving in a city ?

WILLY. To death. Yes. Wherever you turn. So you should never turn away. If you do you lose everything. Turn back and look into the fire. Listen to the howl of the flames. The rest is lies. (*The Sea* 44)

This reminds us of Lear talking about the trapped animals when he is on trial. Lear says "I can't live with that suffering in the world" (*Lear* 35). It is what all Bond's plays want us to consider as the bedrock of our actual experience, beneath the everyday normality and it has to be confronted: "turn back and look into the fire" (*The Sea* 44). The play ensures that we do that. It takes us to the end of the play, to make us think like Willy does. Bond insists convincingly

that he wants us to experience the recognition of what that means and in all his plays what we share with him makes the experience possible.

Tom Stoppard makes a virtue of uncertainty. He has said that what he considers his distinguishing mark is "an absolute lack of certainty" (qtd. in Hayman 40). This certainty of uncertainty carries over to Stoppard's characters. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are haunted throughout the play by a nagging uncertainty. Stoppard's plays present man's victimization by uncertainty. His characters struggle to direct their life according to rational principles but are frustrated in the attempt. Circumstances invariably defeat them. His theatre embodies the mystery and inaccessibility which surrounds man and which fosters in him a sense of perplexity and frustration as well as insecurity and even helplessness. Throughout his career words have been vital because by using them with style he can say: "That's not fair! more disruptively than any child can" (Jenkins 182). *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Jumpers* and *Artist Descending a Staircase* are the plays by Stoppard that I have selected for a comparative study with those of Bond.

The title characters of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* are the school chums of Shakespeare's Hamlet and they have been

summoned to Elsinore without knowing what is expected of them. While the action of *Hamlet* proceeds in the background, the two innocents play games to pass the time in a manner clearly inspired by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Their desire to overcome the fixity of the work of art in which they must function echoes Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The complex inter-relationships of life and art are demonstrated with particular theatrical flair in the pair's scenes with the players who come to perform for Claudius at Elsinore.

One of Stoppard's recurring themes in his early plays and his novel *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon* is the urge to discern some pattern in the world's chaos. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* established Stoppard as a comic master of great theatrical ingenuity and wit. In spite of its length, the play is light and fresh. Though it gets nowhere, it seems to come across as spontaneous, with the excitement of a journey that carries us along, inexorably to an unknown destination. Throughout the play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are haunted by a nagging uncertainty which is pervasive and characteristic and which takes many localized forms like the inexplicable run of heads to the confusion of their identities. Until the end of his play, Stoppard's characters know as little or even less than Shakespeare's prototypes. The play is their attempt to acquire some grasp of a world which they find confusing and alarming. Stoppard says that his protagonists

are in a situation analogous to that of his:

One of the reasons that the play turned out to work so well, I think, is that the predicament of the characters coincides with the predicament of the playwright. In other words, I have these two guys in there and there's no plot until somebody comes in three pages later and they have to fill three pages and I have to fill three pages and there's nothing. (qtd. in Brassel 62)

Their need is to fill in time as entertainingly as possible and his need was to inject enough interest and colour into each line to retain the attention of the audience from moment to moment.

Guildenstern, and to a lesser extent Rosencrantz, are perhaps analogous to Stoppard in a deeper sense than he suggests. They are inquisitive and questioning. They play with language and logic, and they remain uncertain of everything. Not only are the clear truths, which might enable them to interpret the situation, not available, they fear that there may be no such truth. They have no active existence outside the *Hamlet* plot and no power to influence that in the slightest way. They are, as they recognize, trapped in a machine whose master, if he exists at all, is unknown and whose direction and purpose are not clear. All they can do is keep talking. Choice seems non-existent.

Their lives seem to be pre-ordained by some mysterious external force. At times they seem to recognize partly the existence of an audience and at times they take the role of spectators. When they emerge from the Shakespeare scene they are seen to be more emphatically with us. We share with them the role of spectators. Yet at the very moment when we share their place and function, identifying with them, what we witness is their inability to identify with what they are seeing.

“The essence of their spectating, after all, is to be spectators of their own deaths with which they are unable to identify” (Perlette 664). As spectators they are cut off from any direct access to their own ultimate reality. All they have are representations of death which are incapable of providing its fully felt realization and always have the effect of leaving them as spectators on the outside. Through them, we as spectators, can intuit the inescapable distance or difference or alienation between ourselves and our representations. We can understand the inadequacy yet inevitability of representations which though fictitious, is the closest to reality.

The play ends on a tableau of corpses and with the news relayed by the English ambassadors, that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are indeed dead. They know from the substitute letter that they will be

killed and they accept their doom with passivity that has characterized them throughout. They have done nothing wrong and they don't understand why they must die, but resistance, they feel, can make no difference. The play is an elaborate representation of that search for identity, significance, certainty, security which may be foredoomed to failure. A plausible picture of man's cosmic predicament is rendered with intelligence, humour and a melancholy compassion.

Stoppard has a liking for what he calls the "theatre of audacity" (qtd. in Nightingale 419), and *Jumpers* is probably his most imaginative contribution to it. *Jumpers* is one of his best plays, for the brilliance of its theatrical conceits. The play stimulates a great deal of hilarity but it also gives us a glimpse of "what a world without ethical brakes would be like" (Kreps 187). *Jumpers* poses serious questions about both the basis and the limits of human knowledge, human values and human behaviour. George Moore, the protagonist, is the only character we are permitted to admire in *Jumpers*. It is the tension between George's "single-track mind" and "the multi-track world" (Kreps 194), that generates much of the play's laughter. George never gets over his wistful nostalgia for the days of the lamb's lost innocence and though Stoppard makes George appealing for just this reason, he also dramatizes a world beyond the walls of George's study, with fearful tigers.

The clash between innocence and experience, which George explicitly acknowledges in his contrast of the pastoral with the technological, lies behind most of what takes place in *Jumpers*. The play is a courageous attempt to move beyond the social criticism that mainly preoccupies the contemporary theatre into a realm of metaphysics almost entirely ignored by it; to relate the two and in doing so raise issues of great importance. This is achieved not only with a theatrical extravaganza that verges on the outrageous but with individual character too. We remember the arguments and the florid effects of the play but we also remember George, a tiny, defiant figure, helplessly brandishing his fist at a cold and brutal society and what he still partly fears may be a mechanistic universe. He is Stoppard's archetypal man, seeking, and failing to find his precise place in the scheme of things.

George is frequently funny despite the overriding seriousness of his own intentions. The basic irony is that he is totally unaware of the mysteries going on under his own roof and is engaged in a serious effort to penetrate the "two quite unconnected mysteries" of "the God of Creation" and the "God of Goodness" (*Jumpers* 25-26). George learns only at a ridiculously late stage in the play that Duncan McFee is dead and that he has been killed in his own living room possibly by his own wife. Moreover, of all the characters on stage,

George is the only one never to see the extremely visible corpse. Yet, eventhough Stoppard's structure works so constantly against his professor, we listen with sympathy and shared belief to what he says to us about knowing and reality. The dislocation between George's perceptions and the audience's is one of the sources of laughter in the play. Stoppard provides the audience with a better knowledge of conversations and events in the Moore household and it is superior to George's.

Stoppard has said in his much quoted *Theatre Quarterly* interview, in 1974, that his aim in writing was to create ambushes for the audience, an aim obviously achieved in *Jumpers*. If at the end of the play, the audience is caught unaware, it is because Stoppard has worked so hard from the beginning to make them unaware. He skilfully exploits the audience's tendency to believe what they think they have seen, to provide the starting point of the play's action. When the play is over, however, the audience's misinterpretation of what they have been sure about also elucidates, in retrospect, one of the principle points about knowledge and belief in the play. Stoppard shows the world as a place where the best laid plans go astray. Stoppard permits his professor to live out the play in ignorance of what has happened on the moon, but by including the astronauts from the beginning, he provides, not only an ironic background to George's

idealistic arguments but also an implicit challenge to George's stupid values—a challenge that in some form or other George and the audience must eventually be made to recognize. All George's proofs end in a parallel failure and frustration. This is the first play in which Stoppard's aim was to ask questions and then try to answer it or put the counter-question. **Jumpers** illustrates the homely truth that men who know what good is, will not necessarily act on what they know. It also holds up a vision of good which is then punctured by the realistic demonstration that "where self-interest may be compromised, goodness is easier to recognize and talk about than it is to act upon" (Kreps 207).

Stoppard takes the moral issues to the heart of his work again in *Artist Descending A Staircase*, his radio play. He adopts once more the logic of a detective story to show how deduction often leads us weirdly astray. Since assumptions in a radio play are based on evidence, Stoppard tailors his design to take advantage of the materials the medium provides. The play, while shuttling between the present and one period of the past, tells the story of a life-long friendship between three artists by situating its eleven sequences in strategically patterned positions. The first and the last sequences are set in the present, the second and tenth a few hours previously; the third and ninth, a week earlier; the fourth and eighth in 1922; the fifth and seventh

in 1920; the sixth in 1914. So the chronological structure is like a "V" with its lowest point in the first world war. The three artists argue incessantly about theories of art and about their own practice. Emotionally the play leads on from *Jumpers*, while thematically it offers ideas that appear more expansively in *Travesties*.

*Artist Descending A Staircase* is highly reminiscent of a Shavian play both in the brilliance of its wit and the liveliness of its dialogue which allows each character a fair amount of argument and counter-argument. The unity of the play is achieved not through casual relationships but through evocation of a particular mood of wistfulness and sadness created by a subtle contrast between hopes and actual achievements. Each scene contains references to certain conversations or incidents which the following scene will dramatize. The total effect is cumulative. During their lives, the three protagonists, Martello, Beauchamp and Donner have embraced dadaism and pursued every other fashion of avant-garde. According to Donner it was Marcel Duchamp who had opened the gates wide in front of every would be artist and provided him with the sanction to practice art with whatever talent he possessed. The result, as Donner implies, would inevitably be a simplistic expression of a purely subjective reality:

DONNER. He said to me, 'There are two ways of becoming

an artist. The first way is to do the things by which is meant art. The second way is to make art mean the things you do. What a stroke of genius! It made anything possible and everything safe!—Safe from criticism, since art admitted no standard outside itself; safe from comparison, since it had no history; safe from revaluation, since it referred to no system of values beyond the currency it had invented. We were no longer accountable. We were artists by mutual agreement.(86)

Donner's attitude is certainly ironic for he has become completely disenchanted with the theories and practices of modern art. The license that modern artists allow themselves is only a pretext to hide their own lack of skill. Martello aims at producing simple, metaphorical representations of reality. By isolating the object of his attention from the rest of its surroundings and presenting it in an amusing and eye-catching fashion, he hopes to be able to arouse the interest of the onlooker and make him perceive things about it which have escaped his notice. He is the wittiest of the three. His conversation is replete with humour, paradoxes, puns, irony and cynicism. He is aware of the flitting nature of his imagination and its lack of steadiness and

depth. Unlike Beauchamp, he realizes that his life has been a waste and his artistic achievements, an insignificant pile of trivials:

MARTELLO. On God, if only I could turn it off!—no wonder I have achieved nothing with my life—my brain is on a flying trapeze that outstrips all the possibilities of action. Mental acrobatics. Beauchamp—I have achieved nothing but mental acrobatics—Nothing! (78)

Beauchamp has a petty mind whose only gift is the spinning out of innumerable cliches. While on a tour in France he talks to his companions about art in the following manner:

Art consists of constant surprises. Art should never conform. Art should break its promises. Art is nothing to do with expertise; doing something well is no excuse for doing the expected. (104)

Like Donner and Martello, he abandons painting and first devotes all his energy and time to the effortless pursuit of recording all kinds of noise. He then becomes completely engaged in recording silence which he believes will reveal the ultimate reality about life. Donner's wasted life is drawn with a sympathy and an intensity that are new in Stoppard. The feeling of pathos lingers even after we have finished

reading, listening or watching the play. He discovers himself as an artist once he learns that Sophie had perhaps loved him all along. The play makes a stirring if indirect statement about the connection between artistic discipline and human feelings.

All Bond's plays are based on the sensuality of shock, to be precise, an acute and actual enjoyment of it, which is then rationalized and justified as being anti-violent. Bond's characters carry within them the traces of an arid industrialized spirit, bored and oppressed. Bond does not write what people would wish to hear or believe. Though he is an important writer, curiously little is known about him. The interviews he has given have each tended to repeat, elaborate and expand his world views. His photographs reveal a withdrawn, inscrutable face with scarcely the suggestion of a smile. I was eager to explore where Bond had discovered his unrelenting pessimism, his nagging obsession with violence. One reason for my being drawn towards comparing him with Stoppard was a comment by Bond about Stoppard which I happened to come across. "Writing," he says,

has taught me to mistrust words. I mistrust wit. I get it out of my system talking to people. But people seem to expect it in plays. Take something like that play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, for instance:

meretricious rubbish. Put that in; I don't mind how much anyone knocks that play; it was a cultural desert and everyone loved it because it had a nice even balance of funny lines and deep philosophical lines. (Beauman 89)

Bond's own plays are not as serious and without humour as he pretends but their wit is always to the point and one is uncertain the whole time whether to laugh or cry like for instance in *Saved* when the father is hit over the head with a tea-pot. My attempt in this thesis is to highlight the sentimental creation of peasant innocence that lies dormant in Bond's plays, which usually brings into the open violence and ugliness and try to compare him with his contemporary, Tom Stoppard in respect to the motif of innocence.

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## Chapter II

### **Trapped Innocents**

*We are not the masters of our own destinies. No one is totally innocent and no one is totally guilty. We are social animals and as members of a society responsible to some degree for that society. . . . It is often the choices we make, the options we select that determines the extent of our "guilt" or "innocence". (qtd. in Pilkington 15)*

Raymond Hawthorne, the New Zealand director tells the story of a person who went to see Roger Hall's play, *Middle Age Spread* and could comment afterwards only on the type of coffee-service used in the last scene (Coraballis 9). It is a similar reaction that would come from an audience of a Stoppard play because the surface brilliance inhibits appreciation of the underlying design. He is one of the most interesting and exciting contemporary dramatists. Ever since his brilliant play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) won him New York's Tony Award for the best play of the season, Stoppard has

been a prolific source of witty, intelligent, literary scripts for the stage and screen, never more widely acclaimed than with his current screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love* which won him the Oscar Award in 1999.

The adulation and disparagement have continued throughout Stoppard's career, with some praising him as the most brilliant playwright and others dismissing him as merely brilliant, some lauding his wit and others finding him too clever. The vagueness at the core of the play has often been mistaken for emptiness. My view is that the simplicity of design and characterization in Stoppard's plays provide a relief to the audience from the close attention which it is bound to give to the elaborate action and the intricate language. The world the characters move in is a world from which ordinariness has been excluded. Some of the characters lack the courage to be ordinary and therefore cut themselves off from the experience available to ordinary living. They think they are different and strive to be different from other people but all they achieve is a helpless marginality. Others enthusiastically embrace a narrow concept and fail to recognize the shortcomings of their enthusiasm. They sever themselves from reality and in the process doom themselves to frustration and humiliation. I feel it is this **not knowing** that makes the characters innocent victims. I would say that the central

characters in almost all the plays are ignorant of their actions. In Stoppard, I find a playwright who creates a series of characters, who, eventhough ultimately defeated embrace a human compassion.

He writes of the anxiety and confusion of life, of the helplessness of the individual caught up in forces impervious to reason, of the loss of identity and faith. He discusses in philosophical terms the lack of absolute values, the problem of freedom, the uncertainty of knowledge and perception. Stoppard's theatrical world is implausible, irrational and also full of cruelty and pain. Though at one level his plays are amusing word games with wildly improbable and fantastic plots, they also hint at deeper philosophical meanings and reflect on the state of our society. His involvement with and concern for the artist's social responsibility has been rigorous and unfailing. He has dealt with the individual's quest for freedom in a society that seeks to crush his individuality. From his earliest days as a playgoer, the theatre presented him with both the formal and the intriguing mystery.

A similar trend is discerned in the plays of Edward Bond. Bond too feels that playwrights must be morally responsible to their societies and their plays ought, not only to analyse history—how societies became what they are—but also to suggest ways in which

societies can better themselves. Bond is a severe critic of the society in which we live and his plays are intended to express his criticism. He feels that society is rotten and needs to be radically transformed, that the individual is the victim of social circumstances, and that the forces of the establishment have to be opposed. Bond deals with issues he sees as morally vital to the healthy future of a society. He has said in his *Preface to Lear* (1972):

People with unjust social privileges have an obvious emotional interest in social morality. It allows them to maintain the privileges and justifies them in taking steps to do so. It reflects their fear of an opposition that would often take away everything they have, even their lives. This is one way in which social morality becomes angry and aggressive.

But there is another way. Social morality is also a safe form of obedience for many of the victims of the unjust organization. It gives them a form of innocence founded on fear— but it is never a peaceful innocence. (vii-viii)

Bond's plays yearn to explore the gentleness and compassion of which humankind is capable. Many of his characters display

natural goodness under acutely difficult circumstances. One cannot therefore, single out Bond's plays as only about violence. He writes about the effects upon the human spirit of a violent environment. Bond has a Blakean view of life as original innocence perverted by the social order. Evil is the offshoot of extremely cruel abstractions like society, government, religion and environment. Society unjustly deprives many of its members,— specifically and literally the working people,—in that they are denied economic and social conditions productive of a healthy culture. The resultant violence bred of ignorance and frustration, is therefore the fault as much of society as of the individual. Each of Bond's plays is concerned with the evil that results from the mindless dispensation of a corrupt morality.

In the struggle to find a way of living that accepts the need to love, create, protect or enjoy, many of Bond's characters find themselves in more or less bitter conflict with a society based on classes. (Coulter 47)

Stoppard's characters similarly are "bewildered innocents" (Bareham 16), victims of hostile circumstances. Many of Stoppard's characters mean others no harm but do a bit of good if possible. All his central figures are caught in a bewildering world where

absolute values struggle against relativity. He stresses that most people are fundamentally innocent including the conventionally guilty. Petty deceptions related to sins of the flesh are actually results of the innocuous actions of the characters. It is this innocence that endears the characters to us.

What I propose to do in this chapter is to tentatively argue out how far the protagonists in selected plays of Bond (*Lear*, *The Pope's Wedding* and *The Sea*) and Stoppard (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Jumpers* and *Artist Descending a Staircase*) are innocent.

"The Bond innocent" according to Richard Scharine, "is an existential optimist clutching at straws in an attempt to preserve his humanity within an inhuman society" (36). Although they are all destroyed or stalemated, their continuing attempts indicate the survival of goodness on the earth. "The fall", the background of all Bond's plays "occurs when human beings or other animals are forced to live unnaturally, or behave in ways for which they are not designed" (*Preface to Lear* vi). They become destructive and neurotic. Society as a whole experienced it and new generation of children continue to experience it. Bond's prelapsarian innocence is a time of freedom and justice without aggression and violence.

Bond is an optimist who believes that one can maintain a fundamental innocence, that true moral understanding can be improved and that men can find a method of change.

## The death of innocence

Scopey, in *The Pope's Wedding* (1971), is the first of the Bond Innocents, the one character within each of Bond's plays who senses the gap between what is and what should be. *The Pope's Wedding*, the first Bondian play to be performed professionally, was initially presented on 9 December 1962 by the English Stage Society for a members-only audience at the Royal Court Theatre. Set in and around a small town in rural Essex, the play shows in sixteen short scenes the growing obsession of Scopey, one of a group of young labourers, with Alen, an old recluse. Fascinated by Alen's way of life he intrudes more and more into it. Finally he kills the old man and takes his place. The significance of the present title and the original title *The Pope's Wife* was explained by Bond himself as the impossibility of Scopey's "asking for an invitation for something that isn't going to happen" (qtd. in Hay 23) like the Pope's wedding which is an impossible ceremony. The invitation Scopey wants is to share what Alen knows. But Alen knows nothing and the play ends in a tragedy.

Scopey, the protagonist is seen initially as one of a group, whose age-range is from seventeen to twenty-four and part of his curiosity is directed at a seventy-five year old man, Alen, and what he knows. In the beginning Scopey, is not distinguishable from the rest of the group. They are a group of unsentimentalized and unexaggerated working class youths concerned with nothing more demanding than raising the price of a glass of beer the night before pay day. It is only when Scopey volunteers to fix the clasp of a handbag broken during the friendly harassment of Pat, a local factory girl that he gives signs of a sensibility different from the others. The girl is the sole link with the outside world for the hermit, Alen.

Scopey moves a step closer to an intimate relationship with Pat when her boyfriend Bill, is withheld from the cricket match by his feudal employer, Bullright. Scopey plays in Bill's stead and they win the match. He also wins Bill's girl. In courting and marrying Pat, Scopey inherits the problem of Alen. Scopey's relationship with Pat may be seen as a midway point in his gradual withdrawal from his society. His distinguishing characteristic is his curiosity. It is in idle curiosity that at first he attempts to spy on Alen when Pat is at his shack. Bond is here concerned with the relationship between an inquiring individual and his less than perfect society. The movement towards understanding is directly related to the resources possessed

by a particular figure. The more limited the resources the more brutal the solutions tend to be. The nature of the solution shows how the figure relates to the society in which he finds himself.

Alen's lack of concern for the values of the village, stimulates in Scopey a suspicion of their hollowness. He unconsciously hopes that in finding the key to Alen's rejection of society he will be able to understand society. He is however disappointed. As a character Alen is incidental—a catalyst alike to Scopey's quest for salvation and to society's need for a scapegoat on whom violence can safely be inflicted. In searching out an alternative, Scopey entraps himself. As Scopey's obsession develops, the marriage declines. He spends more and more time with Alen, neglecting and losing both his job and wife. Scopey's is an unconscious desire to return to primal innocence. Alen is to him a father-figure. He even suspects him at first to be Pat's father. Scopey's developing obsession with the old recluse comes from his belief that Alen possesses secrets, an alternative way of living. To discover it, would be the means of liberation for him. He kills Alen in a fury of realisation that there is no mystery about the old man and then, refusing to accept the reality, attempts to become the old man. The wedding, as Richard Scharine points out "is ultimately that of innocent to innocent, the moment of murder in which Scopey and Alen become one" (39).

Time after time, Scopey attempts to find the key to the mystery of the hermit's withdrawal: the stacks of newspapers Alen needs for his work, the relationship with Pat's mother, an old photograph of a high-born lady etc, but without success. Even so, he is progressing simultaneously towards his answer and his destiny. The present of an overcoat purchased fifty years earlier to Scopey by Alen represent both the last step in Scopey's search and the mystery of the old man himself. To wear the clothes of the father is the Oedipal urge of the child and to learn his secrets is to supplant him. Before the pockets are opened however, an incident occurs which forecasts their contents. Pat comes to visit Alen to find out from him about Scopey's actions. He claims to be working overtime but has actually lost his job. When Pat leaves, Alen goes to a stack of papers, climbs on it and peeps after her through a chink in the wall:

SCOPEY. (Pause) That what yoo use them papers  
for? . . . Yoo was glad to see 'er.

ALEN. She say she's comin' back regular.

SCOPEY. That's what yoo want . . . Yoo owd nut! I thought  
yoo 'ad them papers for keepin'. All yoo want  
'em for's t' stare outside. Yoo owd fake! . . . Yoo're  
at that crack all day!

ALEN. I ont said I—

SCOPEY. Yoo're a fake! There's nothin' in this bloody shop! . . . Look (Slight Pause) what yoo 'ere for . . . For chris's sake try t' tell the truth!

ALEN. I forget. My mum an'dad moved all over. We always stopped just outside places. We were the last 'ouse in the village. . . . I never stopped gooin' after people. They stopped gooin' after me . . . That's all I can bring back.

SCOPEY. (After a pause) Pockets 're empty. (79)

The pockets are empty and so are people imprisoned inside themselves and seeking to be united with others. Scopey now sees Alen's life as a reflection of his own solitariness. It is fear of isolation that makes people accept even demeaning social relationship. Alen had chosen to live in exclusion and Scopey's intention was to find out the mystery that permits Alen to desire the condition that he unconsciously fears is inevitable. His murder of Alen and his assumption of the hermit's personality is an ultimate act of self recognition. It is also a sacrifice to the society that produced him.

The questions Scopey presses on Alen are tormenting. They

may seem sadistic. But both Scopey and Alen are tormented too. We feel the frustration—partly caused by inarticulacy—of a mind groping to understand why things are as they are. Eventually something explodes and he murders the old man. The senile and childlike Alen serves as both Innocent and Scapegoat. In a very real sense, one could say, the death of innocence is the theme of *The Pope's Wedding*, a theme that covers more than the death of Alen. Scopey is also an Innocent who "dies", in that he ceases to struggle with his situation. In isolating himself he chooses unwisely. Innocently Scopey carries out the judgement of society when he kills Alen, and in the process becomes its next victim. Scopey is the first of a line of protagonists who develop, successively, their capacity to understand, articulate and take responsibility for what they say and do.

### The slaughter of the innocent

*Lear*, is the next of the lengthening line of Bond Innocents that I propose to consider. He is the first character in Bond's plays to reach the level of a tragic hero. It is a play about a society in the process of birth. At the outset of the play, Lear is an autocrat who demands and has always received total subservience. Born to power, his position has allowed him to remain as totally self-centred as a child. Lear is born to the society he helped to create

only when he is usurped from power as an old man. In his old age, he suffers physical and emotional torments but these torments help Lear to gain in his understanding of humanity. He matures and learns the basic truths about man and their social institutions. He becomes a morally healthy human being. In his *Preface to Lear* (1971) Bond has described the eighty or so speaking parts of the play as "one role showing the character of a society" (xiv). Structurally the play is divided into three acts and eighteen scenes. Bond notes in the *Preface*,

Act I shows a world dominated by myth. Act Two shows the clash between myth and the autonomous world. Act III shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove real by dying in it" (xiv)

*Lear*, premiered at the Royal Court on 29 September, is considered by Gregory Dark, as "the finest and most important play" (qtd. in Scharine 183). The play begins with the arrival of Lear to inspect the work in progress on a wall being built by forced labour to protect his kingdom. The people in the scene live by fear of the king. What then happens grows directly out of the events of the scene. Lear does not come intending to murder a man, his two daughters do not come proposing to tell their father of their impending marriage. These things are precipitated by Lear himself.

He creates the conditions of his own overthrow by acting with autocratic authority. Consequently, he is outraged when, for the first time, he is publicly contradicted by his own daughters. Lear's actions are those of a man utterly convinced of his own rightness. To protect his people, to put into operation what he has learnt from history and his life, makes the shooting of one worker a minor irritation.

Lear acts from the best motives. His account of man argues the necessity of the wall. Lear has seen:

armies on their hands and knees in blood, insane  
women feeding dead children at their empty breasts,  
dying men spitting blood at me with their last breath,  
our brave young men in tears . . . But I could bear  
all this ! When I'm dead my people will live in freedom  
and peace and remember my name, no—venerate  
it! . . . (5)

Lear finds sanctuary in the cottage of the Gravedigger's Boy and his wife Cordelia, as a result of his defeat in the civil war that takes place between him and his daughters. Cordelia does not like his presence but before she can persuade her husband to send the old man away, soldiers arrive, kill the Gravedigger's Boy and

rape his wife. The soldiers are slaughtered by Cordelia's lover, the Carpenter. A new conflict breaks out between Lear and his daughters who have captured Lear and the rebel peasant forces led by Cordelia and the Carpenter. Lear's daughters would have put him to death but for the intervention of their husbands. Power changes hands but little else is altered. Bodice and Fontanella, their husbands long since fled are put to death. Lear's eyes are put out to render him politically impotent. Construction of the wall continues.

In his prison cell, Lear is comforted by the Ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy. He acts as Lear's alter-ego, whom Lear comforts and who comforts him. The final act returns to the house of the Gravedigger's Boy, whose decaying Ghost has found its way once more to cling to Lear for both their comforts. Cordelia returns to her old home to warn Lear that he must be put on trial. In the closing scene, Lear is led to the wall, he casts a few spadeful of earth from its summit but is quickly seen and shot by a passing officer. His corpse falls to the ground and is left where it is. Lear's primary purpose in life had been the building of a great wall to keep his enemies outside their borders:

LEAR. I started this wall when I was young. I stopped my enemies in the fields but there were always

more of them. How could we ever be free: So  
I built this wall to keep our enemies out. My  
people will live behind this wall when I'm dead.  
You may be governed by fools but you'll always  
live in peace. My wall will make you free. (3-  
4)

The wall is the dominant image in *Lear*. It symbolizes the great crime of Lear's moral immaturity. It is symptomatic of Lear's moral blindness that he sees himself as the saviour of his subjects at the same moment that he murders one of them. To Bond, Lear is a Renaissance figure who stands for the shift from man's being responsible to himself to his being responsible to a central government. As Lear orders the firing-squad to shoot, he stands exactly in their line of fire, ironically illustrating, and foreshadowing his own fate as a victim of the wall at the end of the play. Lear can kill the worker without conscience because he sees him in terms of national aims rather than as an individual. His death will make the others work faster and the wall will be finished more quickly. He is aware that such policies make him hateful but he accepts it as proof of his acting in the best interests of the nation.

When Lear is overthrown, he is propelled into the society

he created like a baby being born. Unexposed to the society he has created until he is old, Lear retains a baby's egocentricity. He expects to be protected in the way that all animals protect their young. Lear is to be blamed for his daughters' acts against him and against one another. Evil is not inherent biologically in Lear's daughters. They are the victims of the social morality he has taught them. This is the real lesson he learns at Fontanelle's autopsy.

LEAR. She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child. The things are so beautiful. I am astonished. I have never seen anything so beautiful. If I had known she was so beautiful . . . Her body was made by the hand of a child, so sure and nothing and unclean . . .

