

# EDWARD BOND

## BONDIAN DRAMA AND YOUNG AUDIENCE

Edited by

**Uğur Ada**

*Tokat Gaziosmanpasa University, Türkiye*

Foreword by Tony Coult

with

Author's Note by Edward Bond

Series in Performing Arts



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# Acknowledgements

This book is based on the research conducted on Edward Bond's latest plays, primarily written for young audiences from the 1990s onwards. This book introduces recent studies by researchers from different countries, including Britain, Türkiye, Germany, Taiwan, and Spain, among others. The variety of international researchers enables diverse, authentic voices and presents a broader perspective on Bond's plays which are staged all around the world.

I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary debt to British playwright Edward Bond. I would not be able to complete the book without his great support and encouragement. He followed the process, gave feedback to the chapters, and enabled communication among researchers worldwide. It is a great pleasure for me to collaborate with him and share the hope for the future of humanity through drama.

I would like to express my special thanks to Tony Coult, whom I benefited from his research on Edward Bond during my Ph.D. The book will be incomplete without his contribution, which shares his valuable experiences in the foreword of the book. He also created opportunities to get in touch with the other researchers studying Edward Bond's plays. That was enormously helpful in leading an international perspective for the book.

I am grateful to the researchers and colleagues for their time and efforts they provided during the publication process. The book would not have been possible without their contribution. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude for their trust and support. The valuable advice and suggestions were really constructive and encouraging during the process.

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*Edward Bond: Bondian Drama and Young Audience* is the latest academic work of a longtime study beginning with my Ph.D. thesis on Big Brum plays of Edward Bond and including several published research papers on Bondian Drama and a book on Theatre in Education. I could not have undertaken this journey without my lifelong partner Ayşe Derya AKSOY ADA and my son Deniz Kağan ADA. They make both the journey and destination worthwhile.

As one last word, I want to dedicate this book to my beloved parents, Aysel & Hüseyin ADA.



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**Edward BOND** is a working-class English playwright born in 1934 who left state education aged 15 to work in factories and offices. Among his formative experiences was being sent away as a child from his London home to avoid German bombing, only to return to a London being destroyed by Hitler's V1 and V2 missiles. His drama has been performed on every continent, starting in 1963 in London and continuing to the present day. Working for and with young people, both as citizens and artists, has always been a special site of activity for Bond. All his work, whether plays, poetry, or theoretical writing about drama, addresses the most urgent questions about the social and political crises faced by the human species.

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**Tony COULT** is a playwright and arts journalist who has worked since 1971 in many companies specializing in drama for young people. He has written drama for the BBC and Scandinavian educational output and is currently helping to curate the histories of many of the companies specialising in this field of work through the *Unfinished Histories* project based in the UK. Coult wrote the first English-language study of Bond in 1977. His doctoral thesis traces the history of drama for young people as supported by the Arts Council of Great Britain 1945-1994. He is currently curating Edward Bond's online website at <https://edwardbonddrama.org/>

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# Foreword: Five Challenges – Five Personal Responses to Bond Plays

Tony Coult

*Playwright and arts journalist*

In 2016, I was in the French city of Amiens for a conference about the work of Edward Bond. The streets were decorated with images of World War I which suffered its final battles on the outskirts of the city. On the morning of November 9<sup>th</sup>, Edward and others came into the hotel dining room for breakfast. We watched as a TV screen announced Donald Trump's election win.

*The world changed. A challenge was issued.*

I have chosen five plays that have challenged me in various ways and still do. (Actually, I could have chosen many other five-Bond play groupings to make my point.) Not all of these plays are for young people, but his work is as challenging for youth as for so-called maturity. The essays by scholars in this volume take us on journeys far into the rooms and streets of these plays. These, however, are my more personal reflections.

## ***Saved* (1965)**

*LEN: ... Yer can't let it lie on its back. Someone's got a pick it up* (Bond, 2000a, p.45).

One generation from the end of World War II in 1965 feels like a pivotal year as the so-called baby-boomer generation comes to adulthood. In the summer of 1969, hoping to look better-read than I was, I borrowed a play text to quote in my final university exams. The play was *Saved*, and it was different, apparently simple, sharp, and strangely familiar. The challenge to me was why I, a middle-class boy from a rural background, knew these working-class Londoners and shared the same world. How was it that the playwright did not morally judge a group of young men (one an ex-soldier from Britain's colonial wars) who murder a baby that is as helpless as they are? It was for the audience to deal with a crime that came from the culture that those young men and I shared. The Cold War, and its violent proxies in places like Vietnam, were the backdrop to the action onstage. The play was begun only one year after the Cuban Missile crisis that had narrowly avoided global nuclear annihilation.

My thought as I first closed the page on *Saved* was, “Oh. *That* is how plays can be written. That is how plays should be written.” That was my challenge.