If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I would have loved her. (59)

He did not have to destroy his daughters' innocence. He does so only because he does not understand his situation.

In theory, Lear should take pride in his daughters' ability to assimilate the lessons he has unwittingly taught. However, he had sincerely intended to preserve rather than destroy his children's

innocence. When his daughters were children, Lear believed he could work through the system to build a society that would protect them from evil. To build that society he himself perpetuated evil. When they leave him to take their place in his society, Lear recognizes for the first time that he is responsible for the caging of the animal and faints from the horror of what he has done. There is a continuous animal imagery in *Lear*, particularly animals confined.

In the play this image of the threatened animal recurs, to express humanity under stress—as Lear’s face behind the bars, glimpsed in the mirror and as the creature whom Lear dedicates himself to setting free from its cage:

LEAR. . . . This is a little cage of bars with animals  
in it. . . . Who shut that animal in that cage?  
Let it out. Have you seen its face behind the  
bars? There's a poor animal with blood on its  
head and tears running down its face . . . Is  
it a bird or a horse? . . . its wings are broken.  
Who broke its wings? Who cut off its hands  
so that it can't shake the bars? . . . (35)

What Bond does in *Lear* with his extraordinary imagination,

which marks him as a great playwright, is to return to the kinds of symbols that Shakespeare used to express the shock of great events. Lear's and Cordelia's earth wall represents all the acts of natural destruction which society with its technological control has bound irretrievably. Each successive dictatorship continues with the useless task of building the wall as a defence against enemies, either real or imagined. "Our lives are awkward and fragile," says Lear, "and we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and the man without pity is mad" (84). Lear himself learns pity and through it is restored to sanity. He builds another wall of protection around himself, this time composed of the people who are kind to him. He attempts a personal return to the Golden Age and is trying to live a nonviolent life in a violent age. He feels he can eventually make Cordelia change her ways through reason. Inevitably the soldiers come even as the soldiers of Bodice and Fontanelle came and the soldiers of Lear must have come before them. They arrest those to whom Lear has given sanctuary and order Lear to curb his political activities. He reasons, but society determines what is reasonable and power determines what is society. Lear is powerless. Bond seems to imply that men must struggle against the social order, not because there is hope of winning but because acceptance is death. Police force, political power and morality being on the side of society, those who struggle against it have only one weapon, and that is humanity.

As a character, Lear is tragic because he achieves his potential by transgressing society's limits and pays for it with his life. As a social being, he is heroic, because he dies striking at the symbol of oppression. He is shot while trying to pull down the wall. Bond seems to want the final act of trying to pull down the wall to be invested with considerable significance as his Lear through violence, blinding and madness, finds a new purpose. He is allowed at last to make a real choice. In almost every Bond play this offering of choice is a key dramatic issue. But in the context of *Lear* the act is so futile that it seems an almost meaningless choice except in terms of the individual conscience. It stands a symbol of optimism in the fight against tyranny but the power of the state and its use of technology is so great in Cordelia's realm that simple moral gestures become pointless. The play was written as the Vietnam War rose to its final genocidal peak. To Bond, whether Lear gave up his control over society or had it wrested from him does not matter. Lear created the society under which he suffers and what he suffers is no different from what many others suffered under him. In old age he discovers the society he created by being immersed in it. Lear travels the greatest dramatic distance by any Bond character. In his discussion with Irving Wardle, Hobson and Cadder, for the *Gambit* Bond says:

The astonishing thing about Lear is that you see that all his life he lived a very protected life, he is king. Then he discovers himself without power and suddenly realises the world isn't there for his benefit, everybody's looking for what he wants. He has got to come to some sort of terms with that world that he lives in. For me, the fascinating thing is, I'm sorry if it goes back to this child thing again, in fact he's rather like a child growing up and learning to live, but the astonishing thing and disturbing thing is that you see him do it as an old man. (17)

Beginning as an oppressor of men, he comes to understand what he has done and takes action to change it. It is Lear's pessimism of experience that forces him to see Cordelia— not his natural daughter here—as doomed to go the same way as his own wicked daughters, once she starts using force to combat them. This is the central theme of the play— the idea of violence as a vicious circle of chain reactions. Bond's Cordelia begins as a sympathetic, affectionate character who is a contrast to Lear's daughters in her willingness to support her husband's charitable acts. But when the violence inflicted on her by Lear and later by his daughters destroys her happiness, she reacts by taking up arms. She goes

to meet them and becomes like them. It is one of the worst ironies of the play that it is she, not the bad daughters who causes Lear's blinding. In his handling of the blinding however, Bond's optimism asserts itself. Blindness becomes an unequivocal symbol of insight. Just before he was mutilated, Lear had prophesied: "I must become a child, hungry and stripped and shivering in blood, I must open my eyes and see!" (60). This is what happens. Slowly, clumsily he gropes forward and releases himself from the circle of destruction.

The end of *Lear* is not bleak. Lear's final realization is this:

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. (100)

In a final redeeming irony, the tears of suffering become rain, the source of new life. Lear has found his way out of the desert he dreamed of in Act one, a desert created by those who dig up the life-giving sea, in order to get rid of its howling—who try to eliminate tears and eliminate life. In accepting tears as inevitable, Lear makes them life-giving. He no more interferes in the lives of others, no longer tries to protect them from pain, and commits himself to

a truly life-affirming act of suffering.

For the first time too, we see positive evidence that the Innocent character has passed his vision on to others within the society. In *Lear*, Bond investigates for the first time the situation of one of society's architects, who is forced to live under the conditions he himself created. He discovers that the institutions that he has built is to destroy people rather than protect them. *Lear* is an effective illustration of Bond's that the product of greater understanding is greater optimism. It is this path that is followed until the production of *The Sea* (1973), the next play by Bond that I attempt to consider.

### The escape of the innocent

*The Sea*, Bond's "most complete exercise in tragicomedy" (Hirst 115), is a very different play. Subtitled, 'A Comedy', *The Sea* was written straight after *Lear* as an antidote to the remorseless theatrical experience of the earlier play. It opened at the Royal Court Theatre on 22 May 1973. In *The Sea*, Bond shows the ability of human beings to survive the worst, to retain their optimism and not to be brought down by the lunacy and injustice of the world they live in. Bond sets the play in a precise moment in time—it is 1907. In a small East Coast town the ironclad values of Edwardian England

are leading inexorably to the disasters of the early twentieth century. It is a world ludicrously bent on self-destruction. The central character is another Bondian Innocent, Willy Carson, who is a young man who slowly awakens to the horrors around him. He is not a heroic figure but a very ordinary man who is forced by circumstances into trying to understand his world. Willy must suffer and learn. He must face reality.

*The Sea* is set by the sea. A young man Willy, stumbles out of the lashing waves and calls in vain for Colin, his fellow victim of the storm, and for help. Neither the drunken beachcomber Evens, nor the coastguard, Hatch, come to his aid, and he despairs of Colin's life. By day, Hatch is a draper in the small East Coast town in which action takes place and in the second scene is seen serving the ageing Mrs. Rafi. Mrs. Rafi while placing a large order for curtain material in his shop notices Willy passing by and tries to attract his attention. It appears that the drowned Colin was to be married to Mrs. Rafi's niece, Rose. The old lady advises Willy to consult the peculiar Mr. Evens about where the body might be washed up. After their departure, Hatch calls three of his fellow coastguards from the back of the shop. All are convinced that Willy is a manifestation from outer space, whose own world is threatened by disaster: "All these ships in distress are really secret landings

from space" (*The Sea* 10). Hatch issues orders that no more help is to be given to them and a close watch to be kept on Willy:

HATCH. They have arranged times to hover overhead invisibly. You watch and you'll see him make signs in a prearranged code. It could be anything, a scratch, a wave or he will pretend to tie his shoe. Keep it all in your head. I'll go through it with you later. (11)

Willy is an object of suspicion because he arrives in strange circumstances from outside the village. Evens is equally suspect because, in removing himself from society to his hut on the beach, he has rejected the same social pressures that constrict Hatch — he has found a solution, which Hatch, still grappling in his own way, is unable to accept. His fears of an alien invasion of England from outer space may be lunatic and unreal but they find very real expression in his attitude towards Willy and Evens. Hatch believes that Evens is the earthly liaison for the invaders from outer space. Hatch is plagued by paranoid visions. The conflict between him and Mrs. Rafi makes him go off his head, trapped by the contradictions of his professional life. He is terrorized by the sea. The sea is unpredictable in a way that the village is not.

It does not operate according to rules. It is because Willy Carson came out of the sea that Hatch has identified him as an alien agent. After all, Willy is an outsider and he survived the sea, while Colin Bentham, a native of the village, did not.

The only people in the play who can escape madness are the two survivors of the storm that killed Colin — Willy and Colin's lover, Rose. They are both open to change and learning. If a character does exist among the Bond gallery of Innocents who is capable of changing the world, it is Even's symbolic descendant, Willy. Willy is young, physically vigorous and has in Rose, a partner who understands the nature of the problem almost as well as he does. It is to Evens, the man outside society, that Willy turns for help, but the decision does not turn to tragedy as it did for Scopey in *The Pope's Wedding*. One reason for this is that both Willy and Evens are conscious of their own confusions and problems. Evens warns Willy. If Alen was a dead end for Scopey, Evens perhaps has something to offer Willy. Willy is shuttled backwards and forwards between the kind of society to which by birth and social station he belongs and the influence of Evens, the old recluse, whose support he needs if he is to face and comprehend the lunacy around him.

To begin with, Willy shows no inclination to question his

condition, his mind is still locked on thoughts of Colin and his death. Willy loved his friend. He tried to get others to help and he kept going back into the water himself until he was exhausted. *The Sea* is partly Willy's attempt to come to terms with his resurrection and partly Bond's attempt to show the effect of society upon individual humanity. Willy is caught in the chaotic events which he must learn to accept as his reality. He must step into the shoes of his lost twin-companion and wend his way through situations made chaotic by misrule. Hampered by his social shell the promising young man drowns but his death opens the eyes of a friend who steps forward to fulfil his ideals. The theme of death and resurrection asserts itself throughout the play. The play ends with Colin's fiancée and Willy leaving the town, perhaps with changing the world as their mission.

Willy, just twenty-one, comes of age in the course of the play. He belongs to Bond's continually evolving line of Innocents. Willy is a silent observer, still recovering from the emotional blow of his drowned friend. He is unable to save his friend because through an unfortunate freak of fate, the only person on the beach is an old drunk. A middle-aged man, Hatch, does enter, a few moments later but he is nakedly hostile to the young man in distress. This action strikes a chill and his words ring with the sound of

a harsh, crazed morality:

(Willy comes out of the water. He is soaked.)

. . . Hatch catches him in his torch. Willy is heard shouting above the storm.

WILLY. Help us.

HATCH. Go back.

WILLY. Are you all mad? Where am I?

HATCH. I knew you were coming. We'll fight you, you filthy beast.

(Willy turns and goes back into the sea.)

WILLY. Colin. Colin.

(Heavy guns fire some way off.)

HATCH. The guns ! They've brought the guns up.

WILLY. What ?

HATCH. Hurrah the guns ! The army knows you're here. The whole country's turning out. We'll smash you.

(Hatch goes out with his torch. The storm grows.)

WILLY. Colin. Don't die. Not like this. Shout.

(Willy runs through the water.) (2)

Suddenly it seems the whole world is crazy, incapable of one single natural response. The function is to shock and disturb and incidentally to make Willy's traumatic state throughout most of Act One seem convincing as a reaction not only to Colin's death but equally to the callousness and inhumanity he has encountered. One inescapable question stares out at us from what we see: what kind of a world is this where basic human impulses are so blunted and attitudes so deranged ?

Willy begins with an instinctive understanding of the nature of man and develops an intellectual understanding. Willy is Colins, reborn from the sea without the drowned man's restricting village image. He works steadily towards a view of his world that allows ground for hope and optimism. The progress of Willy is from the shell-shocked state he falls into after the drowning of his friend, to a fuller understanding of the problems of life and his society. Above all, he had to learn to face and accept Hatch's fury but not be seduced, corrupted or intimidated by it. He must avoid it but he must not pretend it is not there. Three main elements are interwoven in *The Sea*, the world of Mrs. Rafi expressed mainly through high comedy, the barely controlled paranoia of Hatch and Willy's growing maturity and understanding, partly under the tutelage of Evens together with his dawning relationship with Rose. What

Bond shows is Willy and Rose learning to live in the real world, learning to face the worst and not to grow a protective armour but to plunge back into life.

Bond has the whole sequence between Willy and Rose take place in front of Colin's dead body — washed up on the shore and lying upstage, at first unnoticed by them. The drowned man's appearance down to the last detail, had been one of the formative images in Bond's mind when he started to think about the play. He drowns while unsuccessfully trying to remove his jersey so that he can swim. Symbolically he is resurrected by being washed up onto the beach even as Willy and Rose are beginning to understand one another and the world around them. The jersey represents the societal shell of which he was unable to free himself. Willy, not so encumbered, makes it to shore and wins the love of Rose. Colin's action of trying to escape is analogous to the situation of Willy and Rose who have both come close to being swapped by their own despair. Willy has come to terms with the death and has achieved a sane perspective on life and so reacts undramatically to the body, but the same is not true of Hatch.

The body is used as a focus for the contracting states of mind and views of the world - that Willy and Hatch have arrived

at. Willy is not horrified by what he sees, when Hatch comes to the beach, and thinking himself to be alone stabs and hacks at the corpse in the delusion that it is Willy he is killing:

HATCH. . . . Where's the head? In his hands. That's it! What confidence. Insolence. Sleeping while he waits for his friends to come out of the sea. . . . Mr. Hatch, you have him. careful. (He creeps towards the body. He still holds the knife) A sound and he's gone . . . (Hatch reaches the body. He falls on it and knives it in a frenzy.) Kill it! Kill it! Kill it! Atlast! What's this? Water! Look, Water! Water not blood? (Stabbing) Kill it! Kill it! (He stops) More water? (Stabs) . . . (45)

Our immediate reaction might be horror and repulsion. Willy's comment as he watches the scene is: "Hit it. That's an innocent murder" (45). It is true not only because Colin is already dead but because Hatch, in the fullest sense, is not responsible for his actions. Willy's observations on the innocence of Hatch's fury is an attempt by Bond to drive home a message, it is evidence of the clarity and maturity of Willy's perception. He has been tutored in what to expect from the world by Evens. The old man confirms what Willy knows—the world is full of savagery and aggression—

and Willy openly expresses the weakness he feels: "How can you bear to live? I'm not sure if I can bear it?" (63). Evens offers Willy a positive vision, he emphasises the difficulties but he counsels hope—what the old man says is that there is certainly a lot of violence in life. Life kills other forms of life in order to exist. And on this planet, most life has been lived this way, that is why life has survived. But what he really says is that this is unacceptable to human beings. It's not the sum total of all life. Human beings have other possibilities open to them.

Both Willy and Evens have been through an incredible experience, they both respect each other. In a way Willy and Evens serve as a model of the national, sane society in which Bond wants the audience to place their trust. We should take hope, as much from the relationship we have seen them work their way towards as from Even's parting words of advice: "Go away. You won't find any more answers here. . . . Remember, I've told you these things so that you won't despair. But you must still change the world" (65).

There is no guarantee of success. That much is implied by the unfinished sentence that ends the play. Willy's reply when Rose asks what he has been discussing with Evens: "I came to say good-

bye and I'm glad you—" (65). The unfinished sentence is a poignant reminder that their uncertain future does not warrant the traditional celebration of a comic ending. Bond leaves us in a state of suspension. He says that he deliberately left the sentence unfinished because the play can have no satisfactory solution at that stage. Rose and Willy have to go away and help to create a sane society.

In *Lear* and in *The Sea* violence results not only from the reification of human beings by those in authority but also from the violence on which the authorities are nurtured. In both the plays violence perpetuates itself. Yet *Lear* and *The Sea* dramatize alternatives to this cycle of violence: *Lear* presents the alternative of reform of society, while *The Sea* presents that of escape from society. The innocent protagonists of Bond's plays face society at its most destructive and if they are never totally victorious, we are nevertheless left with hope for the continuation of man's struggle against inhumanity. Bond's earliest play, *The Pope's Wedding* may well be his most pessimistic because its hero Scopey, destroys himself in order to fulfil an empty abstraction. Even he however embodies the desire for a more meaningful existence than the one he knows. In *The Sea*, Evens withdraws from the corrupting atmosphere of the village, but not before passing on to Willy the admonition to

change the world. Lear, after a lifetime of creating an unjust society is forced to live in it. Coming to his senses, he takes the first step in the seemingly impossible task of combating what he has built.

Violence, as anyone who has followed Bond's career will know, is what Edward Bond tends to be known for. Some critics still pretend that Bond loves the violence he presents on the stage. But Bond interestingly gives a clear statement of his reasons for writing about violence in the *Preface to Lear*:

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. (v)

Bond would say human beings are not basically aggressive. We live in urban, crowded regimented groups working like machines and with no real control of our lives. Paradoxically an aggressive society has evolved which does not allow individuals to live in the way for which they evolved. Injustice is the consequence but the organizing group justifies itself through social morality and employs fear and violence to establish law and order. While Bond laments

the loss of freedom which we apparently once possessed, he concludes that the formation of modern society probably could not have been avoided. Nevertheless, as his plays reveal, Bond is basically an optimist. Bond's violent scenes and cruel humour at first attracted attention rather than appreciation. Instead of preaching a rational gospel, however, he fills an almost bare stage with whole societies from which and against which heroes arise, who are basically innocent, who learn through their suffering to act responsibly. Considering the fact that most of Bond's plays present us with the creation of violent, destructive worlds and that his political statements point to the collapse of an unjust system as a cause for hope, not despair, it would be fair to say that Bond views the disintegrating social and moral order as an anarchist would. In a poem which acts as a *Preface to Summer* (1982), Bond says: "Well, people are on the move and so doors are open/communication is possible" (i).

On a close examination of three selected plays of Tom Stoppard, I found a strong similarity with Bond in the portrayal of the protagonists. Although at the surface level the typical Stoppardian play is highly sensational, mystifying and baffling, at its core lies the motif of innocence. This motif is present only in a subdued form and it is seldom played up to lend the plays an ideational

content. All the same, this core of innocence brings Stoppard closer to some of his contemporaries like Edward Bond and Robert Bolt. Like Bond, he assures that beneath their confusion and cruelties, human beings are worthwhile and the proof of this lies in man's on-going search for a just community. It may sound unfashionably optimistic but it generates the play in all his works. He wishes to present human beings under stress and he does it in the most intellectual manner.

### A pair of innocents

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), offers its audience the vision of two characters caught in the agony of moral choice. At a moment when they least expect it and in a place they had never foreseen, they must decide the shape of their lives. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Stoppard's play are garrulous, childlike, ingratiating simpletons, bewildered by the parts they must play. Baffled, imprisoned in a play, they did not write, Ros and Guil must act out their prearranged destinies. Stoppard presents his heroes as two likeable but utterly confused characters, engaged in a perpetual struggle to comprehend the complex manoeuvrings that are taking place around them, as the plot of *Hamlet* unfolds. As Ronald Bryden has said, "they are frightened strangers in a world somebody else seems to have made" (qtd. in Brassel 39).

The idea of a play about Shakespeare's attendant lords was implanted by Stoppard's agent, Kenneth Ewing, Stoppard wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear*, as a one-act verse burlesque. Suitably encouraged, Stoppard extended the piece. In August 1966, the play was premiered at the Cranton Street Hall in Edinburgh. The play was quickly put into production and made its debut at the Old Vic on 11 April 1967. It remains his most popular play to date.

The title characters of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* are the school chums of Shakespeare's Hamlet, who have been summoned to Elsinore without knowing what is expected of them. What first drew Stoppard to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern was the aspect of victims, bewildered and innocent victims. The play shows the two characters adrift in somebody else's plot, just as the Absurdists focused upon modern man's ruderlessness in a world he cannot control. While the action of *Hamlet* proceeds in the background, the two innocents play games to pass the time in a manner clearly inspired by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The urge to discern some pattern in the world's chaos has been one of the recurring themes in Stoppard's plays. His play seems to be making a very basic philosophical point, that if there is a system and order to human affairs, it is never readily apparent and that the only certainties are birth and death. It aims at showing that actors,

audience and characters in a play share the same destiny of limited comprehension. None are offered any insight into a comprehensive reality, a metaphysical pattern or even a moral or logical purpose that is being worked out. His heroes are all trapped within a hostile, mechanistic world which is at odds with individual aspirations.

Stoppard is the first dramatist to build a whole play out of two peripheral theatrical figures. While retaining the broad context given by Shakespeare, Stoppard develops his borrowed characters into his own creations. They are hovering on the edge of a great drama that every often sweeps them up in its wake as Stoppard works passages of *Hamlet* into the play, but their only response is baffled incomprehension:

As soon as we make a move they'll come pouring in from every side, shouting obscure instructions, confusing us with ridiculous remarks, messing us about from here to breakfast and getting our names wrong. (63)

In the wake of these bewildering machinations Stoppard's heroes flounder hopelessly out of their depth. The innocence of Stoppard's courtiers is not primarily a lack of evil but a lack of knowledge. In Stoppard's description of them as bewildered innocents, the focus

is on their bewilderment.

The play begins with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern betting on the toss of a coin, with Guildenstern losing ninety-two consecutive times, as the coin, contrary to any law of probability, keeps on coming down "head" (8). Guildenstern is astounded but finally concludes that this phenomenon, together with the summons they have received to report urgently to Elsinore must be indicative of some turning point in their lives. They are, however, full of doubts and anxiety about their mission. They do not have any directions. Like the actors whom they are about to encounter and whose identity depends on their having an audience, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have no identity prior to the arrival of the summoner. And throughout the play, they show a fluid identity as they themselves are not sure which of them is Rosencrantz and which is Guildenstern. Both, however, are not content just to accept their commission and the reward attached to it. They question and worry about explanations and answers. This concern for knowledge causes them a great deal of suffering, as Harold Hobson observes:

But Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are without this precious gift of indifference, and there are millions of people in the world who resemble them: people,

from Oedipus downwards who cannot bear not to know the answer to questions they would be happier if they never asked. (qtd.in Elsom 189)

Normand Berlin comments that Stoppard: "forces us to question certain assumptions about a character in another dramatist's play and by extension about man in the play-writ-large called life" (274). Stoppard's heroes are conscious of the theatricality of the *Hamlet* world, yet what they fail to understand is that they too are an integral part of that bizarre and incomprehensible world with its theatricality, with all its predetermined plotting and role-playing. Their failure to realise that each footstep into the arena of the *Hamlet* action, however tentative and necessary, is another submission to the destiny of the script, is ironic. In their confusion and fear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never suspect that they may fare better as fictional characters than as real ones, for, once they enter the *Hamlet* play they become part of an ordered universe which will not permit a coin to come down heads ninety-two times. Although they do not perceive the nature of their playworld, the players do. As the Player explains, actors have no identity of their own; they become the people they impersonate and to do so they need an audience who will accept their new identity; who will beckon them to life just as the messenger summoned Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern and woke them up. The Player says:

Don't you see?! we're actors—we're the opposite of people! . . . We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade, that someone would be watching us, and then gradually, no one was. We were caught high and dry . . . frozen as we were in profile, our eyes searched you out, first confidently, then hesitantly, then desperately . . . (45-46)

As purely fictional characters, defined by their roles, they are distinguished from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by their knowledge that they exist only within a script. When Guil naively asks the Player who decides who dies in their tragedies, the surprised Player replies "Decides? It is written" (80). Despite the presence of the players Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not fully understand what is happening, nor why, yet by the end of the play, they have reconciled themselves to their fate and even affirmed it. Befuddlement characterizes the two from the moment they replace the figures in the dumb show, the moment they read the letter condemning them to sudden death. Guildenstern is baffled even at the moment of their death:

GUIL. We're dead men. What else could resolve the gathering dark through which we have stumbled this far? . . . To be told so little . . . to such

an end — and still — finally — to be denied  
an explanation. . . . You knew.

PLAYER. To know that, is nothing, In our experience death  
is at the end of most things. . . .

GUIL . Your experience ! — Actors ! . . . I'am talking  
about death — and you've never experienced  
that. And you cannot act it. You die a thousand  
casual deaths — with panache, and none of  
that intensity which squeezes out life . . . and  
no blood runs cold anywhere. Because even as  
you die you know that you will come back in  
a different hat. But no one gets up after death  
— there is no applause — there is only silence  
and some second-hand clothes, and that's —  
*death* —. (91-92)

What Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never realize is that they are  
part of a larger action than that of their own little lives. The two  
may go to their deaths without resistance but they comprehend  
what it means to be part of a greater plan.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are like soulless marionettes  
while the player has found an identity or a soul, however transitory

that may be. In the place of the actors adaptability, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern insist on certainty and understanding and *Hamlet* offers them neither. One finds here a similarity to Scopey in *The Pope's Wedding*, trying to find out Alen's secret unsuccessfully. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's inability to understand the meaning of their predicament invokes the inability of all mankind to understand those forces ultimately in control of their lives and fates. Our sympathies are thus directed towards these two men groping in an existential void which to varying degrees may mirror our own. Indeed the theatrical metaphor that sustains itself throughout the play underscores the playwright's vision of life as essentially dramatic and of living as nothing more than playing a role.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's encounter with Hamlet does not prove as successful as they had expected. They fail to obtain any valuable piece of information from him; so that Rosencrantz ruefully says: "he murdered us" (40). We see how helpless the two companions are and we feel sorry for them. We participate in their ordeal because Stoppard has managed to make us like them by making their plight, unlike that of Ros and Guil of *Hamlet*, suggestive of the plight of mankind which is also baffled by what life holds in store for it and by the nature of metaphysical reality. Rosencrantz

and Guildenstern being ordinary people, suffer passively the same lot of incomprehension, bewilderment and confusion that is assigned to ordinary humanity. They neither act nor understand what the purpose of destiny or providence in their regard can be. They have summed up the situation on the basis of the facts they were able to learn. They suspect, however, that they have not been told the whole truth. Like common humanity, they feel that they are being unfairly kept in the dark: "what a fine persecution — to be kept intrigued without ever being enlightened (30). Unlike Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of the *Hamlet* script they are innocent of any underhand complicity with Claudius.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have no future, only a series of todays. They have no identity and no purpose in life until they receive instructions or patronage from their superiors. The interim between summons is a vacuum. Their lives lack coherence and like the plot of an Absurdist play being made up of unrelated fragments, they fail to establish any connection between their lives now and the future. One reason for their inability to identify themselves with the actors is that in view of their own innocence and uninvolvedness in any malicious design against Hamlet, they cannot conceive that such a fate can be theirs. Towards the end of the play when they are on the ship, on their way to England

with Hamlet, and when the action follows the same pattern as the one described by the earlier dumb show, they fail to relate what is happening on the ship to the events of the dumb show. Their going to England will mark not only the end of their mission, but of their earthly existence as well. It is therefore fitting that since they have never understood what they were supposed to be doing and never accomplished anything, their deaths should be a similar manifestation of nothingness or non-being, they simply vanish into thin air.

One of the illusions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cling to throughout the play is the belief in a logical ordering of events. The play however shows a complete absence of logic. Hamlet overhears their conversation about the letter they are carrying ordering his death. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern read the contents of the second letter they are stunned but their attitude is one of helpless acceptance of and resignation to their fate:

ROS. They had it in for us, didn't they? Right from the beginning. Who'd have thought that we were so important?

GUIL. But why? Was it all for this? Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths? (91)

The action of the play shows that far from being very important, they were mere pawns in the hands of the mighty and that what is happening to them is purely accidental. They are innocent victims of an inscrutable, arbitrary and illogical fate. The plot of Stoppard's play shows that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are innocent, whereas, Hamlet is guilty of causing the death of two innocent people. In an universe devoid of moral purpose both the innocent and the guilty are destroyed by the same arbitrary fate. What Stoppard manages to achieve in the play is to invest Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with pathos. For Rosencrantz and Guildenstern there is no vertigo and blackness gives way to blankness. They have not advanced to the edge of life—they have merely and wilfully been dumped there to be manipulated and finally disposed off in a grimly patterned world of kings and princes in which ultimately they do not matter.

### The innocence of metaphysics

In *Jumpers*, (1972) there is another interesting dimension to the myth of innocence. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the innocence of the characters is in not knowing where they came from, what they are doing or where they are going. They are not even sure of what they are—actors or real human beings. They are trapped in their roles. In *Jumpers*, George Moore, the well-

settled philosopher is the protagonist whose every attempt to establish meaning and certainty dissolves into confusion and betrayal. Even when he explores reality, he becomes the butt of ridicule and thus commands our sympathy. He is a poor copy of a philosopher who cannot control even the most palpable facts and instead of ordering his world only compounds the chaos and betrayals. Thus quite paradoxically, metaphysics itself is projected here as an innocent game—a game similar to acrobatics or a circus show.

It was not until 1972, nearly five years after *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* first opened in London, that Stoppard's next full length work *Jumpers* reached the stage. The first night of *Jumpers* at the Old Vic was a major theatrical event. *Jumpers* proved beyond doubt Stoppard's brilliance, his daring, his determination to extend the possibilities of the stage and upto the present moment at least, stands as his most completely achieved stage work. Ronald Hayman observes that it is an oceanic play with a glistening surface and chilling undercurrents (108), but like survivors clinging to a piece of driftwood of a shipwrecked culture are Dotty and George Moore. Stoppard gives us a sympathetic impression of their personal needs. When they reach out towards each other, they fail to make contact, when they reach out elsewhere, they are pathetic, especially George with his old fashioned scruples about ethics and language.

Clearly George falls in the tradition of Stoppard's protagonists, those figures befuddled by the world and seeking some manner of counteracting its absurdity. Throughout he is regarded as the local eccentric. He is a Don Quixote championing the God of Goodness. "Moore himself is not important", comments Archie, Sir Archibald Jumper, the University's Vice-chancellor, who offers a design of living for those who jump to his tune, ". . . he is our tame believer, pointed out to visitors in much the same spirit as we point out the magnificent stained glass in what is now the gymnasium" (63). He himself feels that he is ineffectual and cuts "a ludicrous figure in the academic world" (72) and he is certainly a failure as a husband. But George's intellectual debate, with its gritty, back to the wall optimism, shines like a good deed in a naughty world. Confronted with a society, symbolized by the pyramid of yellow-uniformed and not very competent gymnasts, he remains nobly and absurdly himself.

*Jumpers* tries and succeeds in addressing two interrelated major issues in modern society: God's existence and the validity of moral absolutes. *Jumpers* is a satire and its satirical thrust is directed against the philosophers of logical positivism. Stoppard has projected the action of his play into the not-very-far future. Technology has made great progress culminating with the landing of two English astronauts on the moon; politics are being manipulated

by the totalitarian Radical-Liberal Party which has won the elections; and society is embracing an empirical materialism that favours self-interest. At the centre, the most human of Stoppard's flawed protagonists, George and Dotty, struggle to express, though unsuccessfully, what they instinctively know to be right. Stoppard's sympathies are unmistakably with George, the play's hero and Stoppard's own mouthpiece. George's desperate rear-guard action against the logical positivist approach of pragmatism in all things, leads him to wrestle with the philosophical concept of a God-given world. George is seen most of the time in his study preparing a paper for the annual symposium in which his major adversary will be Professor McFee who held the Chair of Logic at the University. The subject of the symposium is "Man—good, bad or indifferent"? (46).

Struggling to prove the existence of absolute values in a world which denies them, George cannot find a beginning for his lecture about the existence of God, He runs into all sorts of difficulties both in theory, like his ridiculous attempts to dictate a lecture on these topics at the beginning of Act I:

There is presumably a calendar date—a moment—when the onus of proof passed from the atheist to

the believer, when, quite suddenly, secretly the noes  
had it. (25)

and in practice, the apparent failure of Providence which allows George unwittingly to kill his hare and his tortoise in the course of the play. By the end of the play he is still insisting, though he has been unable to formulate specific proof;

I don't claim to know that God exists, I only claim that he does without my knowing it and while I claim as much I do not claim to know as much indeed I cannot know and God knows that I cannot. (71)

George's bewilderment is very like that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Moon in *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon* (1966), the only novel to date, by Stoppard. For two Acts, we see George struggling with his own mind against impersonal, philosophical and religious forces that constantly confound him. He has been deserted by his wife and hounded by Inspector Bones, who suspects him of murdering Duncan Mc Fee. Throughout, he has been searching for the hare, who has disappeared and to whom George has grown quite attached bestowing on him the nickname Thumper. Towards the end of the play, still searching for Thumper, George notices a spot of blood on his secretary's coat and realizes it must have come from on top of the ward robe. He reaches upwards and finds Thumper impaled

on the arrow. As he steps down off the chair, he crushes the pet turtle with his foot. The Act ends with George crying for help and sobbing profusely.

George is a complex and intriguing character. Bigsby notes that there is a curious paradox in his predicament—a paradox which:

. . . resides in the fact that while he elaborates his defence of values . . . the world outside is renouncing all interest in the matter. Engaged only on a theoretical level, he implicitly compounds the forces which he deplures. Just as life inevitably evades his attempt to pin it down with words, his elaborate arguments sliding off into anecdotes and parenthetical byways, so his grasp on the real world is seen to be tenuous at best. (21)

George cannot effect a marriage between theory and practice. He can praise the Good Samaritan while failing to emulate him by rescuing his wife, Dotty, from her predicament. His extreme impracticality is manifested by his failure to see the body of the dead Jumper in Dotty's room during Act Two. As an academic he is, as he admits himself, "at one remove from the centre of

events.” (36). But George Moore does give voice to the kind of principles on which right action might be based and to that extent he represents a real advance on Ros and Guil who were paralysed physically and mentally. But he is better at criticizing the principles of his antagonists than at proving his own case. He establishes easily that “if rationality were the criterion for things being allowed to exist, the world would be one gigantic field of soya beans” (40). But when it comes to establishing the existence of God or the validity of absolutes, George runs into all sorts of difficulties. His credulity about God is linked with his naive willingness to believe in the innocence of Dotty’s relationship with Archie. His intellectual awareness of the problem is quite sophisticated and is germane to the kind of comedy that Stoppard is cultivating to interlace George’s verbal confusion with his emotional confusion.

George, despite his failures, has the right ideas although he is unable to use them to meet life head on. George attempts to formulate order out of chaos through philosophical inquiry. Ultimately all George’s beliefs rest on a faith that cannot be proved. He relies on something indefinable within him that makes him human, that offers him values of ethical, religious and aesthetic order. Despite the nobility of his intentions, he is, like all of Stoppard’s protagonists from time to time, a comic figure. Even his philosophical arguments

are somewhat confused. The fact that George is shown to be hopelessly adrift is what makes him so attractive, for in his confusion, he is said to represent essential man. He is the lonely figure holding out against overwhelming pressure, whether from his retired show-business wife; his all-purpose vice-chancellor or the irresistible march to power of the Radical Liberal party. While George wanders in abstractions, the world gets on with its business. He tries to establish his beliefs in the face of a world and society which is busily engaged in doing precisely the opposite. Ultimately all George's beliefs rest on a faith that cannot be proved.

George is an innocent victim struggling to clarify his own sense of values and orders while a political coup, a murder mystery, a university take over and the breakdown of domestic harmony all threaten to swamp him. But he is much more positive than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Rosencrantz hardly tries to control or understand his world. Guildenstern rises to the full tragic perception of his predicament but still fails to do anything about it. George, however, finally manages to put together a coherent and powerful justification of his faith in God and goodness. George Moore does give voice to the kind of principles on which right action might be based.

## The myth of the artist's innocence

In *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1973), Donner perhaps represents the myth of the artist's innocence. The purity of his observations and the spontaneity of his love for Sophie are brought out very well. Donner is the most sensible of the three artists and had always been sensitive to the world around him. A connection can be seen here between Donner and George of *Jumpers*. Like him Donner has always been on the periphery of life and art too, though he has the potential to be more than a bystander.

*Artist Descending a Staircase*, Stoppard's last radio play to date, and the finest, was written just after *Jumpers* and already anticipates some materials of *Travesties* (1975). It was first broadcast on November 14, 1972. The play's design follows a precisely worked time pattern. Beginning in the present, it moves back in five irregular stages to 1914 and then the next five scenes repeat these stages in an upward direction towards the present. According to Michael Billington:

it is like a rubber ball attached to hand by a piece of elastic, hurled in one direction and then returning whence it came. (93)

The play is a satire on modern art and the practitioners of modern art. It acquires depth as the arguments become humanized by being

exchanged in the shadow of a tragic occurrence and by the sense of loss and waste that overtakes some of the characters. The major concern of the play is with art and the nature of reality as depicted by modern artists. The three protagonists of the play, Martello, Beauchamp and Donner are artists. They have been friends and have lived together for a period of over sixty years. The three artists have long abandoned painting. Donner and Martello have turned to sculpture and Beauchamp to recording silence on tape.

All three artists of the play descend a time-staircase back to their innocent youth before they took up fashions of modern art. Like Marcel Duchamp's cubist painting 'Nude Descending a Staircase', the script breaks that descent into separate moments and like cubism itself, it then reassembles the captured parts. The title refers literally to the rapid descent of one of the trio, Donner, who has fallen through the rickety balustrade at the top of the stairs to their attic studio. Donner is sensitive and concerned about the validity of art in a society in which many people are destitute and hungry. He seeks to justify his art by making it edible. As his name which may also derive from the French verb "donner" or "to give" or from the English "donor", indicates that he wants to give or contribute something positive and useful to his society. It was the war that had first made him realize the marginal importance

of art and its irrelevance to the maimed, the disfigured and the needy. Unlike the egocentric and complacent Beauchamp, Donner tries to justify himself as an artist because he is worried about the position of the artist in society.

When the play begins, Martello and Beauchamp, who are now very old men, are accusing each other of having killed Donner whose corpse they have found at the bottom of the stairs on their return home. As in *Jumpers* the plot pivots around the mystery of a death which is explained only at the last minute. Developing the idea that he used in *Jumpers* of Dotty meeting Inspector Bones, Stoppard starts the play with an ambiguous tape recording. Fifty years ago Sophie, a beautiful blind girl, suddenly entered their lives and although she died tragically only two years later, had left a permanent impression on their minds. The memory of her brief pathetic life is especially cherished by Donner who fell in love with her at first sight. Sophie however thought that she was in love with Beauchamp. As the play unfolds we discover that Donner had possibly been the innocent victim of god's cruel sport.

The complicated involvement between the artists and Sophie provides the basis for the play's complex technical structure. She is perfectly contained within the structure, mingling and living with

the artists and meeting a fate inextricably linked to theirs. Sophie is presented as an innocent lover of art and also as a victim of the hollow insincere behaviour of the artists. Sophie's role is that of a sceptic, who gently opposes the artist's dutiful service to Duchamp's maxim which Donner quotes:

There are two ways of becoming an artist. The first way is to do the things by which is meant art. The second way is to make art mean the things you do.  
(24)

It is the second way that Stoppard's artists live and work drawing all kinds of simplistic objects and bizarre creations into the realm of art. Sophie's role is to remind them of the first. She hints at the artist's responsibility to the other members of the community, against that to his fellow artists and it is likely that Sophie is voicing Stoppard's own conception of the desirable role of the artist. Sophie's blind innocence exposes the hollow sophistication of Beauchamp's art but it also emphasises the capacity for error latent in all human perception, which recoils with particular vengeance in her case.

Sophie's mistake depends partly on inaccuracy in interpreting perpetual evidence and partly on inaccuracy in remembering it. The two forms of vagueness often overlap and in personal

relationships, blurred memories of past behaviour help us to misinterpret each other's current intentions. It is not her blindness itself which accounts for Sophie's agony but the way she is treated—the lack of straightforwardness of her lover Beauchamp—when she herself has consistently manifested a straightforwardness which enables her to see potential humour in her handicap. By the day Beauchamp and Martello leave her, however, this humour is on the brink of agony. In effect we are to feel Beauchamp's departure is as callous as such a joke would be. Perhaps still more impressive is the pain of Donner.

At the start of the play, Donner is dead; in the cumulative flashbacks and flashwords we gradually discover his decency, goodness and integrity by comparison with his two companions. In the earliest scene of the play, (1914-42-47), Donner is the least frivolous of all the three artists, able to send himself up where others have grander pretensions, telling the bald truth about their picturesque walking tour, being the first to recognize the reality of the war and expressing his fear in terms of fundamental values. In the 1920 scenes, at Sophie's first introduction, Donner is the most restrained and tactful, but it is also clear that he is the one who did notice Sophie the previous year when she visited their exhibition before losing her sight.

In the 1922 scene we find that Sophie has become Beauchamp's mistress and has been living with the three artists for the last two years. In this scene we also see that Beauchamp has already become weary of her and has decided to dump her on Donner who had been in love with her all along and is only too glad to have Sophie finally all to himself. Donner decides to stay on in Lambeth with Sophie. He declares his love for her but she tells him that she can love no man other than Beauchamp. Donner goes downstairs to bid his friends, who are leaving, good-bye. Sophie continues talking unaware that Donner has left. She tells him that it would be impossible for him to live with her, expecting nothing. When she gets no response, she panics, rushes forward and falls through the window glass down to her death. Like Donner, she has been the innocent victim of fate and the cruelty of the gods.

In the ninth scene, Martello's revelation to Donner, that because of her failing eyesight, Sophie could well have been mistaken about the painting she saw and that the painting which she actually did see had been painted by him, Donner, falls on his ears like a thunderbolt. Sophie had fallen in love with the artist of a particular painting. She had believed it to be Beauchamp's but it had actually been Donner's. This distresses more than consoles him. He realizes he has been the innocent victim of fate. Donner's wasted life is

drawn with a sympathy and an intensity that are new in Stoppard.

The sickening blow as the unfortunate Donner realises the circumstances which have, so to speak, defrauded him of the happiness he might have so easily enjoyed with Sophie and she with him, has such profound effect that it causes him to abandon the principles of a lifetime. Donner had always been susceptible to the world around him. He can never remake the past with Sophie and he is to die ridiculously like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "even when life was at its best there was a small part missing and I knew that I was going to die without ever feeling that my life was complete" (*Artist Descending a Staircase* 113), but before he does so he comes to terms with his feelings for her through the expression of his art. The mere possibility that she truly loved him gives meaning to his work. The new sense of commitment also alters Donner's opinions about art itself and so enfolds the plays debate about art and life in a personal crisis. He tells the astonished Beauchamp: "I have returned to traditional values, that is where the true history of art continues to lie, not in your small jokes" (84). He also says that painting nature is not as easy as they have thought:

I very much enjoyed my years in that child's garden

of easy victories known as the avant-garde, but I am now engaged in the infinitely more difficult task of painting what the eye sees". (81)

In the last scenes Martello and Donner are amiable enough until Donner discovers that the cliché'-statue is supposed to be Sophie. Through his weeping, becomes evident his constancy to her memory over the years and the depth of his feelings for Sophie.

DONNER. Oh Sophie . . . I try to shut out the memory  
but it needs only . . . a ribbon . . . a  
flower . . . a phrase of music . . . a river  
flowing beneath ancient bridges . . . the scent  
of summertime. . . . (91)

Martello relishes Donner's agony. An echo of George and Archie of *Jumpers* begins to be heard and in the second 'last week' scenes, it becomes much stronger. Donner, despite his years of tawdry enslavement to the trendy, is finally redeemed by his ability to feel, whereas Beauchamp and Martello can never pass beyond cynical detachment, an attitude that always will infect their art. After his conversion, however, Donner can see that their antirational creations freed them from any sort of social accountability and this no longer

worries him. Instead he makes his art accountable only to himself and the dead Sophie. In painting Sophie with the unicorn, he gives himself up to the memory of what she truly was. It is Sophie's attitude to painting which she expressed fifty years ago, that has been influencing Donner in his present return to traditional values.

*Artist Descending a Staircase* offers more than an ingenious union of ideas and comic artifice. Behind the flittering cleverness Stoppard's depiction of sorrow and misunderstanding injects the play with an emotion that is all the more moving because of his constrained handling of a potentially saccharine plot. The script pattern detaches us from the sentimental, yet its patterning also colours our sympathies as we move from scene to scene along the time loop knowing what the characters must come to. The play makes an indirect statement about the connection between artistic discipline and human feelings. Donner, the most consistently sensitive of the three friends discovers himself as an artist once he learns that Sophie had perhaps loved him all along. Invigorated by this feeling he gives up dabbling in facile experimentation to engage in painting what the eye sees, by creating his tribute to Sophie. Donner's conversion is designed to imply that nothing less than a naturalistic lifelike portrait from memory can do justice to the depth of his emotions, certainly not the comparatively, playful

and bloodless works of their younger days. In this play Stoppard shows a sympathy for his characters that is new to his work. This sympathy is revealed in the restraint he exerts in manipulating his material. His pathos never thickens into sentimentality or melodrama.

One of Stoppard's more extraordinary abilities is to render through grotesque comedy real pain and a yearning for the good. The major characters in all his work experience various degrees of agony. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Jumpers*, the anguish grows increasingly desperate and it is this anguish which eventually tips the balance towards seriousness in the radio play, *Artist Descending a Staircase*. Good intent, innocence, a joy in being alive and a healthy avoidance of death are the fuel of Stoppard's plays, quite apart from their explicit tributes to an external absolute good. Stoppard's main interest is the individual. He is therefore quite different from his contemporaries who are dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions in England and seek to change them. Michael Billington states that the early 1970's:

saw the rise of a whole new generation of maverick talents disgusted by the shoddy, materialist, corrupt spectacle of British public life and united in their belief that they should do something about it. Drama,

in their hands became not so much a means of initiating change as of registering protest: raising two disdainful fingers at the Britain they had grown up in. (Billington 171)

Unlike Bond's plays, Stoppard's plays are neither calculated to initiate change nor to register protest. In other words, they are just plays and no label works for all of them. The stance is that of a liberal humanist with a corresponding belief that mankind will sort itself out eventually. His plays are primarily concerned with showing an individual's attitude to certain issues which are fundamentally of a moral nature, while leaving the audience to draw their own conclusions. Society in his plays, like in Bond's is the catalyst which brings out the hidden inclination or prejudices of the individual. It also provides the arena where his clashes with other attitudes or philosophies take place. Again, quite similar to that in Bond's plays, the individual has to make a choice on which his or her happiness depends. The pattern that thus emerges shows that Stoppard stands with those individuals who suffer, are not unwilling to get involved and because they care, can take risks for another individual who is in need of their help. The view of men as basically innocent, of life as generally less strange than it may seem to be, leads him to most of what is best and most

distinctive in his work.

Bond's dominant concern is the relationship between society and its subjects. He writes about man in his environment and man has made that environment an unnatural one. He chooses elemental subjects—violence, pity, aggression, love, greed and fear—but conceives them in minutely particular and human terms. And although Bond's truths appear unpalatable, society is being forced by events to heed his warnings. If men do recognize their dangers in time, it may not be directly due to Bond's work or for that matter, any artist, but it will be partly due to the climate of opinion his work has helped to create. So far, the signs may be of little more account than Lear's few spadefulls of earth. But they are there, the straws at which humanity must clutch. His plays are about strengths, real and potential, of individuals in social situations. His politics insist that despite the compromise and failures, a commitment to human freedom must not be lost, that change is possible, that human beings can take control of their lives, that they are finally, rational. Thoughtlessness and cruelty, Bond shows, come about not because human beings are by nature thoughtless or cruel but because their capacity for sympathy, their ability to imagine the feelings and the suffering of others, has been restricted and withered by the culture they live in. Bond is concerned to

present an analysis of the way in which our society functions, our worlds interact so as to give his audience valuable materials with which they may examine and reconstruct their lives. Always, it is that condition with which he is concerned—a condition which is desperate, because of the damage mankind persists in inflicting upon itself. Yet he exhibits, despite his avowed atheism, an unquenchable faith in humanity's divine spark.

To sum up, Bond's violence, however much it may shock the audience, yearns to explore the gentleness and compassion of which humankind is capable. Like Stoppard's bewildered innocents who are victims of hostile circumstances, Bond's protagonists display a natural goodness under difficult circumstances.

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## Chapter III

### **Portraying What The Eye Sees**

*Nothing in fact more truly portrays us as we are and as we would be than the play and players. (qtd. in Whitaker 5)*

Theatre, there can be no doubt about it, has become immensely important in our times. It has become one of the principle vehicles of information, one of the prevailing methods of thinking about life and its situations. It is therefore, now, more than ever before necessary that we try to understand what theatre can and cannot express, how it gets across its messages, the techniques employed and how the audience can understand and grasp these messages. The language of the dialogue, the setting, the gestures, costumes, make-up, voice-inflections of the actors as well as innumerable other signs contribute to the creation of the meaning of the performance. One main point to be borne in mind is that though the audiences today are still largely middle-class, they are now more accustomed to watching drama on television than in the theatre. The theatre therefore has to offer the audience something different,

more theatrical. It also has to make them feel at home, and break down the barriers which used to some extent separate the stage from the audience.

Arriving in even the most conventional West End Theatre today, the audience is likely to find the curtain already up, the set visible and the actors already disporting themselves and creating some kind of action around themselves. The actors may speak directly to the audience. Excitement and entertainment is more important than a continuous plot development. Dramatic visual effects and witty dialogues take preference over logical argument. Theatre reflects the ways in which we behave individually and together. It presents a live event. We, as audience, share the time, space and the emotional and problematic experience. It involves challenges and amusements. It horrifies us and engages our being more profoundly than many of our everyday actions in every day life. It has probably a more significant effect on our assessment of ourselves and the world we live in and subsequently on the way we choose and act. The changes in the theatrical landscape are themselves a part of a wider social and cultural transformation that not only produced new plays but created a climate in which many of the traditional assumptions about the way theatre was made were challenged.

Drama, which had suffered a set-back during the Victorian age, was revived with a double force in the twentieth century. Many dramatists belonging to different schools have come forward with a rich harvest of dramas and many new trends have been introduced into modern drama:

The theatre may always be in movement and the playhouse of any one day may be markedly different from the playhouse of any yesterday; at the same time, if the playhouse is thus organic, it shares the qualities of other organisms, so that the present conditions can often be explained and diagnosed by reference to what has now outwardly passed by and altered shape. (Nicoll 323)

This quotation from Allardyce Nicoll should clarify why I have attempted to make a few comments on the thirties, forties and fifties before proceeding to the sixties and seventies which are actually my areas of interest. If we examine the new movement which seized the theatres from the mid-fifties onward, in relation to the twentieth-century as a whole, we can see that in effect it takes shape as a kind of condensed and accelerated repetition of a more long-drawn out movement from 1900 to 1930.

The thirties were marked by three general styles of play—the relics of old realistic social drama, the various experiments in more imaginative style like the plays written by Priestly, and the sudden advent of new poetic drama signaled by the appearance of *Murder in the Cathedral*. It is precisely these three forms which characterize the drama of the decade 1945 to 1955. Despite the incidence of war, the dramatists in the years immediately following 1945 carried on, as it were, from where they left off. The war years did not in reality create any essential chasm between pre-war and post-war drama. Although the black-outs and bombing interfered with the activities of the theatres, the performances that were given in these theatres did not differ from those presented before 1939. Several dramatists continued to write plays which in style and content pursued paths which had previously been taken. Thus it might be said that the war had no immediate and direct effect on the general playwriting trends which had been established during the thirties.

Topical subject-matter dealing with air-raids and concerned with problems of evacuation certainly and understandably came into being but only the subject-matter was different, not the style or basic approach. Realism was a strong form in the interwar period. The wish to see ordinary life on the stage was the great

potent drive behind realism. But its major limitation was its narrow range of subjects and social interest. Subjects were always taken from middle class life and there was a marked shortage of plays that explore the interests and problems of the working class.

The change that came over the British theatre in the late 1950's was seen initially as social in character and potentially political in consequence, for upto then the working class had been absent as a force from the English drama. In the 1950's the working class appeared in a more dignified and significant form; they had at last penetrated English theatre as subject and artist. This change triggered off a new phase in drama—subject attitudes and above all, writers themselves were no longer being drawn from the narrow social stratum which had, in England, traditionally dictated the nature of social action. New writers whose experiences were profoundly different and whose subjects and methods were therefore likely to be equally new had emerged. By the 1950's, the impact of the "postwar boom" (Wandor 7) was being felt. The campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the university based New Left both of which formed during this period, reflected a political concern for more than material improvement. In different ways the theatre sought to represent the experiences and interests of groups of oppressed and exploited people whose lives, emotions and hopes

they felt had not been adequately represented. The emergence of the young working-class writers presented the appearance of a social and artistic revolution.

In one sense, the playwrights of the late 1950's were conservative. Their plays were "more often a wistful regret at lost opportunity, a bitter despair at the inability of their own age to generate myths with the same compelling quality as those of the past" (Bigsby 20). The revival of social realism when it came in the late 1950's, was a response to a more fundamental sense of unease. It expressed not merely the conviction that power and control were slipping away but the belief that no one was exerting control, and no one could. Beckett's clowns, Osborne's music hall entertainer and Pinter's caretaker are not simply images of a society which has lost all purpose and direction. They are images of a world in which the idea of identity and individuality are themselves ironic. "The fascination of *Look Back in Anger* (1956) lay precisely in the fact that the anger of the play was only ostensibly a class anger" (Bigsby 21). Its chief characteristic was that it was unfocussed. The discontent, misdirected into physical violence was in fact, a profound dissatisfaction which sought a target, and reached for a language which could give it shape. Jimmy Porter was angered not with the injustice of his society but with the vacuousness of

his own life. His anger was his attempt to simulate life, his violent language, an effort to insist on his existence. What Osborne responded to was a system in a state of collapse—an image which he successfully elaborates in *The Entertainer* (1957).

Disruption, decay and disintegration were the dominant images of the 1960's and 1970's alike. These images were not without basis. Industrial production had decreased, unemployment had risen steadily and under the pressure of these economic realities, the political parties lost their ideological distinctiveness. The Labour Party returned to power and devoted its energy to sustaining a system to which, in theory it was unalterably opposed, using methods distinguishable from those employed by conservative governments. The early work of Osborne, Wesker and so on was useful in enabling British theatre to catch up to issues of, for instance, political importance, which it had skilfully managed to avoid until then. Arden, for instance was able to draw on some aspects of Brechtian techniques and "couple them with a powerful sense of indigenous language and incident" (Yarrow & Frost 228) in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959). This left the writers of the 1960's and after in a position to come to terms with other kinds of development which had also occurred in European Theatre. There is, in the later work of Osborne, Pinter, Arden, Bond, Brenton, Hare, Stoppard and others,

an awareness of the Epic and Absurd Theatre and skilfull use of many techniques for shocking and involving and challenging audiences. Some of the major plays are Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958), Bond's *Saved* and *Lear* and Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Jumpers*. The social nature of theatre is seized upon as a justification for engaging realities which surface in a social form but which are rooted in a sense of dislocation and presented as a product of modernity. So the dominant images of these playwrights tend to be those of disintegration. The landmarks in contemporary English drama have been more like landmines, shattering conventional expectations, with a whole new configuration of subjects and themes emerging on the stage each time after the dust of public outrage settled. What *Look Back in Anger* had done for the fifties, *Saved* did for the sixties.

For Bond, as for many of the younger committed playwrights, it was not possible to conceive of an art insulated from social experience and from the inner life of the writer. If art is to be "a living organism" (qtd. in Bigsby 28), it must be co-existent with the life which it proposes to describe and which it is dedicated to transform. But there was indeed a profound doubt about the function and morality of art (Stoppard's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, 1978). The writer fears that he may be an accomplice to

a process of manipulation which is seen in the outside world—a product of economic or class injustice. Even Bond's plays allow for greater ambiguity than do his *Prefaces*, an admission of the failure of art to convey a political analysis. Personal dislocation can be explained in terms of social or spiritual deprivation (Bond's *Saved*) or psychological pressure. What Bond has written in *Saved* is a brutal, comic and sad account of life in London streets and parks where he was raised. The spirit of the English drama, by and large was concerned with elaborating a deviation from the normal state, of English society, with identifying the collapse of social and moral forms and the dislocation of language. For many younger writers this was primarily a symptom of capitalist society—an inevitable stage in an historical development which would lead towards a redemptive socialist future. For others, it was a more profound collapse of personal and public meaning, consequent upon the growth of consumerism and the loss of social responsibility. For Stoppard indeed, the latter process is seen at its most chilling precisely in those socialist countries for whom the voice of the artist is likely to be the first to be silenced if it chooses to appeal to models of private and social morality. Either way, the theatre is seen as an ethical instrument.

The world which they picture is under extreme pressure. There

is no space for moral values to operate. Nonetheless, an urgent necessity for a moralized existence is implied in everything they write. Indeed the act of writing itself is offered as a desperate and tentative but urgent attempt to arrest further decay. Articulate, frequently witty, the theatre of the 1960's and 1970's reflected more directly than fiction or novel, the writer's doubts not only about his society, in a state of genuine crisis but about the function of art and the nature and power of language. The role of the writer, presumed to be so completely a product of the social and cultural system which he observes but with which he is nonetheless in unceasing conflict was also vague.

Bertolt Brecht influenced many British playwrights but his direct influence was greater in that the Epic Theatre provided a constructive alternative to the well-made play. Brecht's Epic Theatre is a rational form of theatre aiming not at a passive audience but at their critical awareness of what is happening on the stage and at their ability to transfer the fictitious reality of life to the social reality of their everyday lives. Bond too conceives of his works:

as manifestations of a rational theatre confronting the spectators with an analytical insight into modern society and making them aware in which way they

themselves are oppressed by and at the same time  
part of the alienating mechanism of this society.  
(qtd. in Zapf 352)

But whereas Brecht's Epic Theatre is a form of meta-theatre, Bond's theatre, though informed with the philosophy of Epic drama, still relies on the immediate force of dramatic presentation. I intend to delve more deeply into this comparison when dealing with Bond's theatre in this chapter itself.

While the alienation effect in the Brechtian theatre is intended to activate the audience's critical and intellectual attitude, the Theatre of the Absurd speaks at a deeper level of the audience's mind. Eva Metman observes in her remarkable essay "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays":

In contemporary drama, a new, third orientation is crystallizing in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers are projected but alone with them. This new form of drama forces the audience out of its familiar orientation. It creates a vacuum between the play and the audience so that the latter is compelled to experience something itself, be it a reawakening of the awareness of archetypal

powers or a reorientation of the ego or both. . . (43).

Speaking on the difference between the Brechtian Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin says:

The Brechtian theatre intent on making the stage a platform for social research and experimentation had developed a valid new vocabulary for presenting the external reality of our world efficiently; the Absurdist on the other hand developed a vocabulary and a stage convention capable of putting onto the stage an internal psychological reality, an inscape of the mind. (432)

The Theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with telling a story in order to communicate some moral or social lesson as is the aim of Brecht's narrative Epic Theatre. To give one example: things happen in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, but these happenings do not constitute a plot or a story, they are an image of Beckett's intuition that nothing really ever happens in man's existence.