### ***Lear (1971)***

*LEAR: ... Listen Cordelia. If a god had made the world, might would always be right, that would be so wise, we'd be spared so much suffering. But we made the world – out of our smallness and weakness ...* (Bond, 1998, p. 98).

Bond's reworking of the King Lear story that had attracted Shakespeare opened at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1971. The director Bill Gaskill persuaded the actor Harry Andrews to play Lear, an actor who had made his name in films about the military. (There were many of these in my 1950s childhood.) Andrews had been a serving Army officer in World War II, including the D-Day landings that began the end of the war in Europe. I watched Lear's certainties crumble through the persona of wartime heroicism embodied by Andrews as his daughters attempted to usurp his power. His revolutionary counterpart Cordelia sought to silence his public opposition to her plan to control the state. The casting of Andrews seemed to re-enact a conventionally patriotic film star trying to dig up a fortification he had caused to be built. Yet this was also a challenge to most of the younger Royal Court audience, myself included, in a period when socialist groupings were all around British political life and flourishing in the theatre. We may have applauded the change that Lear/Harry Andrews embodied, but we had to come to terms with the Cordelias in our own lives.

### ***At The Inland Sea (1994)***

*BOY: The soldiers have guns! How will a story stop them ...* (Bond, 2014, p. 11)?

Over the years, I have been involved in projects that help young people to repair damaged mental health and facilitate creative lives for people with special educational needs. There is a new set of demands on workers in these fields. We have to *prove* we are doing something *instrumentally* effective in order to get money to do the work. Can we prove we have improved a young person's mental health? Can we prove we have at least one element in a therapeutic process? There is growing research literature about art and mental health. Young people's mental health has been badly neglected in public policy and threatens to remain so as austerity budgets undermine good practice. So this work is focussed very closely on achieving instrumental outcomes.

In 1994, I encountered *At The Inland Sea*, Edward Bond's first play for a Theatre-in-Education company (Big Brum, in Birmingham). I was asked to

write an introduction to the play but it resists the instrumental in so many ways - you shouldn't approve of them concentration camps, young people shouldn't be encouraged to build gas chambers! I also had to contend with Bond's declaration that theatre cannot teach. But I'd spent years claiming that it can/ought to. This was a profound challenge!

The play seemed the opposite of the instrumental. It was complex, its actions demanding of its performers, its length and richness of language and image formidable, depicting events that would nowadays demand "trigger warnings" in every school doorway.

Seeing the play performed in an inner-city school by the Big Brum company made it clear to me that this play - this Theatre-in-Education programme - was about Art and the engine of Art - Imagination. The workshop before the performance by the Big Brum Company was not about concentration camps, the Nazis, or young people's difficulties with exams but how to *use* a work of dramatic art. If there is an instrumental purpose that may be allowed to much of Bond's work, it is perhaps the cultivation of the ability to use drama to see the humanity behind ideologies.

### ***The Children (2000)***

*MOTHER: From now on this'll be a house of silence. O I'll talk to you: "shut the door – don't be late- wash your hands." But it's the last time I'll tell you anything that matters to me. A stone'd say more than I will. ... (Bond, 2000b, p. 13).*

This play is unique in Bond's work in at least one way. Great swathes of it are to be performed and rehearsed by young people using script suggestions but no more. A Drama class or similar must take possession of the story and embody it. This is surprising, given the absolute care and discipline with which Bond endows his scripts.

The opening sequence (and a later iteration when children from the local housing estate gather) has an echo of a notorious child murder case in Liverpool when a child was abducted and murdered by other children, hit with bricks, by a railway line. But this is not a documentary about child crime, any more than *At The Inland Sea* is about gas chambers. *The Children* challenges young people to take a journey in the adult world where their own future is at risk and where there is no certainty of success. Bond's inability to offer an easy outcome challenges the normal expectations of children's work, which is to look for a resolution based in optimism.

### ***The Under Room (2005)***

*DUMMY: I want my knife. I have told you. I am nothing. Nobody. One day I could forget what I have done. Then I am this nothing with no past. The knife is to tell me who I am. It is my pass to myself*(Bond, 2013, p. 64).

Already in *The Children*, a puppet figure had appeared as Joe's companion and the victim of his attack with bricks. Now there is a character on stage which is a Dummy, a puppet figure, like Joe's, roughly assembled, making no claim to charm or obvious significance. Unlike the puppet in *The Children*, the Dummy is a "real" member of the cast. It/he/she has lines to be heard but they are spoken by an actor who is upstage left. Other characters in the play address the Dummy and respond to it as if it has spoken. This is a challenge to the conventions of naturalistic drama. The Dummy is not a fantasy, nor is it a "Brechtian" alienation device. It is a means to draw the audience into the action. The Dummy is a refugee in the play's actions but visibly not from any ethnic, or national, or identity group. Its crude gaze, for the most part, is on the audience, and only the audience can endow it with identity. This is an unprecedented device in drama directly challenging the conventions of the actor-audience connection.