The playwrights of the post-Brechtian and post-Absurdist era have at their disposal, a uniquely enriched vocabulary of dramatic technique. Along with those bequeathed to them by other dramatists they can use them in an infinite variety of combinations. The plays of the dramatists who emerged after the 1950's show that they

are not entirely free from the influences of the Theatre of the Absurd as also from the theories or practice of Brecht. The works of a major playwright like John Arden show traces of Brechtian and Absurdist elements. A similar merging of Epic and Absurdist elements can also be seen in the plays of Edward Bond. His *Lear* (1971) has the epic sweep of a Brechtian parable play but the treatment of Lear's madness through the materialization of his thought in the figure of the dead boy who accompanies him has all the hallmarks of an Absurdist approach. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) uses structural elements of *Waiting for Godot*. The major techniques introduced by Absurdist are still being incorporated in modern plays and post-modern plays.

### Terrorism in modern drama

Terrorism is almost impossible to define. In general terms it is violent action intended for public effect and directed usually against members or institutions of the state. Often its intention is to not only hurt key victims but also those who support them. It is often used to create a climate of fear in which people are powerless to act. Terrorist outrages may be directed even at those who are guilty only by association, who have co-operated with those the terrorists define as their enemies. Terrorists believe that it is the circumstance that make one guilty or innocent and hence, to

them, innocence is purely relative. The theatre has taken due note of the almost theatrical nature of terrorism in the contemporary world and made it the major theme in contemporary drama. Acts of violence are staged either to frighten, intimidate or provoke the audience and ensure that the act itself will not be ignored.

The roots of modern drama dealing with terror are to be found in the plays of Marlowe and of Shakespeare. Marlowe was fascinated by the terrorist mentality seen in ruthlessly ambitious individuals. His *Tamburlaine* was and still is shocking in its unmasking of state power. Shakespeare's early history plays often provided a model for modern playwrights like Brecht (*Mother Courage*) in their portrayal of terrorism. The theatre of terror is neither a unified form nor is terror, a separate theme. It can be found in German Expressionism, in Brechtian Epic tragedy, in the theatre of even Beckett (*Endgame*) and Pinter (*The Birthday Party*), in the ritual extravagances of Genet (*The Death Watch*) and Soyinka (*The Road*) the melodrama of Sam Shephard (*Curse of the Starving Class*), Trevor Griffiths (*Comedians*) and in the new political theatre of Edward Bond. To the Brechtian tradition of the V-effect which forces the spectator to judgment through the unexpected altering of circumstances, Bond adds the "agro-effects" (qtd. in Hirst 133) of *Lear* which forces the spectators to wake up to the happenings

around them through unexpected forms of violence.

I now proceed to tentatively examine the particular theatre of Bond and Stoppard, their techniques and the writers who have influenced them.

### Bond's rational theatre

Edward Bond is without doubt, a significant playwright of an active and innovative period in modern British theatre. Bond's stylistic diversity testifies to the technical alternatives opened up for British playwrights by the work of Beckett, Artaud and Brecht. Perhaps the most technically ambitious of the contemporary British playwrights, Bond has managed to create a distinctive voice in the theatre. He calls his theatre "rational theatre" primarily in order to distinguish his own literary practice from that of his contemporaries. Bond is essentially a revolutionary. He wants to change the world and employs the most effective theatrical media to do so. His protest, like that of Arden and Wesker is strictly social and political. Initially, Bond was subjected to the most violent storm of protest and denigration aimed at any modern playwright since Ibsen. The cruelty and violence that are typical of his plays have drawn more reproof than admiration. A reputable critic, J.C. Trewin of the *Illustrated London News* admitted after seeing

Bond's *Saved* (1965) "it contains perhaps the most horrid scene in contemporary literature" (qtd. in Scharine 18). When *Narrow Road to the Deep North* was presented in New York in 1968, George Oppenheimer of *News day* commented: "Mr Bond is the author of *Saved* in which a baby is stoned to death. This time he has given us a play in which the audience is bored to death" (24). The morbid violence in Bond's plays points to the necessity of having to do away with the institutional violence that causes it.

There are no drawing rooms in the plays of Edward Bond and if there were chandeliers on display, they would only be used as ironic, utilitarian vehicles from which grossly offending members from the ruling class would be hanged in full view of the audience. No other British playwright seems to be so possessed, obsessed by violence. In a discussion published in *New Theatre Magazine*, with John Willet, Ronald Bryden, Frank Marcus and David Storey at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature, Bond said:

Violence has always been a human problem; but now its become a technical and scientific problem. This is the important thing. People could always be cruel to each other; but now there exists the possibility of a total cruelty. Because of our technological advance,

we are confronted with something which really does demand an answer. (10)

His plays explore and investigate the nature of human behaviour in societies which like our own, inhibit and destroy natural human responses and turn people against each other. His main argument has always been that change is necessary and possible.

Bond, through his plays demonstrates that a new theatre is forming round us—a theatre of acting rather than analysis. For instance, *Lear* is woven around the image of the Grave-digger's Boy. Bond himself admits in an interview in the *Theatre Quarterly*:

*Lear* grew out of the image of the Gravedigger's Boy and others have begun from phrases or sentences which seem to have some sort of curious atmosphere about them that one wants to explore and open up.  
(7)

To point out another instance, in the same interview, Bond, when questioned about his next play, said: "I really don't know very much about it. It's just called *Two storms* I know its background — the sea" (7).

Bond goes on to elaborate that when he was taken to a

photographer's studio which overlooked the sea, as a young boy, he was told of how a man had drowned when a ship sank in the sea. The man died while trying to pull off his jersey and swim. His hands were stretched upwards caught in the jersey. Bond says he just couldn't sit down after he had heard the story and began thinking of writing a play around these two images for years (7). It materialised as *The Sea*, Bond's "most complete exercise in tragicomedy" (Hirst 115).

Bond is a very conscious moralist and has much in common with the writers in Epic mode. For Bond, playwriting is an unquestionable moral activity. He states that his aim is to tell the truth. "Theatre", he argues, "must talk of the causes of human misery and the sources of human strength" (qtd. in Hirst 127). Such a theatre is Epic because it sees beyond individual psychological issues, social and political truths. According to Bond, the writer's task is to destroy an ideology which society mistakenly revere. Hirst says that Bond uses whatever theatrical tools are available "to chip away at encrusted beliefs and topple unjustly revered images" (161). Bond does not write about violence but about the effects of a violent environment. An interviewer of *Theatre Quarterly* once asked Bond how he set out to make an audience respond to violence as he intended. Bond replied:

Well, I don't think my plays really are violent, though

*Early Morning* might be an exception. They have moments of violence, which are usually set in an atmosphere that is quite different—the dismembered body of Shogo appearing at the end of *Narrow Road to the Deep North* for instance, which isn't a violent play. It is not even about violence—it is about the kind of situation in which violence occurs. Even in *Saved*, where they talk very aggressively, it's really a joke. They never take violence seriously, nobody in the play takes violence seriously. Violence happens there in the way that it happens to an audience. (10)

Two distinctions about Bond's theatre become evident from his reply to the interviewer—the first is the one he himself draws between the play about violence and the play about the situation in which the violence occurs. The second is that the audience is forced to recognize that what is happening on stage is something that belongs to the audience and their world. Whatever happens there, is precisely what the audience experiences. Bond here, makes an important distinction between himself and those writers who use theatrical violence to outrage the audience. He assumes that he is like the audience and that his concerns are the same. In the *Theatre Quarterly* interview published in *New Theatre Voices of*

*the Seventies*, Bond has said: "I am a typical member of my society and so my problems are the problems that everybody else must solve if they're not going to die, or be killed or be very unhappy."  
(33)

While a playwright like Trevor Griffiths, addresses himself more to the particular problems of how precisely to make a revolution, Bond's plays tend to be set at such moments in their character's lives when they are not sure whether change is necessary and if it is, how to go about it. The plays project concern with how the conditions—personal and social—for change are arrived at. All his plays therefore deal in some way with the politics of learning and education. Bond's own experience of the educational system was uninspiring. He left school at fifteen. He declared once that schools are like prisons and that there was not really much difference between state prisons and state schools. Bond mistrusts formal education because it is authoritarian. He seems to agree with the opinion of the critic, William Walsh, that education begins with the particular, goes on to theory and concludes again in a heightened sense of the particular. This three-part structure occurs in Bond's own description of *Lear* in the *Preface*:

Act one shows a world dominated by myth. Act two shows the clash between myth and reality. Act three

shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove  
real by dying in it. (xiv)

*Lear* is thus a play about political education. It is in the gradual realisation that his actions have consequences for him and for others that Lear's learning takes place. His tragedy is that he realises this too late. We can hardly disclaim the play's atrocities, which include not only Lear's blinding but a scene in which Bodice destroys the ear drums of a tongueless captive with her knitting needle while Fontanelle screeches: "kill his hands! kill his feet . . . I want to sit on his lungs" (14). Bond wants us to identify the covert violence that is institutionalised in the society. *Lear* marks particularly the movement towards the possibilities of action in order to change society and advances the debate regarding revolutionary activity by violent means. He is the first of Bond's central figures to take practical action in a play other than theorising about it. *Lear's* companion piece *The Sea* unlike *Lear* which is concerned with the difficulty of changing the world, celebrates the courage and strength of people faced with such difficulties. The play does not offer strategies but it does indicate powerfully Bond's optimistic faith in the capacities of men to remake the world and to pursue solutions.

If Pinter exposed the sadism inherent in supposedly

compassionate institutions, Bond savagely indicted modern technocratic society for its violations of human dignity and its incapacity to care. His plays incorporate Brechtian techniques of distance so that the audience not only feels the direct emotional shock of physical assault but is made to reflect upon its own implications. In *Lear* the shooting down of a worker by Lear at the very beginning of the play is delayed by the interruptions to Lear. Bond intended to build up suspense and tension in the audience. This is the first of many “aggro-effects” as he calls them, in the play. He explained the necessity for them in his reply to Peter Holland’s article in *Theatre Quarterly*:

Alienation is vulnerable to the audiences’ decision about it, sometimes it is necessary to emotionally commit the audience—which is why I have aggro-effects. Without this V-effect can deteriorate into an aesthetic style. Brecht then becomes ‘our Brecht’, in the same sloppy patriotic way that Shakespeare becomes ‘our Shakespeare’. I’ve seen good German audiences in the stalls chewing their chocolate in time to Brecht’s music—and they were most certainly not seeing the world in a new way. (qtd. in Hirst 133)

Brecht’s techniques in the Epic Theatre were a response to the

circumstances of a specific time and place—Germany and the rise of Fascism. For Bond, writing for a different era and a generation who appeared to accept violence with complacent calmness, the needs of the sixties and seventies were very different. Therefore, while acknowledging Brecht's influence, Bond sees his theatrical approach as outdated. According to Bond, for the audience "theatre involves the whole person. . . ideas are two dimensional. . . involvement on the stage is a three-dimensional process" (Innes 197). The active factor in his theatre is specifically the emotional third dimension — instinctive responses. The audience must become involved in the play's narration of events in such a way that the analysis becomes clear. Brecht and Bond, though of different generations are self-professed socialists and regard drama as a medium for expressing and communicating their political views. There are also similarities between the two in the thematic and formal conception of their plays. Their plays are situated in public or semi-public spheres, thus relating the private lives of individuals to the general life of society. Their plays are also similar in their loose, episodic structure, in the short often contrasting scenes, in the juxtaposition of farce and human suffering—all of which reflects a conscious deviation from the Aristotelian mode. Both playwrights also often take up classical, historical or mythological subjects and use them as ironic dramatic model for their anti-

classical interpretation of the modern world (eg. Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Bond's *The Sea*).

All of these parallels in dramatic intention and technique leave no doubt that Bond like many of his colleagues in Britain has, in an important way, been influenced by Brecht. It would however be a gross misunderstanding to regard Bond as a mere imitator of Brecht on the British stage. Brecht's Epic Theatre may be considered as a sort of meta-theatre where the spectator is always kept aware of the fictitious character of the dramatic performance. His "alienation effect" implies a certain relief always keeping the spectator as a reflective—critical observer above the fictional world. Whereas, the most prominent feature of Bond's plays which sharply distinguishes him from Brecht, is the conscious, even excessive use of violence as a kind of shock-therapy on the audience. In this, he is clearly indebted to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and thus to a theatre heavily drawing on psychological, emotional and sensual effects. Brecht and Artaud represent two opposing answers to the problem of alienation in modern drama — Brecht's is of a social nature whereas Artaud's is psychological. Brecht aims at the conscious, Artaud at the subconscious reactions of the spectator. Brecht focuses on man as a political being, Artaud focuses on man as an individual being.

Bond tries to combine these two extreme positions of the modern theatre and while he stands to gain dramatic power, he also runs the risk of the two intentions undermining each other: that his emotional shocks are not political enough to have a rational effect and that his political analysis is not rational enough to be really shocking. However it is Bond's style rather than his subject that produces a shock effect. The affinity between Bond's violence and the comic is central to the meaning especially of his early plays. Bond theatricalizes three comic contexts for violence: jokes, parody and humour. They are variations of the comic as analysed by Freud. According to Freud's theories of the comic, jokes release inhibitions and act as a safety valve for impulses that society normally forces people to repress. Rather than strike someone who irritates us, we make that person the butt of a joke; rather than engage in adultery, we make our desire the subject of a joke. Tendentious jokes thus release the inhibitions imposed on aggression and lust. They are substitutes for anti-social behaviour. In Bond's play however such jokes intensify violence, accompanying the situations in which violence occurs *The Pope's Wedding* relies primarily on jokes to depict the situations in which violence occurs. Jokes surround acts of violence. At times they indicate a character's inclination towards violence. In *The Pope's Wedding*, June makes this joke about

honeymooners:

JUNE. Well they goo this 'otel, see, an'they goo upstairs an 'the blok 'e say I'm just gooin' downstairs for a packet a fags, dear. . . So'e go downstairs an'she get undressed an' 'ops into bed on account a being shy, see an' suddenly there's this big bangin' on the door. . . A big bangin' on the door. . . A big bangin.' An' she shout out 'No need a knock dear, I ent afraid an' 'e say 'Yoo would be if you knew what I was knockin' on the door with'. (263)

Her joke reveals June's affinity with the young men and anticipates her participation in their stoning of Alen's shack.

Ready repartee, another joke technique reveals the violence of the individual who resents and cannot cope with the demands made by others. In *The Pope's Wedding*, Alen reproaches Pat for neglecting him and feels quite sure that her mother must be "turnin' in 'er grave" and Pat retorts, "I 'ope the exercise doo'er good" (260). Pat's repartee shows that she resents her duty to Alen and it allies with the gang of young men rather than with her husband, Scopey, who makes no jokes. The fact that Scopey does not joke sets him

apart from the others, perhaps to underline the magnitude of his despair and alienation. *Lear* and *The Sea* also rely upon both jokes and parody to present the causes and effects of violence.

*Lear* and *The Sea* move away from comic contexts to present alternatives to violence. In *Lear* the Fourth Prisoner's description of the blinding machine as not "an instrument of torture, but a scientific device" (63), is a joke. So too is his description of a strait-jacket as a driving coat and of the head-piece as a crown. They are very serious jokes told at the expense of the society Lear has helped to create. The audience is offered this humour eventhough actual laughter is held in check by what happens next. Bond, as a playwright intends to cause extreme moral discomfort. His plays are unusually disturbing because their comic contexts expose the conditions of violence, while the violent acts, like the blinding of Lear, prevent the audience from laughing those conditions away. The comic thus provides the most serious context in which violence can be portrayed. Indeed Bond's use of farcical comedy has to be seen as an extension of his images of violence. The treatment of Warrington in *Lear* is characteristic of such comedy:

FONTANELLE. Use the boot! (Soldier kicks him) Jump on him!  
(she pulls Soldier A) Jump on his head!

SOLDIER A. Lay off, lady, lay off! Oo's killin' 'im, me or you?

BODICE. (Knits) one plain, two purl, one plain.

FONTANELLE. Throw him up and drop him. I want to hear him drop . . .

BODICE. (to Soldier A) Down on your knees.

SOLDIER A. Me?

BODICE. Down! (Soldier kneels) Beg for his life.

SOLDIER A. If yer could see yer way to. 'E's a poor Ol' gent, lonely ol'gent, lonely ol' bugger . . .

BODICE. It's my duty to inform you —

SOLDIER A. Keep still! keep you eyes on madam when she talks t'yer.

BODICE. that your pardon has been refused . . . (she pokes the needles into Warrington's ears). I'll just jog these in and out a little. Doodee, doodee, doodee, doo. (14-15)

Both sisters are obviously mad and their behaviour is grimly comic. All the time Warrington is being mutilated to death. The result on the audience of such a juxtaposition is a heightened sense of outrage coupled with understanding. Bond has created an original dramatic medium which combines Epic Theatre and his own version

of tragicomedy. He has turned his back on the despair of the Absurdist which Pinter and Stoppard have explored in their creation of a type of existential comedy. Bond said in an interview with G. Loney:

I dislike the Theatre of the Absurd because I think its basically pessimistic—and therefore cynical theatre. Its ultimate effect is to destroy in people a confidence and their trust in themselves. If one could create in people a genuine confidence in their ability . . . that would encourage people to realize that they can find meaning in their lives and meaning in activities. That's why I call *The Sea* a comedy. (38)

In Bond's *Bingo* (1973), Shakespeare cries out at the end of the play: "Absurd! Absurd!" (133) and in these words Bond passes judgment not so much on the human condition as on Shakespeare himself and more generally on the Theatre of the Absurd—a theatre, as far as Bond was concerned, too pessimistic to be morally committed.

Bond is described at times as deliberately confusing, at others as overtly simplistic. At times he is daringly innovative and at others deeply conventional. Bond's passage from one theatre to another may have been responsible for his not being accepted as a writer

of great quality. It is to his images verbal and physical and to their precision that we should look for in the plays of Bond. Each of Bond's plays has a dominant image in the light of which all other actions must be considered. Alen's shack in *The Pope's Wedding* is central to the play because it serves as a comment on the life of the villagers stimulating their imaginations and exercising their conscience. In *Lear* the wall represents those social institutions built to protect men, that end by perpetuating themselves and destroying mankind. In *The Sea* the village and the sea signify, Death and Resurrection. One of Bond's greatest gifts as a playwright is his visual imagination. The opening scene of *The Sea* proves this. It is the most directly theatrical of all the openings to Bond's plays. At the start there is only the darkened empty stage and sounds of thunder and winds:

Beach.

Empty stage. Darkness and thunder. Wind roars, whines, crashes and screams over the water. Masses of water swell up, rattle and churn and crash back into the sea. Gravel and sand grind slowly. The earth trembles (1).

The assault intensifies in the course of the scene as "The Tempest grows louder" (1). The sounds, the empty stage, Willy's cries for

help, twice eclipsed by the noise of the water, serve to disorientate the audience. There is no fixed point of focus for the audience to look at and when finally Evans arrives, he is drunk. Two young men are struggling for their lives in the sea, yet what Evans does is to offer them a drink instead of saving them. The function is to shock and disturb and incidentally to make Willy's traumatic state throughout most of Act I seem convincing as a reaction not only to Colin's death but equally to the callousness and inhumanity he has encountered. Much has also been written about the cricket match in *The Pope's Wedding*.

*The Pope's Wedding* announces a view of theatre which Bond has developed consistently. In 1977 he wrote about the stage as:

an area that has the characteristics of society and doesn't merely represent it . . . I make a girl tell about the loss of her child while she is preparing the cooking or while she is working in a factory: it is necessary that she works, it's also necessary that she speaks honestly about her bereavement. Society does not regard her as an actress who can take ten minutes off for a dramatic solo. The situation must be made concrete in its social setting. I also make

people argue over money while they are cutting bread; we stop listening so much to their words, instead the way the bread is cut, the knife held, the crumbs collected — analyse the words for us. (qtd. in Hay 36)

These ideas run through all of Bond's plays and they account for some of the confused responses to many of the plays.

One aspect of Bond's theatre which distinguishes him most clearly from the plain realism of say, a dramatist like Wesker, is his use of language. The dialogue of his plays ranges from the naturalistic dialect of his working class characters to the poetic reflections of Shakespeare's, *Lear*, from the comic exaggeration of Mrs. Rafi in *The Sea* to the persuasive discourse of the terrorists. For Bond, language is a register of the character's social and class positions, as well as a tool for measuring their self-consciousness. While stressing the primacy of action, Bond reveals himself to be the master of theatre language. The impression of naturalism was the greatest triumph of Bond's early plays for they are naturalistic neither in setting nor in dialogue. The view of Bond as a naturalistic playwright rests, for example, on his handling of the East Anglican dialect in *The Pope's Wedding*. Wesker does not seem far off in scenes

like this one between Scopey and the old hermit, Alen, for whom he and his wife have accepted a curious responsibility:

SCOPEY. In the war they reekon yoo was flashin secrets a the jerries with a woolworth's torch. Yoo couldn't even light a cigaratte.

ALEN. Tobacco and drink are Satan's whores.

STOPEY. Yoo owd nut! I thought yoo 'ad them papers for keepin'. All you want 'em for's t' stare outside. Yoo owd fake!

ALLEN. No.

SCOPEY. All day!

ALEN. Don't row at 'me

SCOPEY. Don't you? . . .

ALEN. I ont said I—

SCOPEY. . . . Let's 'ear yoo! Goo on—talk! Drive!

ALEN. Stop !

SCOPEY. Talk!

ALEN. . . . I sing sometime.

SCOPEY. Sing?

ALEN. Sometime

SCOPEY. Allright—

ALEN. No

SCOPEY. Sing! what sort of singing, what sort a songs?

ALEN. Hymns

SCOPEY. Sing a hymn

ALEN. No

SCOPEY. Sing it! Sing it, By Chriss I'll rip this junk  
shop up if you don't sing! (79)

The sense of some terrible incident looming up gives this close, dry accumulation of detail a peculiar un-Wesker-like force. There is a feeling of mystery. We feel the frustration—partly caused by the inarticulacy—of a mind grouping to understand why things are as they are.

Bond recognizes that there are great strengths in working-class speech. It is emotionally honest and accurate, the most precise language for the character's feelings. Talking of the East Anglian accent Bond has said that he uses it "for its curious concrete feel and its repetitions" (Coult 89). He thinks it's like a sort of hammer knocking, but at the same time it can be very agile and witty. According to him, language should not be just words. It should be something that moves in the mouth and forces gestures and actions. The particular dialect that Bond makes use of can sound

natural even in the act of defining some darkly fantastic event like the blinding of Lear. His language has a peculiarly flat, dead-pan quality and an unexpected range. Bond can produce rhetoric of some grandeur when the feeling requires it, like, for instance, when Lear looks awestruck at the dead body of Fontanelle under the doctor's knife and says:

LEAR. She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child. The things are so beautiful. I am astonished. I have never seen anything so beautiful. If I had known she was so beautiful. . . . Her body was made by the hand of a child, so sure and nothing unclean. . . . If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I would have loved her. (59)

It is the relation between this austere rhetoric and the coarse, gritty ground it grows out of that seems to give Bond's language a special flavour. "Where speech fails, Bond resorts to gesture in order to demonstrate the unprecedented, which is inexpressible" (Opel 10). He generally achieves grotesque effects in this way. In *Lear*, Bodice attests her indifference towards the fate of other people by unflinchingly devoting her attention to her knitting during the council of war and during Warrington's torture. This symbolic gesture

of unconcern lets us sense her malice and debasement. Bond has the tendency now and then to utilize extreme exaggeration as the dominant element in a scene. For example in the last scene in *Lear* where the murder of the Gravedigger's Boy and the rape of Cordelia set inhuman forces free, speech, as such, is no longer capable of giving voice to such hideousness. In a single tableau the torments to which the victims will be subjected are united. The scene acquires a grotesque quality which ofcourse, does not veil the deadly seriousness of the dramatic events, on the contrary it actualises them to the point of intolerability. It must be acknowledged that Bond has a gift of scenic representation which unites a considerable range of images with an uncommon perception.

Raised in North London and the son of transplanted farm labourers, Bond was able to command lower-class speech so much so that he could manipulate it into poetry. His poetry is almost completely devoid of similie. Bond's characters express themselves in poetry. In a discussion with Wardle, Bond said:

I think my plays are poetry. You see this is what I dislike about the poetic drama that one gets now-a-days, it's added something to prose. Poetry is what you have left when you take the prose away. Poetry

is a simplified form of prose. And that's the other way round. You see, because most people try to make their prose clever poetically and I hate that. (34)

Moral passion is a great driving force behind his writing. In some ways he resembles Shaw in this respect. In all Bond's plays the characters moralize and talk in parables. Like Shaw, he uses prefaces and pamphlets to drive home prophetic warnings. He also allies himself with Shaw by continually drawing attention to the social optimism of his play. In *Lear*, for example, the movement is towards redemption. Lear dies in the act of working to undo the wall, symbol of all that he ought not to have done. But considering the images through which he expresses his passion, reveals his great distance from Shaw. Emotionally he seems to be closer to Osborne. Both put an un-Shavian emphasis on suffering and are concerned with characters who have an unusual capacity for feeling the pain of others. Their phrases and ideas could often be interchangeable. There are similarities in their love for metaphors too. Osborne believed that the English audience responded better to violent and poetic metaphors. But on Bond's stage metaphors are acted out in stunningly direct ways. "His imagination is one of the most impressive things in his art" (Worth 172).

Bond's arresting and disturbing imagery stands out in the precision of the stage images in relation to the themes of the plays. An example, is the cricket match in *The Pope's Wedding*. This scene shows the audience Scopley's moment of triumph which is important for the audience because his later move into fantasy is to be considered as his decline from strength. On another level, in *The Sea*, Hatch's frenzied cutting of yards of curtain material seems almost like an act of violence. But Bond links this action to Hatch's crushed spirit. Bond knows how to create unintrusive links between gesture and narrative form. Lear, stripped of his power, not only revels in animal metaphors and parables but also behaves like a caged animal, which runs against the bars and "writhes in the throes of his own impotency" (Opel 17). A play's opening scene is usually a good guide to the writer's skill and the opening scene of *Lear* shows with what economy and speed the character, location and society are conveyed. On the empty stage are seen a pile of building materials. Suddenly three workmen appear carrying a body, followed by a soldier. Then there is panic because someone seems to be coming and a tarpaulin is flung over the body. The lack of respect shown to the dead body, the presence of the soldier, the panic and the atmosphere of fear reveal an unjust, dangerous kind of society. Bond conveys all this information in just one page of the published script.

The bulk of Bond's plays are historically or geographically distanced from the present day English life. Bond believes that a dramatist concerned with addressing an audience's immediate situation need not always deal directly with the present. He says in the *Preface to The Bundle* (1978) that the past is also an institution owned by society. Our present social problems have a history. Bond re-presents and re-interprets aspects of historical and cultural heritage in order to create for his audience a usable past. Bond sees this as one of the primary functions of the artist. According to Bond, Greek and Shakespearean tragedy continue to provide cultural and artistic standards for contemporary audiences long after the plays have outlived their social usefulness. Shakespeare is a figure Bond can neither ignore nor accept wholeheartedly. He feels that Shakespeare's *King Lear* offers us an anatomy of human values which teach us how to survive in a corrupt world rather than show us how to act responsibly in order to change it. The issues Bond is concerned with can only be resolved in action outside the theatre. Therefore the incidents in his plays are always clarified by other incidents and not by any general principles. Thus a tendency towards uneven development can be seen in his plays. The central problem thus gets decentred. This affects both character development and plot construction. Bond thus succeeds in making his audience actively read rather than passively receive the message of the plays.

I would like to sum up Bond's theatre quoting Bond himself in an interview with David L. Hirst. Speaking of his position as a theatrical craftsman, he said:

I would like to feel there was some way in which you can dislodge segments of belief that people have so that the whole structure of their ideology is changed. Suppose there's a mosaic and I just move one piece. As a result of that every piece of the mosaics has to readjust itself. You can do that and end up with a different picture. That's a good approach to an audience. You might be knocking out corner stones. Ofcourse a whole mosaic can't be changed so easily. But you work at it because mosaic can be changed. This is a difficult experience for an audience and it should be an exciting experience. The audience should actually get a reward at the moment — but later they should get more. It should become part of the practice of their own life. (164-165)

## The Stoppardian theatre

One of the most interesting and exciting contemporary dramatists, Tom Stoppard is basically a comic writer. However his

plays have “tackled weighty subjects like the absence of logical pattern in the universe, the individual quest for freedom of expression in totalitarian countries, espionage and counter espionage” (Coraballis 1), and so on. Therefore a typical Stoppard play would be a mixture of well-structured comedy with conflicting points of view that mixes seriousness with farce and is filled with jokes and all kinds of word-play.

Perhaps it is the words one notices first in Stoppard. Later the sense of theatre, the craftsmanship etc. may seem more important. To Stoppard, language is an aspect of human life. He enjoys it and has a flair in it but at the same time, he warns us against over-estimating it. Stoppard has often been compared to Shaw. This is because, like Shaw's, Stoppard's plays are plays of ideas. Both writers allow their major characters a fair amount of ideas and dialogue in order to rebut each other's point of view. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have few problems with language though they meet with difficulty in almost everything else. They voice their perplexities fully, Guildenstern with eloquence and traces of philosophical training:

GUIL. It could have been—a bird out of season,  
dropping bright-feathered on my shoulder.

. . . It could have been a tongueless dwarf  
standing by the road to point the way . . .  
(20)

Rosencrantz, more colloquially but still with relative ease:

ROS. A man standing in his saddle in the half lit  
half alive dawn banged on the shutters and  
called two names. He was in just a hat and  
a cloak levitating in the grey plume of his own  
breath, but when he called, we came. That much  
is certain — we came . . . (28)

Only a passionate lover of word-play would have written the two  
lines in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which was to become  
the germ of *Jumpers*:

ROS. Shouldn't we be doing something-constructive?

GUIL. What did you have in mind? . . . A short,  
blunt human pyramid . . .? (30)

In *Jumpers*, George, in spite of considerable problems along the way,  
is allowed to voice with some grandeur his beliefs:

GEORGE. How does one know what it is one knows. I  
don't claim to know that God exists, I only

claim that he does without my knowing it and  
while I claim as much; indeed I cannot know  
and God knows I cannot. (Pause). (71)

Dotty too has moments of eloquence and often like George who is Stoppard's mouth-piece, her voice too tends to become Stoppard's rather than hers (Hunter 96). Similarly Stoppard often relishes rhetoric and expressive language. But he is more interested than most dramatists, in the fact of language itself. That language is exploitable as well as innocently misleading is abundantly demonstrated in Stoppard's plays. In *Jumpers* the exploiter is Archie. One of the reasons that *Artist Descending A Staircase* is the most accomplished radio play is its dialogue. The play allows each character a fair amount of argument and counter-argument. Stoppard is sometimes accused of being two dramatists imperfectly integrated—one, a jokesmith and prankster and the other a philosopher and metaphysician, yet even the word-play is evidence of an inquisitive mind, eager to investigate the logic or lack of logic, both of language and of life. Stoppard has said in an interview that his distinguishing mark is "an absolute lack of certainty about almost anything", that he writes plays because "dialogue is the most respectable way of contradicting myself" (Watts 12). One of the most effective rhetorical devices that Stoppard employs is deflation. As soon as a character

makes a statement, he undercuts himself or is undercut by another character. This shows that none of the characters can have the last say on any important matter. This adds to their perplexity. In an interview with A.C.H. Smith, Stoppard comments on his use of this technique:

My plays are actually constructed out of people deflating each other. I am a very hedgy sort of writer. What I think of as being my distinguishing mark is an absolute lack of certainty about almost anything. So I tend to write about oppositions, rather than heroes, don't I? and I don't feel certain enough about anything to put up a hero to say it for me. (qtd. in Hayman 40)

He puts to good use this technique in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. The following dialogue from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* would illustrate this:

ROS.       Keep out then! I forbid anyone to enter ! (No one comes. Breathing heavily) That's better. Immediately, behind him, a grand procession enters, principally, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius and Ophelia . . . (72)

Stoppard's imaginative diversity is perhaps the expression

of his continuing quest for elusive and probably provisional truths. Coraballis comments that C.W.E. Bigsby is certainly correct when he claims that Stoppard believes "in the primacy of words" and is therefore "an aesthetic reactionary" at odds with the avant-garde theatre which "is de-emphasizing language, stressing performance over text, preferring group composition to the insights of the individual author" (Coraballis 10). "Words, words. They are all we have got to go on", says Guildenstern in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (30). But this is not true because in Stoppard's plays vivid words are accompanied by vivid action. The action is always carefully contrived to supplement the text. So, the audience for a Stoppard play is likely to be straining its ears for submerged word-play and "feasting its eyes on zany spectacle" (Coraballis 10).

Stoppard's purpose in play writing is purely theatrical. "The most immediately striking quality of Stoppard's stagecraft is sheer nerve, a perpetration of theatrical outrage" (Hunter 36). The special distinction of Stoppard's theatre is in the juxtaposition or overlapping of disparate realities. His stage-craft shows a profound awareness of the possibilities of theatre, something more than just music, lighting and so on. He makes a particularly fine use of simultaneity or bewildering sequence. Stoppard explains in an interview in the

If the mixing-up of ideas in farce is a source of confusion, well, yes, god knows why I try to do it like that - presumably because I am like that. Plays are the people who write them. . . . My plays have a lot to do with the fact that I just don't know. (67)

This "**not knowing**" accounts for much of the excellence of Stoppard's work. Some of the quick shifts or overlapping levels are, as Stoppard points out in his interview, *Ambushes for the Audience*, part of his "leap frog" (63) of ideas. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the familiar action and dialogue of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the transitory reality of the theatre audience, each have to contend with the off stage- Hamlet/on stage-Stoppard existence of two attendant lords who belong to Shakespeare but speak Stoppard's language. According to Normand Berlin, Stoppard "forces us to question certain assumptions about a character in another dramatist's play and by extension about man in the play-writ-large called life" (271).

The long run of "heads" is a kind of epiphany which reveals an absurdist universe and foreshadows the unbreakable chain of events in the Hamlet pattern

which will catch up with Ros and Guil and sweep them along to their deaths. (Duncan 63)

Stoppard shows the difference between traditional art which imposes a pattern of life and life itself which is devoid of any pattern by juxtaposing the fates of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It is one of Stoppard's purposes to alienate the audience from *Hamlet* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* to show that they share the predicament and are victims of the same inscrutable, and inexorable fate. Although in many of his plays he advances the opinion that the universe is devoid of a logical pattern, his plays have a logical development and describe a logical pattern. Stoppard's economy of technique is such that "he chills us with Fate's whisper without a single line of exposition, without an elaborate setting of mood or of theme" (qtd. in Bareham 86).

The play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* begins with the two courtiers spinning coins in record-breaking succession. The atmosphere is tense with the impending crisis. The coin falls heads scores of times in succession. The technique reminds one of the tense, foreboding beginnings invoked by the witches of *Macbeth* or the ghost of *Hamlet* in Shakespeare's plays.

Stoppard seems to be most successful when he functions

as a critic of drama and when he allows the insights of the theatre to lead him to observations of life. Stoppard's art separates the world and the stage. He makes the audience not only observers and critics of the stage but also conscious that they are doing just that. Stoppard forces us to be conscious observers of a play frozen before us in order that it may be examined carefully. The play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* examines the way things are and intellectually confronts and theatricalizes the condition of man the player and the world as theatre. But the play makes no attempt to encourage the audience to change the way things are or take any kind of action as do Brecht's plays.

Although Stoppard sports with the technique of the Absurdist, his universe is not their mechanistic one. Stoppard, in an interview with Giles Gordon in the *Transatlantic Review* replied, when asked which writer influenced him the most:

It's not important to me, but I suppose it's interesting. Influences such as appear in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and any play of anybody else's, are I suppose admirations that have been unsuccessfully repressed or obscured. I don't mean consciously. But of the influences that have been invoked on my behalf,

and they have been Beckett, Kafka, Pirandello of course, I suppose, Beckett is the easiest one to make, yet the most deceptive. Most people who say Beckett, mean, *Waiting for Godot*. They haven't read his novels. For example, I can see a lot of Beckettian things in all my work, but they're not actually to do with the image of two lost souls waiting for something to happen, which is why most people connect *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* with *Waiting for Godot* because they had this scene in common. (23-24)

Beckett has had an enormous influence on Stoppard's drama, an influence which he has slyly acknowledged in a lovely pun, in the coda of *Jumpers*: "Wham, bam, thank you Sam" (89). While Stoppard's characters are similar to Beckett's, his dramatic structures seem to be based on principles shared by most playwrights of the Absurd. According to Ionesco, "the conventional plot in its predictability and resolution is a reassuring distortion of life, whose primary law is unpredictability" (Levenson 431-32). Stoppard's plays are all experimental in form and appear arbitrary, unpredictable and confusing. But each play is governed by a curious logic, an argument which examines possible solutions to a problem ultimately to reject them all and leave the problem unresolved.

Stoppard allows the plot of his plays to unfold in a seemingly uncontrolled manner because the characters have no control over their destinies. They are at the mercy of every situation. The lack of plot turns his plays from sentiment and melodrama. It works as an alienation effect, preventing the spectator from becoming too involved in the problems of any one character or in the cruel and depressing circumstances. It helps to keep the spectator alert to the intellectual fire works of the play serving to create a detached and extremely funny effect which is Stoppard's trademark. This should explain why he is very successful with parody. Stoppard is at his best with parody, when he plays with other people's ideas as in *Jumpers* or with plots such as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard's ideas are largely derivative but he performs theatrical feats in contemporary concepts.

According to Ronald Hayman, "one of the main features in the development of Stoppard's technique has been the refinement of his capacity for accommodating both halves of a contradiction and then making the sparks fly" (56). Hersh Zeifman says that his plays are "feasts of language" (204-5). Stoppard seems to be obsessed by puns. In *Jumpers* we have verbal puns in George's monologues. The pun is used rather like a jump-cut in a film, when George, having ignored Dotty's attempts to engage his attention

by shouting "Murder-Rape-Wolves"! (26), prematurely shoots the arrow from his bow when she shouts "Fire!" (28). There are visual puns of the charade game they play intermittently. Lying nude and apparently lifeless on the bed, Dotty is the 'Naked and the Dead', a vertical view of her naked back later prompts the guess—"Lulu's back!—in town" (43). The title word *Jumpers* also takes on many meanings. Stoppard makes use of puns not only to amuse but also as structural devices, as an integral part of a play's meaning. His characters make deliberate use of this doubleness of puns. In Stoppard's plays form invariably mirrors content and puns are a perfect way of conveying through language the dialectical structure of his plays. Two or more utterly different meanings are yoked violently together in a single word. By thus being an intrinsic part of his plays rather than just ornamentation, Stoppard's puns may be said to constitute a truly theatrical language in that they reveal what his plays are about.

At one level Stoppard's plays are amusing word games with wildly implausible and fantastic plots. But they also hint at the state of the society. Stoppard, who dislikes talking about his work has said that he is primarily an entertainer. Literary parody and allusions are constant elements in Stoppard's work. More than any playwright Stoppard thinks in theatrical terms. In *Jumpers*, the

play which stands as his most completely achieved stage work to date, everything knits together — stage-picture, dialogue, lighting, sound-effects and action. They combine to produce an ultra-theatrical game that matters deeply. During the writing of this play Stoppard realised how words, which he had always seen as sliding, ambiguous and confusing, can, because of these very inadequacies be deliberately used to deceive, persuade or undermine. *Jumpers* therefore marks the turning-point in Stoppard's career as he moves towards the political implications of words that ensnare. To propel his audience into a very different world from the real one, Stoppard begins with a daring and extravagantly theatrical flourish.

*Jumpers* explodes on the stage with a burst of flashing lights puzzling pyramids of gymnasts, an unsynchronized medley of moonsongs and the strip-tease of a secretary who is literally a quite daring woman on a flying trapeze. Suddenly a gun-shot tears one of the jumpers out of the pyramid and the party is over. We are plunged into a play which is, among other things, a murder mystery. The hyperbole of this opening assault prepares the audience to accept any event that may follow. The overt theatricality of the action and set-change forbids our settling into the Moore's apartment with a cosy sense of everyday life. This opening also establishes a bond of confusion between ourselves and the Moores. One of

Stoppard's more extraordinary abilities is to render through grotesque comedy, real pain and a yearning for the good. The pain in *Jumpers* is almost pervasive, the laughter rarely at ease. It is hardly too much to say that Dotty and George are both in misery throughout the play, and the ludicrousness of their circumstances especially in the deaths of Thumper and Pat, rob their wretchedness of the dignity and consolation of tragedy. Archie's glittering smile over all this is the ultimate bitterness.

The inter-play between stereotype, and betrayal can be used to define Stoppard's plays. It explains their parodic structure. Optical illusions underlie many of his plots and it determines his character's existence as doubles, secondaries and so on. "What I like to do", Stoppard once said, "is to take a stereotype and betray it" (Redmond 237). Stoppard admits that he admires stereotypes and naive generalisations because of their inherent truth. He believes there is a connection between easy stereotype and truth, that in fact the real thing is a stereotype. This is one reason why in Stoppard's plays the extraordinary tends to turn into the mundane. Stoppard's characters are stereotypes. They are poor imitations like Rosencratz and Guildenstern, doubles like a philosopher called Moore or substitutes like the second-string critic Moon in *The Real Inspector Hound*. Stoppard sees man and his predicament as stereotypical

so that there is nothing but stereotypes in his vision of the world. Another reason for his love of stereotypes is that he feels he can betray them and shock the audience into seeing the falseness of accepted notions. In his own favourite term, Stoppard likes to create an "ambush" (62). His plays are a series of surprise attacks on both audience and characters. Always in a mad rush to reach a conclusion, and preserve his dignity, Stoppard's betrayed stereotype succeeds only in aggravating the situation. Constantly mortified, he yet carries on bravely until he pays for it with his very life.

There is no point of rest in Stoppard's world. A permanent frustration is the result when one is not able to perceive the images of an optical illusion simultaneously or see any of them exclusively. George Moore, in *Jumpers* opens the bedroom door and finds Sir Archibald Jumper kneeling before his wife and kissing her hand. He may see them playing a charade or he may see Archie serving in his capacity as either Dotty's doctor, psychiatrist or legal advisor, since she is suffering from nervous breakdown. The Stoppard hero thus becomes a 'victim of perspective' (Jenkins 50). To set up a structure with one expected outcome and surprise us with another or opposite outcome is a classic process. It is like the fun of a maze and we laugh at our own discomfiture. In *Artist Descending A Staircase*, we are repeatedly duped. All Stoppard's theatrical

surprises might be included here. As in *Jumpers* the plot pivots around the mystery of a death which is explained only at the end. Once again Stoppard makes use of mystery not merely to generate theatrical suspense but to show that experience is inseparable from interpretation and that interpretations are liable to be grotesquely inaccurate. Stoppard starts the play with an ambiguous tape-recording which will be used by Martello and Beauchamp to reconstruct Donner's death. Against the background of snore-like buzzing, we hear stealthy foot-steps and a creaking board. Both sounds stop before Donner is heard saying "Ah! There you are" (113). Two quick steps are followed by a thump, a cry and the noises he makes as he falls through the balustrade to land at the bottom of the stairs. According to Beauchamp he must have been woken up by Martello, who must have murdered him. Martello, who knows he hasn't, assumes Beauchamp to be the murderer. It is natural for the audience to begin by assuming that one of them is telling the truth. But it is revealed in the end that Donner was not asleep, that the first noise was not a snore, but the buzzing of a fly, that the footsteps were Donner's, that the words were addressed to the fly, that the thump was made by his attempt to swat it and that he lost his balance. Stoppard's intricate design pivots around the ambiguity of a sound effect. The audience becomes curious about the steady cuts back into the past and then forward

again in the play, because they are eager to find out a motive for Donner's death. At the end of *Jumpers* too, we are rocked back on our heels by several upsets, comic, but in each case also ironic or painful.

The most immediately striking quality of Stoppard's stagecraft is sheer nerve, a perpetration of theatrical outrage. *Jumpers* opens with a singing act which immediately fails, followed by a circus strip-tease act which collides with a realistic-looking drinks-waiter, next a circus acrobatic act is interrupted by a man in flannels and jacket who is writing a philosophical lecture. It continues into a chaotic mixture of songs accompanying a pyramid of acrobats, one of whom is suddenly shot. He dies, crawling pitifully upto the singer. The play continues with a television programme about a moon-landing, and we have finished only four pages of the book! The television screen is cleverly utilized to show captain Scott's boot in the face of his fellow space voyager as he attempts to reboard the spacecraft, Stoppard also gives a comic new vitality to stale examples, like the bow and arrow episode or the hare and tortoise one. He is skilled at making more than one use of a device. Stoppard's plays are also distinguished by remarkably untedious long speeches and sometimes solos. In Stoppard's world reality is not denied but rather infused with imagination. Our expectancies and romantic

ideals erode before our eyes.

What does have worth in Stoppard's work is survival. He focuses on the helplessness that each of us experience and provokes us to find a base from which we ourselves can cope, however temporarily. For Stoppard, creativity offers a mode of survival. He startles us into seeing our limitations as laughable. Literary parody and allusions are constant elements in Stoppard's work. One could say they are at the heart of his work. The glee that the audience have of recognizing a sidelong allusion is a pretty innocent pleasure. In Stoppard's plays the allusions are like instinctive casual jokes between friends with a common background. The subjects of Stoppard's theatre are familiar to much of contemporary literature. As with most of Stoppard's effects, here too, the prime aim is entertainment. During the interview, titled 'Ambushes for the Audience' when asked to comment on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard said:

What was actually calculated was to entertain a roomful of people with the situation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at Elsinore. The chief thing that added one line to another was that the combination should retain an audience's interest in the same way . . .

But my pre-occupation as a writer, which possibly betokens a degree of insecurity, takes the form of contriving to inject some sort of interest and colour in every line, rather than counting on the general situation having a general interest which will hold an audience. (62-63)

Like Pirandello, Stoppard tries to give extra-dramatic life to a group of already written characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. But he introduces elements of chance and spontaneity into a scene previously determined by an author. His object is to discover what happens to people whose lives are completely fixed and formalised, when they are allowed to meditate self-consciously upon their own pre-destination. In *Jumpers*, much of George's ruminating is effective parody of philosophical thinking. The British philosopher, A.J. Ayer has commented: "This is very fine parody and like all the best parodies could quite often be mistaken for the original" (16). Stoppard, through George's extended discourses, moves beyond the absurdist void. It is a positive step out of the disjointed world of playwrights such as Beckett and Ionesco. I would illustrate with an example:

GEORGE To ask 'Is God'? appears to presuppose a being

who perhaps isn't . . . and thus it is open to the same objection as the question, 'Does God exist'?. . . but until the difficulty is pointed out it does not have the same propensity to confuse language with meaning and to conjure up a God who may have any number of predicates including omniscience, perfection and four-wheel-drive but not, as it happens, existence. (24)

These speeches are not just parody, they are reflective of society at large. Dramatic absurdity and philosophical argument are tied together and the union reinforces the most crucial theme of the play: that mankind is not simply a passive victim in this world but can be an active participant. The play is a reaction against modern man's denial of all values and a reaffirmation of the belief that something within us makes us human, something which makes us believe in goodness and beauty. The difficulty of life on earth is now accepted. What matters here and in the plays to follow is how to live under those conditions. Stoppard dispenses with the limitations of human activity, taking a bold step in moving beyond absurdity and begins to confront world issues directly. Stoppard's work is beloved by those "for whom theatre is an end

and not a means, diversionary and not central, not a modifier of the status quo, a soother of worried minds and not an irritant" (Roberts 91). His plays assure the reactionary that theatre was and is what they always trusted it was—anaesthetising.

Theatre is not the examination of static scripts. It is the creation and re-creation of dramatic scores on a living stage. Both Stoppard and Bond believe this and have been lucky enough to enjoy significant productions in major theatres or by major companies. Though their theatrical techniques are conspicuous and different from each other's they do share certain aspects in common. One such similarity is in their interest in the Shakespearean text. Although Artaud recognized that the theatrical revolution which he advocated was necessarily dependant on a change in social order, his work lacks the political motivation found in much of the plays of Brecht. Yet there is an affinity in their belief that Shakespearean drama has ceased to retain its Elizabethan force. Brecht wished to break down the audience's expectations of classic drama in order to rescue them from decadent empathetic responses. Brecht has said:

. . . our enjoyment of the theatre must have become weaker than that of the ancients; even if our way

of living together is still sufficiently like theirs for it to be felt at all. We group the new works by a comparatively new method — empathy — on which they rely little. Thus the greater part of our enjoyment is drawn from other sources than those which our predecessors were able to exploit fully. . . . Our theatres no longer have either the capacity or the wish to tell these stories, even the relatively recent ones of the great Shakespeare, at all clearly. . . . We are more and more disturbed to see how crudely and carelessly men's life together is represented and that not only in old works but also in contemporary ones constructed according to the old recipes. One whole way of appreciation is starting to get out of date. (qtd. in Scott 10)

It is this reaction which many dramatists have attempted to correct in one way or another. Bond reacts against the notion of a universal Shakespeare, a man for all time. For Bond, "Shakespeare is not for all time, and even in his own time he was in many ways already out of date" (*Preface* x). Bond creates in *Lear*, a socialist drama, specifically re-aligning the *King Lear* myth for the late twentieth century. Bond elaborates to G. Loney:

The reason I took *Lear* is that as a myth it seems central to peoples' experience. . . . It's fascinating play—I mean Shakespeare's play—and I felt that somehow I wasn't living in the real world until I dealt with that myth in my own terms. In other words Shakespeare's handling of that myth was no longer adequate for me, much as I admire that play. I think it's the greatest play written and it's the play I get the most out of. Nevertheless it doesn't work for me and in a sense I have to criticize it. (40)

Bond further clarifies in the same interview:

I think the job of art at the moment — especially the theatre — is not to reconcile people, but to disturb them, to puzzle them, to shake them out of their complacencies. (41)

Bond wants his audience to “escape from a mythology of the past, which often lives on as the culture of the present” (qtd. in Coult 28) and then be free to correct injustices: theatre therefore must commit itself to political reform if it is to be moral instead of being frivolous. The myth of *King Lear* haunted Bond most of all. For him, *Lear* epitomized all that was best and worst in western culture. Bond loved the old king for his insight but loathed him for failing

to act on it. He transformed Shakespeare's original into a Brechtian critique of contemporary culture. Bond's Lear learns as Shakespeare's does not, that to reform society, to build it into something more humane, one must acknowledge the loss of innocence and then act on that loss by tearing down the walls that separates men from other men, not merely suffer in guilty silence. It is clear that Bond has a bone to pick with Shakespeare, not Lear. What Bond criticise in Lear, he also criticizes in Shakespeare. As Lear was to kingship Shakespeare was to art—a man who had knowledge of social ills but chose to tolerate them by either remaining silent or turning inward to lament his own failure. For Bond, Shakespeare should be seen, therefore, in terms of his historical period.

On the other hand, Stoppard is happy to proclaim the Elizabethan's universality stating in a 1980 lecture published in the *International Shakespeare Association Occasional Paper*, that Shakespeare "calls spirits up from the vasty deep, spirits which manifest themselves into a paradigm of human emotion, action and expression and when he calls them up they come" (13). His *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, rather than re-aligning the *Hamlet* myth, forms instead a commentary in comedy on the play. This provides an interpretative perspective and sends the audience back to Shakespeare refreshed and ready to see his work anew.

Stoppard's reaction to *Hamlet* is one of sympathy for two of the characters sacrificed by the action. He looks at *Hamlet* from a comic point of view imaginatively questioning certain actions in the play—Is the death of Ros and Guil an unnecessary act of cruelty on the part of Hamlet? Stoppard says:

Hamlet's assumption that they (Ros and Guil) were privy to Claudius's plot is entirely gratuitous. As far as their involvement in Shakespeare's text is concerned, they are told very little about what is going on and much of what they are told isn't true. So I see them much more clearly as a couple of bewildered innocents than a couple of henchmen, which is the usual way they are depicted in productions of *Hamlet*. (qtd. in Brassel 38)

Stoppard opens his play with the motif of the tossing of the coins. This is a comic routine and alters the Shakespearean tragic genre. Unlike Bond's play, Stoppard's does not attempt to refashion the mythic elements of Shakespeare's play for a modern audience but rather provides the author's commentary on *Hamlet*. He creates a witty, technically brilliant extravaganza in its own right, a play indebted to others but existing in itself. Stoppard, despite the absurdly ludicrous nature of his drama works within the boundaries of

bourgeois theatre whereas Bond attacks them, trying to free his theatre from them. Bond argues:

The bourgeois theatre clings to psychological drama and so it can't deal with the major dramatic themes. *Hamlet's* soliloquy has withered into the senile monologue of *Krapp's last tape*. (qtd. in Bulman 61)

This in part explains why Bond felt compelled to revise *King Lear*—to rip it from bourgeois psychology and to address more clearly the moral issues it raises; to make it the public play that Bond thought it had the potential to become.

Both Bond and Stoppard have been immensely influenced by other writers. Just as Stoppard could not have written *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* without the example of Beckett, Bond could not have written any of his mature plays without the example of Brecht. It is true of course, that Bond was not directly influenced by Brecht, except in the sense that there was a generalized Brechtian influence in the air. An earlier influence was the English painter-poet-philosopher, William Blake. A number of direct references to Blake are found in Bond's work: the concept of his protagonists as innocent, the image of the caged robin in *Lear* etc. Fundamental to both artists is the fear that the worship of science and untempered

reason would lead to an abandonment of purely human sensory needs. In his time, Bond has seen Blake's fear manifested in mechanized warfare, industrialization and scientific experimentation. As for Stoppard, Beckett has exerted a most important influence for which Stoppard thanks him, as I mentioned earlier, at the end of *Jumpers* in his characteristically parodist way. Another important influence on Stoppard is T.S. Eliot. Critics have commented that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been wooed out from under the shadow of *Godot* by *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Stoppard declares:

There are certain things written in English which make me feel as a diabetic must feel when the insulin goes in. Prufrock and Beckett are the twin syringes of my diet, my arterial system. (qtd. in Hayman 7)

Stoppard himself has taken this further, stressing that, Beckett's influence came as much from his novel as *Godot*:

It's only too obvious that there's a sort of Godotesque element in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. I'm an enormous admirer of Beckett but if I have to look at my stuff objectively I'd say that the Beckett novels show as much as the plays. . . . There's an element of coincidence in what's usually called influence. One's

appetites and predilections are obviously unique. They overlap with those countless other people, one of whom — praise be God — is Samuel Beckett. (Hayman 7)

To Eliot and Beckett other names have also been added, Pirandello, Kafka, James Saunders, leading to a critical contest to decide the principal influence. However a recent critic Tim Brassel, writes: "Eliot seems to exert a special hold on Stoppard's imagination and the greatest influence derives from Prufrock" (66-67).

Contrary to Stoppard, Bond says, he does not believe in an *Endgame* or a *Waiting for Godot*. Bond's judgment of Beckett as quoted in the *Theatre Quarterly* is:

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 which 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 even have written them, and every reason why he should go and kill himself tomorrow.

(14)

Certain critics, however, feel that Bond in fact, learned much about theatrical technique—stage imagery and the movement between public and private worlds—from Beckett, especially in the early plays. Bond's borrowings from both Beckett and Brecht are mentioned by Ruby Cohn in *The Fabulous Theatre of Edward Bond*. Bond however discusses the Theatre of the Absurd in *Modern Drama*, in the context of his own choice of a Rational Theatre:

The form of the new theatre will be epic. This is often misunderstood, partly because the form is not yet sufficiently developed. An epic play tells a story and tells why it happened. This gives it a beginning, and middle and an end, joined together in a truthful way. The Theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with such things. It sees life as meaningless: it has a beginning and an end but no middle. The bourgeois theatre is concerned only with anecdotes: they have a middle but no beginning and end. (70)

It would be possible to plunder the history of literature, theatre and art and find echoes, influences and quotations in Edward Bond's plays. Certain names though such as Shakespeare, Chekov and Blake are unavoidable. It is Brecht's name, however, that occurs most frequently.

However no amount of comparison or analysis can actually capture the experience of good theatre and nothing can substitute for performance. Both playwrights make ample use of the semiotic practices of theatre. The term semiotic practice is used to designate all semiotic processes other than verbal practices which when considered from the point of view of language, are basically semantic practices. Bond and Stoppard make use of the trichotomy of sign functions suggested by the American logician and founding father of modern semiotic theory, C.S. Peirce. Peirce's highly suggestive trichotomy of signs — icon, index and symbol corresponds so effectively to our common sense perception of different signifying modes that it has received widespread and sometimes uncritical application in many fields, not least in theatre study.

The governing principle in iconic signs is similitude, the icon represents its object mainly by similarity between the sign-vehicle and the signified. Iconism is usually associated by commentators with visual signs where the similitude involved is most readily apparent. I would like to illustrate Stoppard's use of this device, with an example from *Jumpers*. George's Secretary sits on a swing hanging from the chandelier and swings into the spot light and then back into darkness. Each time she reappears she has taken off some clothing to the delight of the guests. Crouch, the porter

who has been hired to serve drinks does not see her and is not aware of her presence. Since the Secretary is of the party of the Logical Positivists, it is possible to interpret her actions as emblematic of their activities and their philosophy which does not adhere to or advocate any moral absolute but keeps swinging with every expediency. In the process of doing so, they degrade themselves with every move or attitude.

In Bond's *The Sea*, Colin drowns while unsuccessfully trying to remove his jersey so that he can swim. I quote from the play:

(The jersey is pulled up over the head and the arms, which are lifted up and bent at the elbows in the act of removing the jersey — so the jersey forms a hood, covering the head, neck and shoulders, arms and hands.) (40)

It is a classic figure of Bondian iconography — a crucifixion figure who is simultaneously a resurrection image. As in other Bond plays, it is not however the resurrection of the dead man's body that is important but the love he represented. Once his love is reborn between Rose and Willy, Colin has no purpose. The jersey in which he dies while trying to remove it represents the societal shell of which he was unable to free himself.

Indexical signs are casually connected with their objects. An index is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object.

. . . Pierce also includes in this category the pointing (index) finger — which relates to the pointed-to-object through physical contiguity — the rolling gait of the sailor, indicating his profession, a knock on the door which points to the presence of someone outside it.

(22)

Every aspect of the performance can be considered as in some sense indexical. The importance of the indexical sign-function is that it points out where the spectator should direct his notice. Lighting changes may serve to indicate or define the object of discourse in an indexical manner. Thus the darkness of the stage for a good part of Bond's *The Pope's Wedding* is not only a rejection of naturalism but also a way of showing the situation of the figures of the play. The limitation of the characters, the limited routine of their lives and their economic imprisonment are strongly expressed by the meagre amount of light available to most of the scenes. It spreads across both the village world and Alen's hut. It insists on the sameness of the two locations. The light may grow, according to Bond in the later scenes and this perhaps relates to the growing

relationship of Scopey and Alen. When Bond says, scene fifteen may be played in bright light it is because by then Scopey has attained Alen's status. Scene sixteen reverts to the darkness because although Scopey's curiosity is not satisfied, his attempts to change his world have failed. Alen, after all, had no secrets. Stoppard too, resorts to this device. In *Jumpers* the intermittent disappearance of Dotty's room ensures that the audience will focus primarily on George, awarding him a large proportion of their sympathies despite his muddle-headed inadequacy. At other times when we see both George and Dotty's rooms, we either understand more than George or owing to a previous black out, are for a moment more muddled than he is. The play's most elaborately deceptive moment takes its effect from a combination of lighting, dialogue, action and sound cues.