### **And a Sixth Challenge –Commentary and Theory**

Few playwrights reflect as vigorously and frequently as Edward Bond in commentary about his work. Those reflections can be about the practicalities of producing his plays but often sit within longer and richer pieces that situate his work theoretically in the history of Western Drama, particularly the importance of Drama to Greece, the first nation-state to develop democracy. For Bond, Drama is more than an art-form; it is the core activity of human social development. Much of his theoretical reflection is therefore rooted in the early days and months of childhood.

This aspect of his work- theory, and commentary - is manifest in essays and poems published alongside playscripts, and in the series of published letters edited by Ian Stuart for Harwood Academic Publishers. Most recently, his website (<https://edwardbonddrama.org>) carries a regular pulse of challenges to our culture and the political crisis we inhabit.

The first draft of this Introduction was written weeks into the bloody invasion of Ukraine. Never has it been truer what one of Bond's correspondents says, that we are now living in the world of his later plays. Many of these are set in 2077. The challenge is that it is 2022.

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# Author's Note

Edward Bond

Recently workshops on my War Plays were held for young students in Strasbourg. The workshop directors found that the students – teenagers in their early twenties – had hardly any sense of history (not even the history their parents had lived through) and no focused sense of a larger world beyond their own lives.

This is a symptom of modernity. It is as if the students lived in an electronic cocoon manufactured by the media and the commercial market. They exist in society as consumers, not as citizens. They have no sense of belonging but instead of isolation. It's odd because they share their sense of isolation, and *it can even be quite amicable!* But it is dangerous because it denies them responsibility for themselves and their society.

Until the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, each new generation lived in the world of their parents and ancestors, in the same houses and on the same land. But the Industrial Revolution drove them from the land into cities of suburbs and slums. This caused great suffering – but later, it was compensated for by the new mass consumption and the distractions of the electronic market. We are just beginning to live with the consequences. Mass consumption can be as socially and individually devastating as historic destitution. Our world is many times more dangerous than the world of our forebears. We live with chemical and nuclear dangers; we destroy the climate, pollute the sea, and poison the earth – that is modern cannibalism.

Modernity has changed the surface of our lives. But it can't abolish the millions of evolutionary years that made us human. We are a social species. We either live together or die together. The War Plays (the subject of the Strasbourg workshops) showed this; in fact, in working on the plays, the students *proved* it to themselves! First, it was necessary to explain that the plays' events came from World War II and were real. Once the students knew this, they became intensely involved, understanding, and creative. They astonished themselves. They were studying the plays but were 'workshopping' and *re-creating* themselves and their lives. They took control of their future.

Most modern theatre tries to give the audience a feeling of instant satisfaction. In fact, that is damaging, even corrupting. The audience forgets their problems for a few hours and then goes home and finds their problems waiting for them on the doorstep.

Two cautions. Material facts can't create moral values. Nor can imagination – imagination can be immoral and destructive. (Hitler had a vivid imagination.) But the combination of material fact and imagination is the logic of morality. This logic is the basis of drama.

Secondly, not all authorities are repressive. In *Tune*, material fact and imagination are divided. In the play, this makes both the mother and son victims. Such divisions may be tragic. But in tragedy, there may be hope.

Whenever Students study or work on the plays in this book, they should first be given to read Tony Coult's *Introduction*. He has brilliantly selected texts that combine to restore our lost sense of past and present and our responsibility for the future. Doing that should be the aim of all modern drama. He achieves this by relating the texts to his own life. I shall follow his example.

When I was thirteen, I walked through a London suburb of bombed houses to see an adult performance of Macbeth. For the first time, someone spoke to me about my life. I found that morality makes us human. It defines the human good. Morality isn't law but understanding. Everything else is foggy transitory or a mechanism. I write this as Putin wages a war against Ukraine. He says his war is going to plan. He lies. The war was meant to be over in a week. Who would start a war when the only possible outcome was such a delayed and botched victory? The trouble with Putin is he isn't in control of himself. The aim of drama is to give the self-control of the self. Without that, we are not human, and the broken foundations of society are not mended. Regret is too late, and triumph too soon, but we try to run society on regret, triumph, and technology

I've described our outline situation. We live with two great dangers. The capitalist market and nuclear power. Our present political institutions can't control this situation. Perhaps there will be more wars between sides armed with nuclear weapons. Each war would be more destructive than the one before it because the opponents would have used the time between the wars to construct more powerful nuclear weapons. Putin would describe this as going according to plan. Trump's battle cry would be America First and Last. What survived would hardly be human.

That is our situation. Nuclear war, global warming, pandemics. They are all the outcomes of the rabid money market.

Each generation should hand to the next generation a world more human than its own. We will hand on a ruin according to plan.

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