Coming to symbols, here, the relationship between sign-vehicles and signified is conventional and unmotivated; no similitude or physical connection exists between the two. Theatre performance as a whole is symbolic since it is only through convention that the spectator takes stage events as standing for something other than themselves. In Stoppard's *Jumpers* the astronaut's yellow uniform is a symbol of a cynical and manipulative pragmatism made concrete in the persons of Sir Archibald Jumper and the

Radical Liberals. "I have seen the future," says the Professor, McFee, "and its yellow" (80). Similarly in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* the game of coin-tossing is referred to frequently in the play. The fantastic run of 'heads' symbolizes life as a game in which one may lose suddenly and inexplicably. In Bond's *Lear*, the wall symbolizes the great crime of Lear's moral immaturity. Lear himself has been corrupted by the wall. Bond's Lear says: "I built this wall to keep our enemies out. . . . My wall will make you free" (3-4). The irony is obvious. The caged animal in Act II is also symbolic. The animal is Lear himself and as he implies by showing a mirror around, all other members of the society that he created. Society is the cage and the restrictions of social institutions are the bars.

In Bond's *The Sea*, the jersey similarly represents the societal shell of which he was unable to free himself, the symbol that completes the crucifixion image which I mentioned earlier. The sea therefore symbolizes both death and resurrection. It also represents nature, turbulent, unstructured and uncontrollable. The village in *The Sea* represents society. The sea kills but it is also a symbol of re-birth. The village constricts and manipulates preventing growth. Bond assures us that *The Sea* can be interpreted optimistically, the image of the sea, usually a negative image, should be read as a symbol of hope. He develops our attitude to it by associating it with characters

and actions we come to approve and opposing to it characters and actions we come to disapprove. Whereas Evans, Willy and Rose are comfortable with the sea, the manipulative characters like Hatch, Hollarcut and Mrs.Rafi prefer the land. The dichotomy between land and sea provides much of the tension in the play and comes to an ironic climax in scene seven.

In dramatic discourse co-referential rules are in part responsible for the semantic and pragmatic coherence of the dialogue. Absurdist drama makes considerable play with this rule. But the flagrant contravention of such rules is a frequent source of comic business as when two speakers believe themselves to be referring to a single object while the audience is aware that there are distinct referents in the play. A good instance occurs in Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*, when, two distinct happenings, a noisy party and a murder committed during it, come to form what is apparently a single point of reference in Inspector Bones interrogation of the witness and possible culprit, George:

BONES. Well, your wife says you can explain everything and you say you are wholly responsible, but —

GEORGE. Are you still going on about that? — for

goodness, I just lost my temper for a moment,  
that's all, and took matters into my own hands.

BONES. Because of the noise!

GEORGE. Exactly.

BONES. Don't you think it was a bit extreme?

GEORGE. Yes, Yes, I suppose it was a bit.

BONES. Won't wash, Wilfred. I believe you are trying  
to shield her.

GEORGE. Shield who?

BONES. It's quite understandable. Is there a man who  
could stand aside when this fair creature is  
in trouble —

GEORGE. Aren't you getting a little carried away? The  
point is, surely, that I'm the householder and  
I must be held responsible for what happens  
in my house.

BONES. I don't think the burden of being a householder  
extends to responsibility for any crime com-  
mitted on the premises.

GEORGE. Crime? You call that a crime?

BONES. (With more heat): Well, what would you call it?

GEORGE. It was just a bit of fun! Where's your sense of humour, man! (59)

The confusion here is that Bones thinks that George is confessing to the murder while George believes that Bones is concerned with a complaining telephone call he made to the police. The confusion is aggravated by the fact— characteristic of co-reference — that the events and their agents are not specified but are indicated as 'that', 'it', 'her' etc. through that form of indexical reference known as anaphora. Anaphora, instead of pointing to the object directly picks up the referent of the antecedent word or expression. Writing about theatrical communication Elam Keir observes:

There exists, nevertheless a class of transactional (performer - spectator) conventions concerned with explicit definition of what is going on. . . . conventionalized presentational devices include the apologetic prologue and epilogue, the induction, the play-within-the play, the aside directed to the audience and other modes of direct address. (90)

Both Stoppard and Bond make use of these devices. In *The*

*Sea*, in scene four Bond switches back from the scene on the beach to the unnatural climate of the town. With imperious authority Mrs. Rafi presides over an event, which characteristically represents a triumph of art over life. The rehearsal is of a play on the subject of Orpheus and Eurydice, to be presented by her group of local ladies in aid of the coastguard fund. The irony that this play within the play is on a theme which contains strong correspondences with the remainder of the play cannot be ignored. We have only to substitute Colin, Rose and Willy for Orpheus, Eurydice and Pluto. This scene is one of the comic highlights of the play. It is a wicked parody of the worst kind of village hall amateur theatricals. With this device Bond places the two characters, who must remain in the foreground of the audience's mind, in a strong position downstage even though they have little direct part in the scene. They are Willy and Rose, who sit on the stage with their back to the audience, as spectators. This is a vital scene in terms of Willy's development as a character.

Stoppard's handling of the rehearsal by the Tragedians forms the centre-piece of the play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. In extending the play-within-the-play beyond the truncated version given by Shakespeare, Stoppard has turned it into a paraphrase of *Hamlet*. The players and the *Hamlet* cast intermingle often and

the mingling culminates in the closing moments of the play. Stoppard uses this play-within-the-play in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* to make tangible the forces threatening his protagonists. But a much more important function is to elucidate the basic clash between the real and the artificial on which the play depends. The Player and his band act the dumb-show called the Murder of Gonzago, in the play and extend the action in Absurdist fashion to include Hamlet's going to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, after substituting the letter. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern however fail to recognize themselves in the actors. In view of their own innocence and uninvolvedness in any malicious design against Hamlet, they cannot conceive that such a fate can be theirs. Even though on their way to England with Hamlet, the events follow the same pattern as in the dumb-show, they never relate to what is happening. The Player's death scene turns out to be a play-within-a-play (in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which is itself a play-within-a-play, of *Hamlet*). It looks real. But the jolt of recognition when we come to see that we have been taken in does not serve to convince us of the unreality of life but to throw into even starker relief the distinction between feigning and real life, between the connections of the stage and the condition of actual experience between that which we know to be and that which we know not to be. Of all the actions that a man might play, death is a final reality which

cannot be acted out.

A play may be an event rather than a text, but with a Stoppard play it may be necessary to turn back the page, as well as to view the event in order to arrive at an eventual understanding. Although Stoppard continues to affirm as he does in "Withdrawing with Style" that "the best art has more effect on our moral sensibilities" (41), his plays continue to reflect his reluctance to be over-explicit even if it means the audience never find out certain things about the way the plays reflect his beliefs. What Stoppard sees and what he offers his audience is a vision of human beings as moral and spiritual creatures who inhabit a cosmos which is both real and freighted with mystery. The theatre, above all art form, gives access to the most important and subtle and constructive ideas, because it is the medium that is at once most immediate and personal and yet most social.

I am winding up this chapter with Bond's views on plays which applies equally to Stoppard's:

I think perhaps one should write very simple plays — with a direct message — and also more complex plays that are an analysis, an investigation, a testing.

The stage seems an ideal place to do both these things. Firstly it can have great panache and wit. And, for the more complex work, you have a combination of things that the other arts can only use selectively. The human face is like a mobile canvas constantly re-arranging the image, the figure is like a mobile sculpture but it can be statuesque. Speech is a form of music, conveying much of what it says through tone and rhythm. So communication in theatre is very complex and subtle and intimate. (qtd. in Coult 96)

What is vitally important about Bond's work is its dogged and insistent glorying in humanity and its possibilities, says Tony Coult. Inseparable from that vision is a remarkable technical and artistic skill. Together, the two qualities offer indispensable visions for our dangerous and despairing times.

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## Chapter IV

### **Divergent Views — Convergent Motifs**

*What is important is not only a writer's honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him but also his attitudes to those big social and political issues . . . that are struggling for a new order, a new society, a more human future. . . . And ofcourse it depends on which side he is in these class struggles of his times. (Thiongo 74-75)*

The British plays in the eight years that followed *Look Back in Anger* (1956) was distinguished by two kinds of revolt: against the well-made plays technically, and emotionally against a bourgeois, capitalistic society. The prevailing atmosphere had changed from the mid fifties. The playwrights could write in the style of Brecht and no one would recoil. They could write Absurdist plays without being accused of meaninglessness. Social environment had changed, economic and political issues were aired. The well-made play gave way to Absurdist drama, Epic narrative and the Theatre of Cruelty.

Many of the writers and theatre workers who made an impact in the British theatre in the ten-year period from 1968 to 1978, were not just socially committed but committed to a socialist society. The significant British theatre of this period was primarily a theatre of political change. It had as its base a recognition of capitalism as an economic system which produces classes; that saw the betterment of human life for all in the abolition of classes and capitalism and considered the establishment of socialism as a step towards the realisation of the full potential of every individual human life. In short, it is socialist theatre. The writers of this period believed that the minds of people could be changed and their work was a contribution to that change.

1968 was a historic year which politicised a lot of people, so many events coincided on a global scale that it clearly marked the beginning of a period of political consciousness. To name a few important events, it was the year of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the year in which Martin Luther King and Kennedy were assassinated, the year that the Chinese Cultural Revolution was at its peak and it was the year that the Women's Liberation Movement attained significance. 1968 was the year in which theatre censorship was abolished by Act of Parliament and the year of student revolt on a large scale. For theatre, it was the radicalisation

of students which was most significant. It was the period when the "war babies" (Itzin) came of age. Young people could understand clearly the contradictions between what they had been educated to expect and the reality of the world around them. The response was disillusionment, despair, pessimism and anger. 1968 created a political consciousness not only in the new generation but it also had strong political influences on important writers of the previous generation — Arden, Bond, Wesker, Griffiths and so on — whose work had been political to varying degrees in its subject matter or orientation. They regarded themselves as political playwrights whose plays were censored for political reasons.

A political perspective explains the paradoxical position of Edward Bond. For a major twentieth-century playwright, he was scandalously under-produced in Britain. His early plays aroused a hostile critical reaction though later they too came to be acknowledged as classics. Bond's plays can be seen to be written from a socialist perspective. He himself came to acknowledge this. What he wrote was important but equally so was, when and why and its relation to other writers and their writings. The hostility to his early plays was probably due to the threatening, alienating and politically unacceptable quality of the plays.

While there was nothing so dramatic as a state of revolution in the seventies, there were radical attempts in dramaturgy to provoke the people. Just a few examples of the writers produced in the seventies would indicate the extent to which theatre was influenced by the emergence of political theatre. 1974 saw the production of Stoppard's *Travesties*. It was the first attempt made by one of Britain's wittiest writers into the literal arena of politics. Stoppard here, elaborated on his feelings about the failure of the Russian Revolution. He opted for human solidarity rather than class solidarity. Stoppard was concerned with freedom and freedom of speech. He took an oppositional stance to the then current left-wing views. He was congratulated for "hitting out at the materialistic view of the world and society which is the sacred cow of Bond, Planchon, Brecht" (qtd. in Itzin 186). He relegated politics to a secondary status acknowledging that he is more interested in the metaphysical condition of man rather than the social position, unlike Bond. Paul Delaney comments that: "Stoppard's vision is of man as a moral being, a being subject to a moral order which is not contingent on intellectual fashion or political expedience or ideological imperatives or national interest" (1).

In this chapter I wish to focus on the conflicting view-points of both playwrights and to show that inspite of their different outlooks

on politics and art the underlying motif in their plays is that of innocence.

Bond is a self-professed socialist and regards drama as a medium for expressing and communicating his political views. As the unofficial dean of British Left playwrights, he provided lessons in how, radical social thinking could help shape “the sprawling dramaturgy his generation had inherited from their angry young fathers” (Robinson 22). Terry Eagleton observes that the political orientation of Bond’s *Prefaces* is Marxist, only Bond tends to sentimentalize class struggle and the evolutionary nature of social development in the manner “of an old-fashioned nineteenth-century rationalist” (135). Bond’s theatre is political and his focus of investigation is nothing less than the survival of human beings. Ruby Cohn is quite correct in her characterization of Bond’s theatre as “fabulous” (185). All of his plays illustrate the conflict of justice with that section of society which is dominant and which imposes its will upon the rest by whatever means available. The real revolution for Bond is not the replacement of one ideology with another but the replacement of systems. Bond has repeatedly shown in pamphlets, poems, prefaces and notes that his plays reflect a coherent and serious view of the state of the world.

Bond is a political writer but a writer “without party or dogma;

a militant thinker but without specific political alignment; a propagandist in no-one's pay", comments Roberts. Bond's affiliation is to "no party line" (Roberts 34), or no particular creed, for his plays are concerned with responsibility. The creation of the plays is Bond's contribution to an awareness of the situation. All of Bond's plays show characters attempting to find out about themselves, usually within a world which demonstrates the consequences of not understanding or worse, of passively accepting, through ignorance or deliberate evasion. The world of the plays is ruled by those who feed off such passivity and are cunning enough to keep it that way. Bond believes that all action, whether specifically or generally political, is a matter of understanding individual motivation as honestly and truthfully as possible. "It's not enough to say something is a political truth. You have got to be able to relate that to the experiences of people in their lives and if you cannot do that you have not understood the truth accurately" (qtd. in Itzin 86). *The Pope's Wedding* projects a situation within which the characters are shown as victims of circumstances not of their making. Scopey is confronted by things he cannot understand. The old tramp, Alen, presents a mystery to Scopey and he is driven to find out what it is about the old man that bothers him so profoundly. His means of doing this is to kill Alen and wear his clothes. He tries to put himself into Alen's context only to find that the context

is no mystery and Alen is not extraordinary.

Scopey, in *The Pope's Wedding*, is one of Bond's more dynamic heroes, for he removes himself from the passive tedium of the characters who surround him. He has to decide for obscure reasons, what it is that fascinates him. His method indicates how far he is from understanding. The play is not a contribution to the class struggle but an account of an individual and his difficulties and how these difficulties are a product of his situation. The play reflects a class situation in so far as Bond's setting shows characters at the bottom of society. The characters in the play have learnt never to expect anything and have had whatever innocence and ability they possessed almost entirely negated by a structure of society which has already decided what role they should play. The characters are moulded to fit the needs of the society which flourishes only if sections of it are repressed and used as the basis for the advancement of the others. Scopey, like the rest of Bond's protagonists searches for meaning and is strongly characterized by his curiosity and restlessness. The movement towards understanding is directly related to the resources possessed by a particular figure. The more limited the resources, the more brutal the solutions tend to be. The nature of the solutions show how that figure relates to the society in which he finds himself. Bond presupposes that what

happens in societies has identifiable causes and that things can be done to effect change when that seems necessary. He is not a playwright of political tactics. His plays are concerned with the politics of learning and education.

From the beginning, *The Pope's Wedding* shows a world dominated by money. The characters are all young working class people for whom the absence of money is one of the determining facts of life. "Scene one shows us the texture of living, Scene two begins to fill in the agencies that impose that texture, and one of these is the man who employs the farmworkers, Mr. Bullright" (Coult 48). He fills their days and nights with bleakness. Significantly Bond does not make him appear in the play. He could be any capitalist who tries to curb even the small pleasures of the workers. The innocent protagonist of the play, Scopey, finds his life thwarted by a rigid class structure and attempts to find some way out by going to Alen, an old man in the community. He makes a violent attempt to get into the clothes of Alen who seemed to have a secret understanding of some kind of meaning. The impossible attempt is motivated by a social environment that offered nothing. A local cricket derby is to take place, one team made of the farmworkers and the other including Bullright. One of the players, Bill is withheld from the match by Mr. Bullright, his boss, because he wants to

retire as the captain of the winning team. The loss of Bill's talents by such a petty trick is, like all local misfortunes, blamed on old Alen's curse. Bullright's treachery provides a chance for Scopey to play in his stead. With his alert and daring play, he wins the match for the farmworkers. He also wins Bill's fiancée. Suddenly everything seems to go right for him. His tragedy though, is that he doesn't have the resources to make that happiness last. Life shows him possibilities but even before his day of triumph is over, the social limitations begin moving in to crush him. When the scene ends we find the workers, having tasted the energy of rebellion over Bullright, going after Alen. For the helpless, this is at least one way to feel that they have some effect on the world. It is their way of interacting with the society that ill-treats them, the pent-up menace, is suddenly released and it gushes forth.

Scopey, meanwhile begins to criticize things around him as if searching for some way to re-experience his day of happiness. He looks for his salvation in Alen, who offers him a challenge, an object to exert power over, and a symbol of a kind of romantic freedom—alone, unattached, self-governing. But Scopey finally sees Alen's life as a comment upon his own, a reflection of his solitariness. Scopey's attempt had been to find out what makes Alen desire the condition that he fears is inevitable. What he discovers is that

the inevitability extends, not only to solitariness but to the wish to avoid it. He realizes the irony of his search. His murder of Alen and his assumption of the hermit's personality is an existential extreme, an ultimate act of self recognition. It is a sacrifice to the society that produced him. When he discovers the true reasons for the hermit's withdrawal, it has an effect analogous to the loss of religious faith. If Alen's reasons for leaving society is not a good one, then Scopey's own withdrawal is meaningless. Scopey's killing of Alen is thus a fulfilment of the hermit's myth, a reaffirmation of society's judgment of him. Scopey is dissatisfied with a society in which men are alienated. In reply to the interviewer, Glen Loney, Bond said:

. . . in the first play, the young man kills the old man because there's absolutely no possibility of any communication between them. Not just words, not even feelings. If you cannot convey feelings, then you're really isolated, aren't you? If you're isolated you become violent like people in a mad house. And this leads to murder. (45)

Scopey chooses unwisely in attempting to isolate himself from other men. "When he kills Alen, he perpetuates the myth of

separateness, while at the same time he seals himself off from the possibility of change" (Scharine 43). Society triumphs. Scopey carries out the judgment of his society and in the process becomes its next victim. In *The Pope's Wedding*, the revulsion that the persecution and slaughter of an old recluse causes in the audience is intended by Bond to force the recognition of the crippling effect of society upon humanity's moral system. All of Bond's aggressors are victims of their situation. The difference between these figures is marked by their ability to make a coherent analysis of their situation. Scopey fails here.

In *The Sea*, Bond's portrayal of a class society is wider in scope. Where the landowner in the earlier play is only referred to, here there is a clear, three-fold class structure. Mrs. Rafi is the traditional centre of power in the town, the lady to whom money means little because she always had it. Hatch, however, the aspiring bourgeois, struggling to set up his own business, is desperate to the point of madness about money. The main class conflict in the play is between these two and it is won by neither. In *The Sea*, Bond shows the ability of human beings to survive the worst, to retain their optimism and not to be brought down by the lunacy and injustice of the world they live in. Bond remarks in an interview:

I wanted very much in *The Sea* to look at the same

sorts of problems but this time to put the emphasis on the strength of people, on their ability to change their society. So I wanted to make people laugh and experience human strength, (qtd. in Hay 139)

Bond is concerned to show the effects of a rigidly sectionalised society on its victims. "He shows a characteristically English form of repression — the operations and influence of a rigid class structure" (Hay 140). For Bond, conflict is rooted not in basic human nature, but in the constrictions forced upon it by society, and conflicts can only be resolved by human action to change society. "*The Sea* represents Bond's anarchist philosophy for although it depicts a world bent on the destruction of order, it ends with Even's final testament of faith in life" (Roches 480). Bond's critics look at his plays and call them terrifyingly pessimistic. Bond looks at the world around him and calls man optimistic for trying to live in it. Almost all of Bond's plays obliquely call for a change of society. Evens in *The Sea* demands it openly:

Don't give up hope. That's always silly. The truth's waiting for you, it's very patient and you'll find it. Remember, I've told you these things so that you won't despair. But you must still change the world.

(65)

Evens withdraws from the corrupting atmosphere of the village but not before passing on to Willy the admonition to "change the world" (65). The play is important in Bond's development as the clearest statement he makes on the necessity to come to terms with tragedy, to see things as they really are and to go on living. Through Evens Bond presents a picture of humanity at its worst in a nightmare image of the future:

EVENS. . . . We sit here and the world changes. When your life's over everything will be changed or have started to change. Our brains won't be big enough. They'll plug into bigger brains. They'll get rid of this body. It's too liable to get ill and break. They'll transplant essential things into a better container. An unbreakable glass bottle on steel stilts. Men will look at each other's viscera as they pass in the street. There'll be no more tragedy. There's no tragedy without grass for you to play it on. Well, without tragedy no one can laugh, there's only discipline and madness. You see why the draper's afraid. Not of things from space, of us. We're becoming the strange visitors to this world. (64)

This statement envisages mankind entirely stripped of its humanity: a world 'without grass' and 'without tragedy' where 'there's only discipline and madness.' The implications of such a world are glimpsed already in *The Sea* through the attitude and conduct of Mrs. Rafi and Hatch.

Hatch, in *The Sea* is the logical product of society headed by Mrs. Rafi. She believes she's dominant only because people want a sense of order and security. Hatch believes that the village is endangered from outer space because he is insecure and unable to admit the source of his insecurity. He is socially moralized and therefore sees the vulnerability of the village as stemming from lack of leadership. His social, economic and spiritual values are derived from the higher stratus of his own society. His escape from the semi-serfdom in which Hollarcut, Carter and Thompson are trapped, depends literally upon Mrs. Rafi's whims. She is the authority figure who determines his progression, regardless of his individual merits. Hatch believes, being taught from birth, that Mrs. Rafi has that right. Even when she refuses to take delivery of the curtain velvet he had purchased for her, because he refuses to help a man in need, and it ruins him financially, he does not contest her privilege:

HATCH. Now, Mrs. Rafi, your curtainings have  
come. . . .

Mrs.Rafi. Send it back.

HATCH. What?

Mrs.RAFI. Mr Hatch you cannot expect me to patronize a tradesman who ignores his duty as a coastguard — and —

HATCH. But you must take it! . . . .

Mrs.RAFI. You let an innocent man drown. . . .

HATCH. I'm in a small way of business, Mrs.Rafi, I'm on the blacklist. . . .

Mrs.RAFI. It goes back.

HATCH. I see, You're acting on his instructions already then? What's he said to you? has he told you to break me? You are his first victim, you've been corrupted. (31-33)

He assumes that it is because the aliens, in the form of Willy, have deceived her. The aliens are ofcourse the projections of Hatch's own fears.

What finally drives him mad is not so much his sense of the unjust way that his society is organized as the fact that he is forced to suppress his feelings about the real causes of these

injustices. While Willy works steadily towards a view of his world that allows grounds for hope and optimism, Hatch's inability to reach an intellectual understanding of his situation culminates in the futile intensity of his knifing of the corpse of Colins washed up on the beach. When he stabs the body and water spurts out instead of blood, his greatest fear is underlined. What if it is not necessary to die in the alien world?

No blood. Only water. How do I know he's dead? Surely, surely! (stabs). There that's hard enough. Hack his throat. Cut it! Tear it! Rip it! Slash it! (Stops stabbing. Rambles on quickly to himself). Still no blood! who would have thought of this? Surely they die? Why come here, why do anything, if you're not afraid of death? Yes. Their world's dying and they'll die if they stay—they know, they know! Ofcourse they die!  
(45-46)

When he cuts Mrs. Rafi with his shears it is an act of Oedipal violence. He is an Oedipus figure, left to die by his society in order to serve society's needs. He expects to appease society by killing others but is punished for killing without society's approval. Hatch and Evens represent two extreme poles of social response. Evens, in removing himself from society to his hut on the beach, has

rejected the same social pressures that constrict Hatch. He has found a solution which Hatch, still grappling with them in his own way is unable to accept. Hatch goes off his head trapped by the contradictions of his professional life. Mrs.Rafi comes to realise that it won't be long before she will be senile and hated.

The only two people who can escape madness are the two survivors of the storm that killed Colin. Colin's friend Willy and his lover Rose are both open to change and learning. It is to Evens, the man outside society, that Willy and Rose turn for help, but the decision does not turn to tragedy as it did for Scopey. One reason for this is that both Willy and Evens are conscious of their own confusions and problems. If Alen was a total dead-end for Scopey, Evens perhaps has something to offer Willy. The play shows Evens, the self-conscious, dying outcast helping the unformed younger people to cope with a world in which he has failed. *The Sea* shows Hatch, as the man who was broken under society's strain, but he is an improvement on earlier members of his species in that we come to understand his development by seeing, in the form of Mrs.Rafi, the pressures that have moulded him. In the character of Hatch, Bond embodies an important irony. Oppressed by Mrs.Rafi and repressed by himself, he invents a fantasy of revenge and aggression which enslaves both himself and men like Hollarcut.

The violence in this play is confined to Hatch: his attacks on the velvet, Mrs.Rafi and Colin's corpse. A particularly ironic note is struck in his conviction that he has killed an alien, when Colin's corpse oozes water instead of blood. But the violence handled here in a markedly different theatrical style from *Saved* or *Early Morning*, is less firmly related to social and political realities. Hatch is a pathetic victim of his class, just as Mrs.Rafi is trapped by her own bourgeois indoctrination. His imagination is made eccentric by the social stratification in the town, and by the myths of social class and wealth. Even Mrs.Rafi is touched by these myths but she can see no way out of them: "I'm tired of being a side show in their little world. Nothing else was open to me . . . of course I have my theatricals" (56-57). Her theatricals and Hatch's fantasies actually grow out of the same alienated world. Bond uses Mrs.Rafi to show how creativity can be subverted and misused and to demonstrate the social consequences of that misuse.

Bond shows that thoughtlessness and cruelty, come about not because human beings are by nature thoughtless or cruel but because their capacity for sympathy, their ability to imagine the feelings and sufferings of others had been restricted and withered by the culture they live in. Born into a culture where fantasies of aggression, competition, individualism etc. are transmitted at

every level—in the home, at school, at work, in art, in political debate—, it is hardly surprising that it produces humanbeings like Hatch in *The Sea* or Peter in *Saved* (1966) who elevates his running down of a child on the road into a fantasy of deliberate child-killing. The death of imagination and its replacement by fantasy conspires to destroy human values of society. It is a process which Bond sees happening today especially as technology grows more powerful. In the *Preface to Lear*, Bond expresses this view:

Our situation has been made much worse, at least for the time being, by our technological success. . . . 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. Our environment is changing so rapidly that we cannot wait for biological solutions to evolve. So we should either change our technosphere or use technology to change human nature. . . . For us the end will probably be quicker because the aggression we generate will be massively expressed through our technology. (xi-xii)

To fight these plagues, Bond finds “antidotes only in a fully democratic, classless politics and the vigorous cultivation of creative

imagination, whether in art, technology, politics or education" (Coult 84). Art is his main weapon in the struggle. In a conversation with David Roper, Bond explained:

The final product of reason in a society would be a socialist society. The struggle for that is politics. But you see, if you understand it in that way, you can see why you can't possibly make any distinction between politics and art—because they are both concerned with human consciousness. (44)

There are two easy assumptions to make about Edward Bond's *Lear*. The first is that the play parodies Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The second encouraged by Bond's Preface to the play, is that, it makes a political statement. *Lear* is politically, a perfect protest play. It is about the tragic nature of history, particularly revolutionary history. The king shares the responsibility not only for the political situations which he sets up but also for the actions of his daughters, who rebel against him and for the revolutionary Cordelia who rebels against all three. In *Lear* Bond is concerned with different kinds of political oppression and the violence he shows is exclusively political in nature. In the plays which preceded *Lear* we see some of the ways in which Bond shows "the destructive effect on people's

happiness of a capitalism whose deepest values are non-human and whose methods of working are therefore unjust" (Coult 51). *Lear* warns that precapitalist and post-revolutionary societies can destroy happiness just as effectively if they do not break away from the inhuman values of the past.

Bond symbolizes the importance of political choice through the dilemmas he sets up for his characters in the plays. *Lear* draws on violent imagery; its central symbol is a wall which represents the conflict between what Bond sees as natural goodness and culturally produced evil. The wall imposes itself from the first moment as a dark shadow over the action, the central symbol, and this at once takes the audience away from the familiar Shakespearean environment and lures them to think in Bond's terms. They remain constantly aware of the wall but do not see it until the last scene when a tremendous physical shock is given by having it appear suddenly, filling the whole stage. It looks like a great threatening creature. Again and again Bond is drawn back to the situation of the individual and his/her need to make positive choices to change their lives. All Bond's plays are means of making us look at ourselves and every society he presents is ours. *Lear's* position had allowed him to remain as totally self-centred as a child. He is capable of great, if unintentional evil. It is symptomatic of *Lear's*

moral blindness that he sees himself as the saviour of his subjects at the same moment that he murders one of them. He kills the worker without conscience because he sees him in terms of national aims rather than as individual. His death will make the others work faster and the wall will be finished more quickly. Lear is aware that such policies make him hated. He has been hateful, therefore not to hate him would be an exception. However he does not resent the hatred and accepts it as proof that he is acting in the nation's best interest. In Bond's shortest play, *Black Mass* (1971), the prime minister says: "Men of vision, are bound to be misunderstood in their own time and being misunderstood is part of the privilege of being a man of vision" (48).

Lear's concerns are national but since he is the head of the nation they are also personal. Since he is acting for the people, any method he uses for the well-being of the people is acceptable. Power protects itself with this rationalization. Lear's daughters learn this lesson and are corrupted by it. They strip off Lear's power and condemn him to death. Evil is not inherent biologically in Lear's daughters. He is to blame for his daughters' acts against him and one another. Their actions reflect the society that formed them, it reflects their father. In theory, Lear should take pride in his daughters' ability to assimilate the lessons, he has unwittingly

taught. But he sincerely intended to preserve rather than destroy his children's innocence. He is the first character in Bond's play to reach the level of a tragic hero. Despite the physical and emotional torments that he suffers in his old age, he gains in his understanding of humanity. He matures morally and learns the basic truths about men and their social institutions. He becomes a morally healthy human being. He achieves a state of understanding after great suffering and acts according to that understanding, a course of action that conflicts with the limits set by society. His death is inevitable and he knowingly brings it upon himself.

The idea of actions being determined by their social and personal context is continued in the character of Cordelia. Bond shows us the social roots of the unhappiness of Cordelia so that we can understand her decision to allow a limited terror. She is the daughter of a priest and is always defensive and unhappy when her own security is threatened. Faced with the violent disintegration of the old regimes of Lear and his daughters, she has to fight a guerilla war in order to seize power. When she does have power she uses terror to silence Bodice and Fontenelle eventhough during the fighting, when she had ordered the execution of a soldier, while one of her own guerrillas was dying from a stomach wound, she had declared: "When we have power these things won't be necessary"

(45). Cordelia, herself being a brutalised victim, sets out the guidelines for the Carpenter to have Lear blinded hoping to make Lear politically impotent. But this gives him further insight into the political process. He becomes a nuisance to the new regime. In a very telling scene in the play, Cordelia defends the rebuilding of the wall and tries to stop Lear from involving himself in public affairs:

CORDELIA. You were here when they killed my husband. I watched them kill him. I covered my face with my hands, but my fingers opened so I watched. I watched them rape me and John kill them, and my child miscarry. I didn't miss anything. I watched and I said we won't be at the mercy of brutes anymore, we'll live a new life and help one another. The government's creating that new life — you must stop speaking against us. (83)

Lear is a threat to her vision of a just world, but he will not be silenced and he pleads with her to restore humanity to the revolution. In *Lear* Bond might at first appear critical of revolution. He is rather critical of the conduct of those who are insufficiently educated in the needs of society. They mistakenly replace one form of tyranny with another. Education affords to establish that things are right

and need changing and that only human socialism has any hope of doing so. The more people see the necessity for change and demand it, the less opposition there will be and therefore the less chance that change will be violent. Bond's plays assume that life is of supreme importance. Men must struggle against the social order not because there is hope of winning but because acceptance is death. Humanity is the only weapon to struggle against force and political power. Lear can be executed but humanity cannot be destroyed as long as memory of it remains.

To Bond, whether Lear gave up his control over society or had it wrested from him is beside the point. The fact is that he is a Renaissance figure. He created the society under which he suffers and what he suffers is no different from what many others have suffered under him. In his old age Lear discovers the society he created by being immersed in it. Then his problem is to find a way to live in it. The parable of the man, the bird and the cage is a definition of the society of Lear. It illustrates the right of all creatures to life and freedom. It also shows that the responsibility of living creatures is the same to one another as to themselves, because in the end the oppressor suffers the same fate as the oppressed. The man who holds the cage door shut is as entrapped as the prisoner. In dealing with violence, Bond repeatedly returns

to the theme that people are not born with innate aggression or hatred but that it is taught them. The innocent people who live in harmony with their surroundings, for example, the Grave digger's Boy, Susan or Thomas, in *Lear*, who take in the overthrown Lear, have no aggressive feelings. They derive their humanity from their poor and humble circumstances and from the insight gained by living outside the society. But over and over again innocence is overwhelmed by superior forces.

Lear, after a lifetime of creating an unjust society, is forced to live in it. Coming to his senses, he takes the first step in the seemingly impossible task of combating what he has built. What Bond has said of that act in the *Preface* to *Lear* may well serve as a comment on the optimism of his work in general:

Lear is old by then, but most of the play's audience will be younger. It might seem to them that truth is always ground for pessimism when it is discovered, but one soon comes to see it as an opportunity. Then you don't have to go on doing things that never work in the hope that they might one day—because now you know why they can't. (xiii)

The alternative to violence suggested by *Lear* and *The Sea*

develop from a recognition of violence and its causes. Reform of society—the tearing down of Lear's wall—becomes possible only after Lear is blinded. Through suffering he comes to understand that his wall has become an end in itself, dividing his people and fostering disease and death. Escape from society becomes feasible for Rose and Willy in *The Sea*, only after they witness Hatch stabbing Colin's corpse and learn from Mrs. Rafi and Evens that neither action nor inaction will absolve them of responsibility for or avert violence of others. The condition of violence uncovered in *Lear* and *The Sea* depend upon Bond's previous examination of violent behaviour in *The Pope's Wedding* and *Saved*.

Bond's work invariably embodies a tough critique of the unholy alliance between religion and political power. He attacks a frame of mind which blames on gods, the responsibility for what happens to human beings. His plays are nevertheless haunted by religious ideas, images and characters. Bond is an atheist, a condition that springs from the religious training of his childhood:

I don't think one can actually have true religious belief as a child—if you hear the bare facts of the crucifixion, for instance, and are told this is an example of God's love—well, one felt that they were abusing the language!

I was very puzzled by this, and ofcourse Biblical metaphors were very confusing. But what one can have as a child is religious fear, and I think I had a certain amount of this . . . yes, puzzlement, bewilderment. (qtd. in Hudson 5)

That it remained with Bond as an unacceptable face of religion is shown in his first performed play, *The Pope's Wedding*. Here Scopey enters into a half-caring, half-dominating relationship with an old tramp, Alen. He forces Alen to sing for him and he sings this bizarre hymn:

Little babe nailed to the tree  
Wash our souls in thy pure blood  
Cleanse each sin and let us be  
Baptized in the purple flood. (295)

His choice of the hymn suggests incomparable barbarity rather than a god of love. "Like the baby nailed to the tree, the senile and childlike Alen serves as both Innocent and Scapegoat" (Scharine 42). Bond grew up in wartime, and knew what it was like to be bombed, so there were obviously violent threats enough to confirm at least the possibility of an event, as dreadful as the crucifixion.

His childhood memories of war suggest a growing critical faculty. He was born in North London where his parents had come during the depression because they couldn't get work on the land. At the age of five, with Britain at war, he was suddenly evacuated to Cornwall. The plague had broken out in Cornwall and people were dying. It was a traumatic experience for the five year old Bond. He lived his early years in a context he always considered to be a political one. Growing up meant to him, being involved in questions of necessity. The young Bond was politicised in all senses. In an interview to the *Theatre Quarterly* Bond said:

Well, I don't quite know why or where it came from, but from quite a young age—about twelve or something—I know I was anti-conservative, although my family were politically in a sort of limbo. (Hudson 25)

He says that the reason he is interested in politics is because he grew up in a political situation where everything was seen in terms of politics. It was probably the army where he was called up for service in 1953 that finally politicised him. Soon after leaving the army he began to write plays. Bond remarks:

What really started me writing seriously was being

in the army because then that presented a lot of problems that I had to sort out in some way. So that was certainly why I became the sort of dramatist I became. The army's a sort of parodied version of civil society—its without all the face-saving rituals and without all the social excuses and just the naked barbarism. It's a very corrupt form of society and a very foolish and vicious form which is an amalgam of sentimental, sloppy reverence for dead idols combined with a real viciousness. (qtd. in Hay 15)

Bond has chosen a path very different from the politically-committed writers and artists of his time like Trevor Griffiths, Wesker, Arden and so on. His handling of dramatic techniques mirrors precisely his treatment of social and political structures. Just as he sees it necessary to understand the history of Britain's social and political institutions in order to change them, so too he has progressively come to realise that as particular dramatic genres are representative of ideas and ideals of their time, it is by coming to terms with them and adapting them that the responsible playwright can operate most effectively. He feels the need to go beyond the exposition of contemporary social evils, to finding out a more positive means of remedying them. This added sense of responsibility brings

with it an increased awareness that the dramatic medium in which he is operating needs to be equally sophisticated. In selecting different theatrical devices from the past which reflect particular historical periods and in combining them with his own original techniques, Bond has established himself as the leading pioneer of political theatre.

No matter what his subject matter, Bond, always writes about the same thing: the attempt of the individual to preserve his humanity in a society alien to the human condition. In *The Pope's Wedding*, Scopey recognizes the limitations of his environment and moves towards another which is equally hopeless. To Bond, industrialization is political as well as economic and social. Its society has imposed upon human beings restrictions that can only lead to violence. It then calls that violence an inherent part of human nature and uses it as an excuse to impose more restrictions. All of Bond's characters are children of society and all are more or less battered by it. In turn, they become the instruments of society, destroying others. They are "murdered innocents" (Scharine 67) incapable of feeling or responding, capable only of murdering others. The stoning of the baby in *Saved* "is on one level the explosive release of aggressions created by the dehumanizing restrictions of an industrialized society" (Scharine 67). Whether it is murder or

unnatural conditions and control, the end result is the same: the loss of innocence and humanity. The literal deaths of children are presented powerfully in several Bond plays. In addition there are the deaths of those characters who have somehow managed to carry the moral innocence of children into adulthood: the murders of Alen in *The Pope's Wedding* and the Gravedigger's Boy in *Lear*. The blinding of Lear, the innocent who is not born until he is an old man, can also be included in this list. But more important than the literal deaths, is the spiritual deaths of humanity of those who survive. The vast majority of children do survive physically but in terms of their humane potential they are "but ghosts of what they might have been" (Scharine 264). If a socially moralized person accepts as fact that society should control him, "the living ghost, designates himself as an instrument by which society controls others" (Scharine 264). In *The Sea* Hatch creates in his mind an enemy who threatens society with all the oppression that he himself has suffered. He then sets out to kill all those he believes to be connected with the enemy. In *Lear*, Bodice and Fontanelle realize that their father, the creator of their society, is perfectly capable of sacrificing them to fulfil his national aspirations. Therefore, they propose to destroy him in the same way he has destroyed others, eventhough in doing this they sacrifice their humanity. All of Bond's aggressors are victims of situation. Bond comments on violence

in the *Author's Note to Saved*: "It occurs in situations of injustice. It is caused not only by physical threats but even more significantly by threats to human dignity" (xiii).

Bond argues that social injustices are quantitatively more violent and morally reprehensible than the individual acts of retaliative violence its victims unleashed. He clarifies that his early plays had provoked critical hostility because they were fundamentally political in recording and reflecting the realities of society ie; capitalist society truthfully. In the introduction to *The Bundle* (1978) Bond says: "At the moment, in our society, as it is, the truth is more terrible than the caricature of it." (xvii)

Bond's *Prefaces* to his plays provide a good guide to his conceptual development and his process of politicisation. For him, the period 1968-1978 was a period of political education. He developed "from being intuitively political to being consciously political, from talking about morality to talking about Marxism, from being socially committed to being committed to a socialist society" (Itzin 77). Bond acknowledges in an unpublished interview with Katherine Itzin:

I would say that I always had a political attitude but that I did not have any vocabulary or idea to express

it. I was aware of the injustice and in that sense had a class attitude to it, but I wasn't aware of it conceptually. I had no conceptual language with which to enlighten myself or others. (79)

Over the decade Bond discovered the concept to explain what he had been writing about from the beginning: that capitalist society was violent. Eventually he began to envisage a non-violent socialist society, and finally to look at the methods of achieving it even if it involved necessary and justifiable violence. He blames the environment for what happens to his characters. Their pent-up fury at the conditions under which they were forced to live was the chief cause of the corruption and violence. Human beings behaved aggressively when deprived of physical and emotional needs. "We do not need a plan for the future, we need a method of change" says Bond in the *Preface to Lear* (xiii). In the process of social change art plays an important role. The theatre, remarks Bond, in the *Preface to the The Bundle* (1978), can't by itself change the world, but "theatre can co-operate with all those who are in any way involved in rationally changing society and evolving a new consciousness. It may initiate the change in some people" (xiii). Theatre could analyse what is recorded or reproduced and stimulate analysis in the audience. It could show characters not just as

individuals, but as a class: "We have to show the mask under the face not the mask on it" (Itzin 86). The theatre, Bond feels could tell the truth and provide human beings with a new image of themselves. Eventhough art is a product of culture, it could function critically and tell people about the nature of the world. Expressing his view on art, Bond remarks in the introduction to *Bingo* (1973):

Art is always sane, it always insists on the truth, and tries to express the justice and order that are necessary to sanity but are usually destroyed by society. All imagination is political. It has the urgency of passion, the force of appetite, the self-authenticity of pain or happiness—imagination is a desire that makes an artist create. (viii)

Bond imagines the creation of a democratic socialist society. He hopes to produce a more humane society, "by rational means; that means teaching, that means discussion, that means persuading, that means caring" (qtd. in Castillo 88). His plays point to the necessity as well as the extreme difficulty of making this revolutionary gesture, but also that only through such gestures can we create a socialist society. One of Bond's major themes, is the role and responsibility of the writer. His full-length plays perhaps indicate

the strength of his conviction about the necessity for an artist to be politically committed. There is even the suggestion that if there were no injustice or oppression, then there would be no reason for art at all. The death of imagination and its replacement by fantasy conspire to destroy the human values of society and this is the process Bond sees happening today especially as technology grows more powerful. To fight these plagues he finds antidotes only in a fully democratic, classless politics and the vigorous cultivation of creative imagination, whether in art, technology, politics or education. Bond is an artist who makes professional use of his creative imagination. Art is therefore his main weapon in this struggle, and because it has radical social change as its conscious goal, his art is inseparable from politics:

. . . art isn't about itself, it's about how men relate to the world and each other; it's not a private or even individual experience, but one of the ways society creates its identity: It's not primitive and dark, but rational and constructive. (qtd. in Coult 84)

Bond is an iconoclast, for him the writers task is to destroy an ideology which society mistakenly reverences. His plays have been concerned with attacking or demystifying figures as different as Queen Victoria (*Early Morning*) and Shakespeare (*Bingo*) "in order

to expose the inheritance of moral guilt and hypocrisy associated with the former and to question the role of the artist in society through his dramatization of the latter" (Hirst 160). His aim is to make us aware of unworthy ideals, and irrational circumstances. He feels the need to go beyond the exposition of contemporary social evils to an indication of the more positive means of remedying them and this added responsibility makes him aware that the dramatic medium he uses should be sophisticated. He feels committed to showing how a better life should be arrived at and so his dramatic devices have become more expressive and dynamic. In selecting different theatrical devices from the past and combining them with his own original techniques, he has established himself as one of the leading pioneers of political theatre.

In Bond's plays, characters are surrounded with images of dehumanization or metaphors connecting them to animals. His plays are deeply involved in the examination of the self and its dehumanized or estranged self. Bond's *Preface to Lear* returns almost compulsively to the contrast of the innocent aggressiveness of the free animal to the unnatural violence of the caged one and the comparison of both free and caged animals to the panicked aggressivity of the human race (v-viii). The pure, unsocialized animal that is the double and secret self of man is thrust outside him, is perverted into

beastliness and at its limit, point the “animality [that] has escaped domestication by human symbols and values . . . [and] reveals the dark rage, the sterile madness that lie in men’s hearts.” (Foucault 21). The directness with which Bond looks at man’s inherent cruelty may be embarrassing but he does it deliberately to draw attention to the menace that lurks within the mind and bursts out in acts of violence and cruelty at unexpected moments.

Hubert Zapf comments in his article “Two concepts of society: Brecht and Bond”, that a closer look at Bond’s plays reveals that there is an additional new dimension to social philosophy which goes beyond the inherited Marxist version of capitalist bourgeois alienation (356). To Bond modern man is dehumanized not only because of material inequality and economic injustice but “by the development of half-autonomous bureaucracies, the substitution of science and technology for myth and religion” (Zapf 356). Having developed into a complex apparatus far beyond the experience, control and often the understanding of its individual members, society turns into a strangely half-real super-reality which, like an invisible person, threatens to alienate man from his fundamental needs. This may be the reason for the often diffuse and apparently unmotivated acts of aggression which are such a striking feature of Bond’s work. Zapf comments:

No longer do we have in his works, as in Brecht's, people acting and interacting according to their real, if morally questionable life-interests, but isolated and finally powerless individuals reacting to an abstract world which in effect negates and annihilates their concrete existence. (357)

Bond believes in an original goodness of human nature which is distorted in the hostile environment of an aggressive society. Bond explains in his *Preface to Lear*:

We evolved in a biosphere but we live in what is more and more becoming a tehnosphere. We do not fit into it very well and so it activates our biological defences, one of which is aggression . . . (xii)

Technological advances made by modern society have finally become so overpowering that they tend to become independent of their creators. They begin dictating their anonymous, impersonal laws to the lives of the individuals, threatening to turn them from subjects into mere objects. They deprive the individuals of their own personal and communicative sphere, of their right to feel, to think, to act or to live in a self determined way. This accounts

for the aggressive behaviour of Bond's characters. Nowhere else is it more clear than in *Lear* that Bond feels that concrete man is deformed and dismembered while society becomes an autonomous force. The many acts of violence in the play are epitomized in the operation in which the prison doctor blinds Lear by removing his eyes with a new "scientific device" (77). He has no personal relationship to Lear whatsoever and there is utter indifference in the cool scientific performance of his task which strikes us as shocking and inhuman. It is certainly one of the most terrible scenes in contemporary drama. It is this new view of a society without human beings, a sense of alienation which creates a sense of terror in the spectator and it seems that it is this abstract society that is responsible for the extreme incoherence and fragmentation of human life and for the senseless and self-destructive acts of aggression that pervade Bond's plays.

Power-mania, intolerance, unscrupulousness and ingratitude prevail as trademarks of the people on this earth. One is almost astonished by the wealth of Bond's imagination which he employs not only to amass atrocities but also to make the audience aware of them. He forces the audience to realise that there is no more room for humanity in a world which is founded only on the interplay between violence and counter-violence. Bond qualifies man as the

unsuccessful agent of a failing God. David L.Hirst remarks:

There is not the slightest trace of any level of transcendental powers which intercede in earthly matters either to guide and direct or even reward and punish in the plays of this dramatist. (19)

The one-act play *Passion* (1971) closes with the following words of Christ:

I am too late. I can't be crucified for men because they've already crucified themselves, wasted their life in misery, destroyed their homes and run like mad men over the fields. . . . How can I suffer for men when they suffer so much, what are my sufferings compared to theirs. How can an innocent die for the guilty when so many innocents are corrupted and killed? This is a hell worse than anything my father could imagine. (66)

Thus, Lear at the end of his life of suffering is unable to offer his followers a message which they expected of him. Human suffering has assumed such proportions that in comparison, the godly suffering appears contemptible. Over all the individual suffering

and each specific meanness there hovers the general suffering of humanity which each particular folly or malice is only a token of. This general suffering is such a heavy burden that one can hardly differentiate between the guilty and the innocent or even between Good and Bad. The suffering is not unleashed by individual negligence, passion or impatience. There are no incomprehensible forces but rather, the characters bring their doom upon themselves and the end of this cycle of destruction cannot be foreseen. Bond shows us all sides of the common man, not just the good one. The baser instincts of mankind are revealed to surface when it is allowed to make a choice between survival and principles. Bond does not applaud selfless sacrifices because he wants to change the system from within. When God is unable to help his creatures, then man should at least try to do something with his life, is the message Bond tries to convey throughout his works.

Tom Stoppard too has a vision of life which permeates all his major plays though it is often misunderstood. He is thoroughly conversant with the prevailing currents of thought but chooses to stand largely opposed to them. He accepts a direct connection between art and morality, between art and life. Unlike Bond, he relegates politics to a secondary status, acknowledging that he is "more interested in the metaphysical condition of man rather than

the social position" (Funke 228). He writes of mankind as existing in a realm in which right and wrong are universal metaphysical absolutes. Stoppard declares, "I think it is a dangerous idea, that what constitutes" good behaviour depends on social conventions — dangerous and unacceptable" (qtd. in Kerensky 170).

As early as in 1974, Stoppard was accused of avoiding social and political realities; that his work was therefore a withdrawal from actualities and that his plays remained unreal. In response to this charge of being apolitical, Stoppard in an interview in the *Theatre Quarterly* voiced his belief that "all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it" (14). Throughout his career, Stoppard has affirmed that human experience is inherently moral and that a Marxist view of human beings as material objects is reprehensibly reductive. Stoppard publicly acknowledged that: "I've always felt that whether or not "God-given" means anything, there has to be an ultimate external reference for our actions. Our view of good behaviour *must* not be relativist" (Kerensky 170). Stoppard says he set out to reflect such a theistic conclusion in his writing for the stage since nobody was doing it:

I wanted to write a theist play, to combat the arrogant view that anyone who believes in God is some kind

of cripple, using God as a crutch. I wanted to suggest that atheists may be the cripples, lacking the strength to live with the idea of God. (qtd. in Kerensky 170)

From the beginning, Stoppard has been unable to deal with political events in terms which are merely political. He has "seen social and political events in the larger context of timeless moral absolutes" (Delaney 152). Stoppard believes that the world is not divided between evil people and the rest of us, but that the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. The gulf between Stoppard and a committed political playwright like Edward Bond, as far as politics is concerned is apparent here. Bond has little difficulty in distinguishing between those evil people who have insidiously been oppressors and the rest, who may be able to throw off their oppressors through such a politically necessary step as cold-blooded murder. What separates Stoppard from the masses, says Delaney is:

not a right-wing political stance as opposed to a left-wing stance but a metaphysical perspective as opposed to a political perspective, a moral view of individuals and regimes as opposed to a materialistic or ideological view. (9)

Joan Fitz Patrick argues that the two crucial distinctions separating Stoppard from such “committed” playwrights as Wesker and Bond are that Stoppard’s plays are highly theatrical rather than naturalistic and that his social and political concerns are not the favourite of liberal, intellectual circles.

Stoppard’s plays have never “insulted the human-race” (Delaney 151). Instead his plays pervasively dramatize human beings as not just materialistic entities but moral and spiritual beings. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have the intuition that the actions in the world they inhabit must signify something other than the redistribution of wealth. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been spinning coins to pass the time and it has always come down heads:

ROS.        Eighty - nine.

GUIL.        It must be indicative of something besides the redistribution of wealth. (He muses) List of possible explanations. One: I am willing it. Inside where nothing shows, I am the essence of a man spinning double-headed coins, and betting against himself in private atonement for an unremembered past. (He spins a coin at Ros.

ROS. Heads.

GUIL. Two: time has stopped dead, and the single experience of one coin being spun once has been repeated ninety times. . . . (He flips a coin, looks at it, tosses it to Ros.) On the whole, doubtful. Three: divine intervention, that is to say, a good turn from above concerning him, ef. children of Israel, or retribution from above concerning me . . . (11).

George, in *Jumpers*, recognizes that there must be something more in him than "meets the microscope" (67). Further there is always in Stoppard the sense that the behaviour of these moral and spiritual creatures is subject to judgment. There is also the suggestion that these moral beings whose behaviour is subject to absolute judgment are endorsed with certain inalienable rights not merely by each other but by their creator. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern merely apprehend the numinous, *Jumpers* is a farce whose main purpose is to prove the existence of God.

Stoppard's plays are rooted firmly in his conviction first reflected in *Jumpers* "that all acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it" (14). In *Jumpers* Stoppard has offered us

an honestly realistic picture of what happens in life and politics. Stoppard shows that intellectuals are seldom crowd-pullers, they are too detached, indifferent and preoccupied with abstract problems to give their attention to matters of everyday life. Demagogues and opportunists on the other hand, can manipulate the crowds because they are practical, resourceful and "have their feet on the ground" (Andretta 63). Therefore much as we disapprove George's behaviour we know that he cannot act otherwise. However much we endorse Archie's versatility and resourcefulness we cannot endorse his motives. It is also characteristic of modern society, points out Stoppard, that the good man should be as shabby, unattractive, awkward and ridiculous as George, while the villain should be as elegant, attractive, decisive and rational as Archie Jumper.

Stoppard's plays are primarily concerned with showing an individual's attitudes to certain issues which are fundamentally of a moral nature, while leaving the audience to draw their own conclusions. Society in his plays is the catalyst which brings out the hidden prejudices of the individual. Although Stoppard is never explicit about his stand, his moral preferences can be discerned from the way his plays develop and from the fact that in each play the individual has to make a choice on which his happiness depends. He demonstrates that there are actions a man has to choose

and that he is in consequence of choice, morally responsible for them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern read the letter that asks Hamlet to be put to death and although Hamlet is their friend, they choose not to warn him and to stay neutral:

GUIL. We've got a letter—

(Rose snatches it and tears it open.)

ROS. . . . I see . . . I see . . . well, this seems to support your story such as it is — it is an exact command from the King of Denmark, . . . that on the reading of this letter, without delay, I should have Hamlet's head cut off—!. . . .

ROS. . . . We're his friends.

GUIL. How do you know ?

ROS. From our young days, brought up with him. . . .

GUIL. . . . Let us keep things in proportion. Assume, if you like, that they're going to kill him. Well he is a man, he is mortal, death comes to us all, etcetera, and consequently he would have died anyway, sooner or later. Or to look at it

from the social point of view—he is just one man among many the loss would be well within reason and convenience. . . . All in all, I think we'd be well advised to leave well alone. Tie up the letter—there—neatly—that—They won't notice the broken seal . . . (81- 82)

George Moore in *Jumpers* is totally unaware of his wife's gradual mental disintegration and prefers to maintain a neutral stand. None of them gain any happiness. Stoppard focuses on the helplessness that each of us experience and provokes us to find a base from which we ourselves can cope, however temporarily.

In an interview in 1974 with the *Theatre Quarterly*, Stoppard stretched the term political into meaninglessness:

. . . there are political plays which are about specific situations, and there are political plays which are about a general political situation, and there are plays which are *political acts* in themselves, in so far as it can be said that attacking or insulting or shocking an audience is a political act. . . . The term 'political play' is a loose one if one is thinking of *Roots* as well as *Lear*—I mean Bond's—as well as *Lay By*. So

much so that I don't think it is meaningful or useful to make that distinction between them and *Jumpers*—still so, in the case of *Travesties*. . . . *Jumpers* obviously isn't a political act, nor is it a play about politics, nor is it a play about ideology. . . . On the other hand, the play reflects my belief that all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without them. (qtd. in Roberts 86)

Stoppard's stance is that of a liberal humanist with a corresponding belief that mankind will sort itself out eventually without anyone prodding it in any particular direction.

In *Professional Foul* (1978) and in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1978), Stoppard attempts to demonstrate a universal consensus as to what constitutes fairness, goodness and ethical behaviour. *Night and Day* (1978) reveals more clearly in some way than any other play in his canon that what concerns Stoppard is not the comparison of one ruthless regime with another "but the universal moral standard which can be brought to bear on each" (Delaney 91).

Stoppard has offered this touchstone, in the *Theatre Quarterly* interview, "Ambushes for the Audience" which is useful not only

for *Jumpers* but for his more recent plays too:

. . . the point is not to compare one ruthless regime against another—it is to set each one up against a moral standard, a consistent idea of what constitutes good and bad in the way human beings treat each other regardless of class, colour or ideology, and at least my poor professor in *Jumpers* got that right.

(12)

In *Jumpers*, philosophy, religion, politics, ethics, literature, linguistics, music, songs, science, technology, detective mysteries, farcical exchanges and charades are all yoked together in order to offer a kaleidoscopic picture of society that is becoming increasingly materialistic and pragmatic, a society that advocates moral relativism in its politics and ethics and turns its back on transcendental values. Stoppard basically shares George's contention that there is more to man's existence than the materialist's arguments allow. Stoppard has projected the action of his play into the future. Technology has made great progress, culminating with the landing of two English astronauts on the moon, politics are being manipulated by the totalitarian Radical Liberal Party which has won the elections and "society is embracing an empirical materialism which favours

expediency and self-interest" (Coraballis 133). The moon landing represents the triumph of modern science and technology which has destroyed man's romantic yearnings. To some extent, therefore, it is our technological age that has emptied the universe of its values and emotions. Politics and technology and the apparent death of altruism that has accompanied them have conspired to make the world of *Jumpers* a decidedly sterile location. The society that Stoppard envisages in *Jumpers* is dehumanized and grim. The military parades confirm what Dotty tells George—that the victory of the Radical-Liberals was by a 'Coup d'et' (34) rather than by democratic elections. Political Machiavellianism and the quest for power have triumphed over democracy, paving the way for totalitarianism and corruption.

Stoppard's political sympathies have been most engaged as anybody's born in Czechoslovakia, by the difficulties of those campaigning for free speech in Communist countries (Hunter 197). The events of Stoppard's early years seems likely to be important. His Czechoslovakian parents had to leave the country in a hurry with their two sons on the eve of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939. They settled in Singapore where his father had been transferred by his company. But again when the Japanese invaded the island in 1942, and the women and children were

evacuated, Stoppard's mother took him and his brother to India. His father stayed behind and was killed while in enemy hands. With such a background it was only natural that Stoppard should have become interested in the political situation in Czechoslovakia and the plight of the political dissidents in both Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. In fact it was this interest that led him to become a member of the human rights organization known as Amnesty International and its subsidiary, the Committee Against Psychiatric Abuse. His happiness in India and later at preparatory school in England were bright against a background of earlier fear and insecurity. Psychologists say this must have been formative. Stoppard's main interest is the individual. He is therefore completely different from his contemporaries who are dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions in England and seek to change them.

Even in Stoppard's major stage play, we see that his impulses are to celebrate the value and worth of the individual within the context of a complex but coherent cosmos—"a cosmos which resonates with metaphysical and moral mystery but never with the meaninglessness of the amoral or the merely materialistic" (Delaney 35). We are confronted by the fact of mortality which will come to all men but inexorably, we are also confronted by a world of outer mystery which lies beyond the grasp but not beyond the

reach of every man. Just as George can assert that there is more in him than meets the microscope (67), so Rosencrantz and Guildenstern sense that there is more in life than is explainable. They know from the substitute letter that they will be killed and they accept their doom with the passivity that has characterized them throughout. They have done nothing wrong, they don't understand why they should die but resistance they feel, can make no difference: "our movement is contained within a larger one that carries us along as inexorably as the wind or the currents . . ." (93). They sense, however dimly, the existence of a realm which cannot be accounted for by microscopes or probability. What emerges from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, is the picture of characters who inhabit a world which is stranger than they had supposed, a world which they know is not as it seems. They are trapped in a world which does not make sense, which does not follow the expected rules (Brassel 54). The play invokes the inability of all mankind to understand those forces ultimately in control of their lives and fates, at the same time that it asserts that such forces beyond control or understanding do exist. Stoppard's play leads us to recognize that whether we can comprehend it or not there is a design at work in life as well as in art, that there is order and coherence to the cosmos beyond man's ability to grasp. The philosophic position to which Stoppard confesses he has been

reluctantly drawn is that right and wrong ultimately have a divine genesis:

The difference between moral rules and the rules of tennis is that the rules of tennis can be changed. I think it is a dangerous idea that what constitutes good behaviour depends on social conventions—dangerous and unacceptable. That led me to the conclusion not reached all that willingly, that if our behaviour is open to absolute judgment there must be an absolute judge. (qtd. in Delaney 89)

Belief in the existence of an absolute judge, Stoppard explains, provided the thematic impetus to *Jumpers*. It would be relevant here to review the explanation Stoppard gave for wanting to write a theist play (quoted earlier in this chapter). Believing in the ineluctably moral nature of human experience, both Stoppard and his protagonist George, in *Jumpers* is discomfited to find themselves impelled towards belief in the existence of a transcendent divine progenitor of absolute moral values. As a theist play *Jumpers* gives dramatic realisation to metaphysical assumptions which Stoppard was voicing, however wryly, when the play first came out. Stoppard is convinced that human actions are to be judged against an absolute

standard of morality rather than merely in terms of political effectiveness or social desirability. He appeals to a moral order which transcends political ideology. Although by the end of 1970's Stoppard came out with a series of plays with contemporary political settings, (*Jumpers*-1972, *Travestis*-1975 *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*-1978, *Professional Foul*-1978, *Night and Day*-1978), his heightened involvement in political issues is inseparable from his earlier moral perceptions.

Despite journalistic and academic announcements of his politicisation, Stoppard protests that reports of his metamorphosis have been greatly exaggerated; there was no sudden conversion. He also denies any fundamental transformation within his plays: *Jumpers* has got the same subject as *Professional Foul*, he insists, "both are about the way human beings are supposed to behave towards each other" (qtd. in Delaney 85). Indeed, Stoppard maintains that even in his earlier plays an emphasis on the ethical always had political implications. Such an insistence on the subservience of political consideration to more important, more fundamental and permanent standards of right and wrong constitutes the distinguishing characteristic of his 'political' plays. Whereas his earlier plays affirm the abstract proposition that political acts must be judged in moral terms, the later plays act upon those moral

and metaphysical affirmations. Further, in these plays Stoppard presents characters who come to act upon these moral percepts which their predecessors had only affirmed at a theoretical level. Ultimately we see that when such characters do enact what they believe, their actions are not depicted as pathetic protests against an absurd universe, rather their actions frequently prove to be capable of making real and tangible difference in the world which they confront. Whereas George in *Jumpers* does not act, and Anderson discovers in the course of *Professional Foul* his own capacity for moral action, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* presents a person who has already chosen a course of moral action before the play begins.

Stoppard's characters demonstrate an organic continuity with their predecessors. In *Jumpers*, George's bewilderment is very like that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Moon in *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon* but in the last analysis, George is a much more positive character than Moon and Rosencrantz or Guildenstern. But for a man bent on justifying the notion of providence, George suffers an inordinate number of personal disasters. George fails where Professor George Anderson later succeeds. He cannot effect a marriage between theory and practice. George Moore gives voice to the kind of principles on which right action might be based

and to that extent he represents a real advance on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Moon, all of whom were paralysed mentally as well as physically. He creates characters in whom moral belief becomes enfolded in moral actions. Stoppard affirms the primacy of moral values, the conviction that all political acts have a moral basis and must be judged in moral terms.

Stoppard does not depict human life as a power struggle in a world devoid of any sense of the possibility of altruism. Even if his plays are intellectual extravaganzas, "the nucleus around which Stoppard's wit and verbal panache and visual high jinks revolve is a recognition of the numinous beyond the phenomenal, of the inextricable link of the mortal and the moral" (Delaney 157). The world of spying in *Hapgood* (1990) may at first glance seem like a power struggle but even there Stoppard affirms the worth of the individual human being and the possibility of self-sacrifice for one another. Stoppard's concern for the inherently moral dimension of human behaviour relentlessly impels him towards a recognition of a realm which is explained not merely by physics but by metaphysics. What is reflected in his plays is a world which he recognizes as real even as he stands with open-mouthed awe before its mysteries. What he sees and offers is a vision of human beings as moral or spiritual creatures who inhabit a cosmos which

is both real and freighted with mystery. The reality Stoppard perceives is that human beings are not just organisms but spiritual beings and that there is a moral dimension to experience that defies scientific replication.

Stoppard has manifested a keen interest in political abuses and brutalities even from *Jumpers*. In *Jumpers* he was concerned with the relativism advocated by the Logical Positivists and its disastrous consequences when applied to politics and morals. He is not interested in political intrigues or political theories but in the inalienable rights of the individual such as freedom of speech. He thus creates situations that can be judged in terms of moral absolutes and not merely in terms of particular political incidents or situations. He is aware of the price art has to pay when it is used as a vehicle for political propaganda: that it seldom survives the specific occasion or the particular evil it was meant to address. He says in the *Theatre Quarterly* interview that his objective had always been to realize "the universal perception" and transcend the limitations of topicality and sheer relevance:

The objective is the universal perception in terms of a specific political event, but I'm not impressed by art because it's political, I believe in art being good

or bad art, not relevant art or irrelevant art. The plain truth is that if you are angered or disgusted by a particular injustice or immorality, and you want to do something about it, *now at once* then you can hardly do worse than write a play about it. That's what art is bad at. But the less plain truth is that without that play and plays like it, without artists, the injustice will never be eradicated. (14)

Stoppard's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* and *Professional Foul* have very similar atmospheres and backgrounds. They both dramatize the plight of a political dissident in a totalitarian regime. The plays point to the injustice and inhumanity of totalitarianism. Stoppard once confessed himself to be:

deeply embarrassed by the statements and postures of 'committed' theatre. There is no such thing as 'pure' art—art is a commentary on something else in life — it might be adultery in the suburbs or the Vietnamese war. I think that art ought to involve itself in contemporary social and political history as much as anything else, but I find it deeply embarrassing when large claims are made for such an involvement, when because art takes notice of something important, it's

claimed that art is important. It's not (qtd. in Roberts 85)

Interestingly, having said that art is bad at message, Stoppard, in the *Theatre Quarterly* interview, goes on to say that art is important because it provides the moral matrix, the moral sensibility from which we make our judgment about the world (14). Modifying our view of the world is, Stoppard asserts what art does adeptly:

Art is very much better at laying down inch-by-inch a matrix for the sensibilities which we ultimately use to make our value-judgments on society, than on making an immediate value judgment on an immediate situation. . . . Art is intensely important for reasons other than writing angrily about this morning's headlines. (qtd. in Delaney 7)

Stoppard here assumes a direct, open connection between art and morality. To illustrate the point he compares the work of Adam Raphael, a *Guardian* journalist who has written on South Africa and Athol Fugard, the South African playwright. While journalism may throw light on an immediate situation, art puts the immediate situation within an universal or timeless context. Thus when Adam Raphael broke a story on wages in South Africa, Stoppard states in "Ambushes for the Audience":

within 48 hours the wages went up. Now Athol Fugard can't do that. However what the art of Athol Fugard can do is to demonstrate within a South African context that the difference between justice and injustice, between freedom and oppression, between decent treatment and indecent, is absolute. God knows he can do things which Adam Raphael will never be able to do, but it is self-evident that the situation provokes a very important question, whether it is better to be Adam Raphael or Athol Fugard. (4)

Thus what art can do is to awaken, modify and refine our moral sensibilities. Kenneth Tynan sensed these contradictions at once and pointed out that not only the plays but also Stoppard's responses to interviewers seemed to have been carefully planned. Stoppard himself says in one of his early interviews on television "I write plays because dialogue is the most respectable way of contradicting myself" (qtd. in Bareham 34) The same idea is expressed in "Ambushes for the Audience":

What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters and they tend to play a sort of infinite leap-frog. You know, an argument, a refutation then a rebuttal of the refutation, then

a counter-rebuttal. . . . So that there is never any point, in this intellectual leap-frog at which I feel *that* is the speech to stop it on, *that* is the last word. (9)

Many critics have concurred with this self-assessment and have proceeded to depict Stoppard as “withdrawing in style from the chaos” (Tynan 53). Concern with the moral is not, Stoppard insists, a form of withdrawing in style from the chaos but of dealing directly and honestly with reality:

The truths which are important don't reside in particular events in the physical world. . . . On the contrary, the essential truths are much foggier things which we recognize instinctively rather than analyse and establish by demonstrative proof. (qtd. in Delaney 1)

What Stoppard has resisted steadily both in his plays and in his opinions expressed in interviews is any idea of the theatre as an agent of change, as a form of art which is in any sense expressive of and contributory to the nature of the society of which it is a part. Stoppard once stated:

Some writers write because they burn with a cause which they further by writing about it. I burn with

no causes. I cannot say I write with any social objective.  
One writes because one loves writing. (qtd. in Roberts  
84)

Philip Roberts accused Stoppard of writing plays which are “anodyne and anaesthetising [which is], beloved by those for whom theatre is an end and not a means” (Roberts 91). As opposed to the overt political statements of Edward Bond, Roberts sees Stoppard’s defence of a universal and timeless art as creating a theatre which is “diversionary and not central . . . a soother of worried minds and not an irritant” (Roberts 91). In *Cahoots Macbeth* (1980) however, in demonstrating the incompatibility of universal and timeless art with a totalitarian political regime, Stoppard levels his primary attack at the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of totalitarianism. The play also serves as a reply to those who have called for an overtly political theatre as the only way of demonstrating the social relevance of art. We also see revealed here, Stoppard’s affirmation of the primacy of moral values.

*Jumpers* affirms that moral absolutes do exist and Stoppard reveals here that any position the jumpers leap to will come crashing down as soon as one removes the belief that moral absolutes do not exist. George Moore sees human imperfection. He acknowledges

that we live “in a fallen world. But he still sees in that which is humanly possible, a flawed figure which bodies forth the reflection of God” (Delaney 46). Believing in moral absolutes, he is relentlessly impelled towards a belief in God, which he finds embarrassing and immediately dissembles. When he pushes his convictions to absurdity; confesses, the moral absolutist George:

I arrive at God—which is at least as embarrassing nowadays. All I know is that I think I know that nothing can be created out of nothing, that my moral conscience is different from the rules of my tribe . . . and because of that I’m lumbered with this incredible, indescribable and definitely shifty God, the trump card of atheism.  
(67)

Stoppard echoes both George’s affirmation and discomfiture in his explanation which I have already quoted in this chapter. A belief in the existence of an absolute judge, Stoppard says, was the instigation for *Jumpers*. Stoppard as well as George is impelled towards belief in the existence of a transcendent divine progenitor of absolute moral values. Stoppard seems to agree with everything George believes. George knows much but he fails to act on his knowledge. While he is in his study, trying to prove that man is good or bad but not indifferent, he remains inhumanely indifferent

to the pain of his wife in the next room. With his mind on matters of universal philosophic import, he never responds to another human being. In his philosophic world, praising the importance of experience and real life, George ignores the real-life experience of his wife. But he cannot construct any positive explanation or rationalization that would support his views. Innocently he attempts to give a physical demonstration of what is essentially physically undemonstrable and purely theoretical. His approach is therefore simplistic and unphilosophical and "undercuts any pretensions he may have of proving the existence of the God of philosophy, philosophically" (Anderetta 143). Finally the fact that society has not actually reduced itself to the heartless state of Rad-Lib Britain is itself some evidence for the existence of the values the relativists deny. What George and Stoppard try to bring out is that there is some flaw in the ethical relativist approach.

George may have difficulty in finding the right words in which to clothe his ideas, but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are even less articulate. However dimly, what they sense, is the existence of a realm beyond natural explanation. Stoppard focuses on their avowed recognition of a frame of meaning which they can never grasp. Their innocence is not primarily a lack of evil but a lack of knowledge. They exist within a realm which is greater than they

can recognize but not beyond their apprehension. They may not grasp what they have seen but they make continuous attempts to master the situation and comprehend it with the assumption that there is something to comprehend. Thus while admitting the difficulty of coming to grips with the meaning of existence, Stoppard agrees that it is possible to comprehend purpose in life. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, we see the seed of Stoppard's future concerns — concerns which he subsequently expresses in his acknowledgement that he is more interested in the metaphysical condition of man rather than his social position. In an interview Stoppard remarked: "One thing I feel sure about is that a materialistic view of history is an insult to the human race" (Ambushes 13). It is possible to see from Guildenstern's remark at the outset of the play, when the coins keep coming down 'heads' that "It must be indicative of something, besides the redistribution of wealth" (10), just how early in his career Stoppard was prepared to disconnect Marxist materialist explanation of reality. In *Traverties* Carr serves transparently as the spokesman for Stoppard's own views, voiced in "Ambushes for the Audience":

The great irony about Marx was that his impulses were deeply moral while his intellect insisted on a materialistic view of the world. His theory of capital,

his theory of value and his theory of revolution, have all been refuted by modern economics and by history.

In short, he got it wrong. (13)

Stoppard will not depict human life as a power-struggle in a world devoid of any sense of the possibility of altruism. His plays present man's victimization, his betrayal by uncertainty. One suspects that his attitude is rooted in pervasive humanism and more specifically in his delight in the sheer diversity and eccentricity of human behaviour and response. Stoppard and Bond vary in their attitudes towards change. Where Stoppard explores the experience of the trapped, the latter focuses on the moment when individuals identify the need for change. Bond implies that, under whatever system, existential individuals can still make choices, however apparently insignificant, to improve their lot. At the same time, Bond was not afraid to attempt difficult, unusual tasks, one of his distinctive, stylistic features being the use of violent images. His violent scenes have a powerful reality to them which shocks us out of a casual acceptance of violence. Bond is a puritan, grim and unyielding. At times he tends to lose his craftsmanship within the violent scenes. Eventhough he could be criticized for building his political cases from extreme examples, like the stoning of the baby in *Saved*, cruelty and horror, are the natural consequences

of the situations given and the arguments he provides. His argument is that there should be a common concern and love for all mankind. The logic of Bond's plays, though Marxist in essence, seems to be strangely Christian—he shares with the Christians, a vision of man's evil tendencies but does not express the prospect of a redeeming force. Stoppard, on the other hand, delights in a sense of private irrelevance. The characters of his main plays, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, George and Henry Carr are all outside the swirl of events, lost and uncomprehending. The audience invariably knows more than they do—and they are thus figures of fun. They have no way of knowing what will happen to them. The message seems to be that we are all equally lost, at the mercy of forces outside our knowledge and control.

Bond and Stoppard inhabit distinctly theatrical worlds. But in their plays their characters share a common motif, that of innocence. Bond believes that human beings act not in accordance with the ideas they are taught but those that they acquire while they are in it. His characters behave violently due to ignorance and frustration and it is the fault as much of society as the individual. A society lacking culture is a society lacking reason. He firmly believes in the possibility of creating a new and sane culture — one based on Marxist criteria and not on antiquated concepts of

privilege. He intends to confound conventional morality by exposing its hypocrisy and arguing for a more rational approach to society:

One has to acknowledge violence. It's not that one would want to use violence, but that violence is used to maintain societies. It would not be a matter of introducing violence, for it is already there. Ideally, I would like to see societies changed without violence, but if there were a revolutionary situation and people wanted to change their society, it is obvious that this would be resisted. It is not that one would choose to be insurrectionary but that insurrection would be thrust upon one . . . I think that armed revolution is justifiable if it is politically effective. (qtd. in Itzin 87)

Bond's plays appear to be shocking and sickening to some critics but it is a sickness that the author is witnessing around him, not creating. The actions of Bond's heroes tend to be innocent and childlike in view of their societies. Their motivation is primarily an unconscious desire to return to primal innocence. Society has taught men that they must be restricted or they will kill and when severe restrictions and inhibitions are even momentarily removed, they do kill. If the social element is allowed to function unchecked, society will determine the conduct of the individual rather than

the other way around. Bond confused his early critics by spending too much time developing the environment of his characters and too little time telling what happens to them. He did this because the background was his plot. He writes about a society the structures of which causes things to happen. It is certain that Bond continues to be optimistic about man's ability to change his disastrous and self-destructive course and to search artistically for the means to effect that change.

Far from sharing Bond's "doctrinaire irritability," (Hayman) Stoppard makes a virtue out of uncertainty. His characters are victims of hostile circumstances, bewildered innocents who don't act, like Bond's innocents. Throughout his work Stoppard returns to concepts of order and of goodness and to characters whose sins are not those of destruction, repression or meanness. His import repeatedly seems to be a faith in life. Circumstances invariably defeat his characters but they struggle to direct their life according to rational principles but are frustrated in the attempt. None of his characters really wish others ill. Their innocence lies in their ignorance to comprehend what is happening around them, the difficulty of knowing in a world where appearances do not always reveal reality. Stoppard's imaginative diversity and stylistic variety is, in short, the expression of his continuing quest for elusive and probably provisional truths.

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## Chapter V

### **Conclusion**

*The writer is the visionary of his people; he recognizes the past and the present, not for the purpose of enshrinement but for the logical creative impulse and statement of the ideal future. He anticipates, he warns. (qtd. in David 127)*

In many respects Edward Bond and Tom Stoppard would appear to make unlikely associates, for, they inhabit distinct theatrical worlds. But from my reading of their plays, I have found that they share a common concern for the individual's quest for freedom in a hostile environment. Bond is obsessed with the notion of not leaving out any horror which a human being could inflict upon fellow human beings. Critics who have been hostile towards Bond, have frequently claimed that his plays are violent, bleak and frightening. I have attempted to point out that they are compassionate, unsentimental and witty. All the same Bond's work represents a kind of new brutalism in the theatre which takes unlimited freedom

for granted and which also takes for granted an amoral society. The main point of Bond's plays is almost invariably misunderstood, since critical reaction has usually taken the form of a literal reading of plays like *Lear*, *Bingo* and *Saved* — literal in the sense of taking effects rather than causes as the key to meaning. Literal, in an insistence upon a simplistic assumption that, "Bond's pre-occupation with violence reflects a paranoiac eagerness to embrace it" (Roberts 34). Each of his plays is a variation on a single theme, analysing the causes of contemporary violence and showing the psychological effects. In his plays, there is always a consistent view of society and its discontents which I have attempted to explain in my third chapter. They invariably have a learning momentum and the audience is implicated in the learning process along with the central characters. Bond can be seen to have been a socialist writing socialist plays long before these were common even before he himself recognized the full radical implications of his work. He acknowledged this in an unpublished interview with Catherine Itzin. The relevant passage has already been quoted in chapter four. Bond believed that theatre could provide human beings with a new image of themselves. It could provide people with an image of a socialist society and an image of themselves in that society:

We have to create an image of what a socialist mind

is, so that people can say, oh yes, that is possible for us. . . . We've got to be able to create a socialist image of what society is about . . . because theatre does change the way people are seeing and the way people interpret themselves and the way they should understand themselves, and the way they should think of themselves. It goes very deep and can't always be measured instantly. (qtd. in Itzim 86)

The idea of people controlling their own lives and thereby being responsible for them, was a key element in Bond's socialism. The idea of responsibility ultimately defined for Bond the nature of socialism. It was important to realise that the way people lived their lives was not something destined but an invention of society. Bond felt it was not enough to just show what is wrong but to try to show why things go wrong and how they could be corrected. Bond has taken a great step forward in realising that the violence created by capitalism could in fact be used against capitalism. He says in his Author's Note 'On Violence': "Class society must be violent but it must also create the frustration, stimulation, aggression and— if necessary — physical violence that are the means by which it can change into a classless society." (11)

Stoppard is a realist and the world of his plays is neither

surrealistic nor absurdist. He writes extraordinary plays which celebrate ordinary human beings. Society in his plays is the catalyst that brings out the hidden inclinations or prejudices of the individual. It also provides the arena where his clashes with other attitudes or philosophies take place. Critics who first labelled Stoppard, an absurdist, a surrealist, an existentialist, have more recently been announcing a radical transformation, the politicisation of Stoppard, especially in the plays he wrote in the late seventies. But even in these plays, I find that his concerns are the same. I have dealt with this aspect in my fourth chapter.

Before concluding my thesis, I would like to make a few comments on some of those plays of Bond and Stoppard which I have not considered in my thesis and which I feel are worthy for further reading and research. It is also my intention to show that their later plays have not changed much either thematically or in their presentation.

Stoppard's *The Real Thing* (1982) is his most biographical and most intimate play. Once again the main character reflects Stoppard in many ways, like George, in *Jumpers*. He defends the soundness of art as he did in *Artist Descending a Staircase*. In *The Real Thing*, for the first time Stoppard allows the human story

to take precedence over ideological concerns or stylistic conceits. Yet there is a bit of everything in this romantic comedy that does not shy away from either pain or politics; there is perhaps even a touch of autobiography in that the protagonist, Henry Boot is a playwright. His speech using a cricket-bat metaphor to uphold standards in language and thought is dramatic writing at its best.

In his later play, *Hapgood* (1988), it is very clear that he is still in perfect command of language and is as fond of word play as ever. It is in his characterization that we notice a significant development. *Hapgood* is a complex character, a woman of great variety. The play depicts the unpredictabilities in every human being. It combines spy technology with stage wizardry to transform the entire audience into espionage agents. The complexities of *Hapgood* result from Stoppard's attempt to deal explicitly with the complexities of the cosmos. Stoppard affirms that even a universe which is not only bafflingly intricate but unpredictably random may yet be presided over by a God who controls everything. Although *Hapgood* invites us to recognize the impossibility of plucking out the mystery of an individual, the conclusion of the play leads us to acknowledge that what is right and what is wrong depends on how one individual treats another individual. The person is more important than the business. *In The Native State* (1991) may be seen as an exorcism

of India from his thoughts. The play captures the lurking hysteria of a woman who has the dead-pan job of telling the time on the telephone as it ticks by second by second. The play is set in England in the present day, juxtaposed with flashbacks to India of the 1930's. Interestingly, this radio play was to have been performed in the Prithvi festival in Mumbai a few years back but the attempt was put off because they couldn't get the actors together.

His recent play *Indian Ink* (1995) is a lovely play with some structural and thematic parallels to his *Arcadia* (1993) but lighter, less dense and more accessible. It is an adaptation of his radio play *In the Native State*. Set in India and England, the play examines the themes of colonial and post-colonial life in India. As a boy Stoppard had spent about four years in India, in Darjeeling and this Indian experience which must have remained dormant in Stoppard's mind finds appropriate expression in *Indian Ink*. The structure of the play provides the frame-work for a multiplicity of themes that Stoppard explores: cross-cultural contrast and conflict, caste system in India and amongst the British colonies, comparative religion, art, the perception of women, the work of historians and elusiveness of history itself. The cleverness of his early plays has been supplemented in later works by a mature tenderness notably in the elegiac *Arcadia*. His command of language seems total. His

never-ending wit and word play underlies his thematic exposition.

Stoppard continues to astound with wit, originality, creativity and erudition in his very recent play, *The Invention of Love* (1998). He places the life and work of A.E. Housman, a classical scholar and poet, at the centre of his play and then, as is his usual way, Stoppard riffs on the themes that reverberate from Housman's life. Dominating the occasionally ponderous first act, are discussions and ruminations on the nature of classical scholarship and the difficulties of research into ancient texts. It is a theme that Stoppard has discussed before in *Arcadia* and also in *Indian Ink*, the ways that accounts of history are transmitted and reinterpreted from generation to generation and the distortion that enters the process. There is no real plot or dramatic line to *The Invention of Love*; it is more like an unfolding series of incidents exploring its themes, its momentum carried remarkably well by the sheer verbal virtuosity and intellectual challenge of Stoppard's exposition. The dialogue in the first act of the play incorporates a great deal of Latin. Stoppard here is equally interested in the Housman, beyond the scholar and it is the exploration of the man's humanity's that gives the play its heart in every sense of the word.

All of Bond's plays upto *The Bundle* (1978) have similar

themes—the nature of society and the way its culture shapes human beings, with its violence passed on to the individuals. It develops the themes of earlier drama and returns to the subject matter of *Lear*. *The Bundle* is a play about revolution but it differs from other plays both in its positive emphasis and in its discovery of radical new theatrical techniques to present this shift of focus. *The Bundle* is the first of Bond's "answer plays" (Hay & Roberts 267). The last scene of the play distinguishes it from all other plays. Whereas in earlier plays Bond has shown characters who couldn't accept an irrational and unjustly ordered society and so attempted to bring about change, he now shows change not only as something to be worked hard for, but as a practical reality. He discusses how changes in human consciousness must inevitably be preceded by changes in social institutions and social structures. It seems that Bond here has become more conscious of the ability of human beings to provide answers. Bond makes the audience commit themselves emotionally before asking them to examine their response to what is happening on the stage. It is a fundamental break with the Brechtian tradition of Epic Theatre, with which Bond is often compared.

In *The Worlds* (1980), Bond allows contemporary youth the response of rage. Like *The Bundle*, this play has a straight-forward

plot; the scenes are designed to ask questions. Four worlds are presented in *The Worlds* and it is the interaction between them which produces an analysis of society. Bond implies that reality is much more ruthless and dangerous than it appears to be and for the first time since *Saved*, he explicitly confronts British Society and goes on to ask about the extent to which violence is justified. In *Summer* (1982), though, by an after-thought, he allows the possibility of cool and measured withdrawal— surviving by keeping society at a distance. It is the first time that such an option has entered Bond's plays. It is totally different from anything Bond has written before in respect of its form and theatrical style. By bringing the subject of the Nazi death camps into a play which initially promised to be a domestic drama, "Bond has applied his strategy of employing bourgeois theatrical conventions to fulfil the purposes of the political dramatist" (Hirst 83).

In *The War Plays* (1983), Bond confronts the most dramatic political issue of the age: nuclear destruction. *The Woman* (1979) sums up all his work. It deals with all his themes and sets them in a frame work of the classical past. But there is one obvious mark that distinguishes it from all other previous work: the main character, Hecuba, is a woman. Bond, in this play looks at the world from the point of view of women. Bond's vision, thus remains

universal. *The Woman* has something more concrete to suggest—what we achieve is likely to be precarious, because the world beyond remains dangerous and threatening but we must act in defence of right, here and now. *The Woman* is also Bond's first direct venture into directing. Of considerable relevance to a study of Bond's work are the two short plays he wrote on the specific requests of two different humanitarian groups.

*Black Mass* (1971) was written for the Anti-Apartheid Movement and *Passion* (1971) was commissioned by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament for their Festival of Life held on Easter Sunday, 11 April 1971. *Black Mass* is Bond's shortest play. It has only six characters, three of whom are non-speaking and has less than a hundred speeches. Yet it contains the usual Bond images and themes: the slaughter of the innocents, the crucifixion and the resurrection. Even the ending, with society firmly in power and humanity on the outside is familiar. What is new is the comic context. Black humour is present in all of Bond's plays but it always tends to underline rather than lighten the horror of his dramatic vision. *Black Mass* is an exception. It proves that Bond can present his ideas with a light touch but prefers not to protect his audience from the pain he believes that they should feel.

The light touch is evident in *Passion* too but the pain once again dominates. Bond embodies all of his usual themes in *Passion*. Only one, the ability of our advanced technology to multiply the aggression caused by our socialized morality is brought to the stage for the first time. It is a concept that had haunted him for sometime:

Well, as a society we are destroying ourselves through violence. . . . There is no alternative, because this is the whole dialectic of violence—I threaten you, you threaten me and finally you have to carry out your threats, otherwise there is no credence behind them. And also because aggression creates fear and this leads to more violence and this has an escalation of its own. So that if society goes on as its going on now, it will destroy itself. Not will it, could it, might it—it will. (Hudson 9)

In Bond's opinion, "the way out of man's essential predicaments can lie neither with religious devotion nor with the secluded individual's merely spiritual creativeness" (Barth 198). Any achievement ought to depend on the social and political activity of people with enough enlightenment to refrain from cruelty. The demand is for a radical change that must be revolutionary in kind but ought to be achieved without further violence. And it is Bond's

ability to portray violence theatrically that, while reminding us of Shakespeare or the Jacobean playwrights makes him especially relevant now in this time of riots and civil disorder. What Stoppard leaves us with is the certainty that there are moral problems, that we are responsible for our choices however freighted with ambiguity they may be, and that there is an enduring sense of goodness, an enduring sense of right and wrong, even if the ambiguities of particular contexts make the choices difficult.

The dramatic view of the mechanism of violence in this theatre of the world should therefore be challenging enough for any contemporary audience to consider the issue with regard to their own situation in social and political life. The world that Bond and Stoppard pictures is under extreme pressure. There is no space for moral values to operate. Nonetheless the urgent necessity for a moralized existence is implied in everything they write. Indeed the act of writing itself is offered as a desperate and tentative but urgently willed attempt to arrest further decay.

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