

Edward Bond: A Chronology

Play	First performance
The Pope's Wedding	9.12.1962
Saved	3.11.1965
A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (<i>adaptation</i>)	13.1.1966
The Three Sisters (<i>translation</i>)	18.4.1967
Early Morning	31.3.1968
Narrow Road to the Deep North	24.6.1968
Black Mass (<i>part of Sharpeville Sequence</i>)	22.3.1970
Passion	11.4.1971
Lear	29.9.1971
The Sea	22.5.1973
Bingo: Scenes of money and death	14.11.1973
Spring Awakening (<i>translation</i>)	28.5.1974
The Fool: Scenes of bread and love	18.11.1975
Stone	8.6.1976
We Come to the River	12.7.1976
The White Devil (<i>adaptation</i>)	12.7.1976
Grandma Faust (<i>part one of A-A-America!</i>)	25.10.1976
The Swing (<i>part two of A-A-America!</i>)	22.11.1976

Saved

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Author's Note

On Violence

Violence is a biological mechanism which evolved before human beings evolved, and which has been inherited by them. It first occurred in animals lower than human beings in the order of biological organisation. When these animals are threatened, and have no alternative, they may violently attack whatever is threatening them. It is a last defence, used in a crisis, and its value for primitive animals is clear: it helps to ensure the continuation of their species. But for human beings the opposite is true. Violence threatens the continuation of our species, at least in a civilised form. How has this happened and what must we do about it?

Hunting sometimes resembles violence in appearance. They may both have the same speed, intensity and energy. But searching for food can't be connected with hating it. Hunting is violence only when the prey becomes a threat. Nor, I should add, do cannibals hunt and eat each other because they are hungry; they wage war on each other for social reasons. So we must distinguish violence from hunting.

The distinction is vital. We do not need to be violent. We need food and warmth, but we have only a capacity for violence. A dog has a capacity to swim the first time it goes into water, but it has no need to swim because it has no need to go into water. Human beings are violent animals only in the way that dogs are swimming animals. We need to eat; but only when we're starving does there have to be the possibility that we will use our capacity for violence to satisfy our need for food. Violence is a means not an end. If it were an end, a need, it would probably be a very serious biological weakness.

One wonders if an animal with such a need could long survive. To satisfy its need it would have to seek out violent situations, so that animals in which the need was stronger would be at greater risk than those in which it was weaker, and they would therefore tend to die out. The survival of the fittest would aid the survival of animals in which the need was weaker, not – as is usually supposed – animals in which it was stronger. This argument would apply not only to aggression outside a group but also to aggression within a group, where it helps in sorting out the order of rank, except that in the animals in these groups built-in restraints on aggression are as strong as built-in aggression. Human beings, however, are said to be the only animals living in groups of which this isn't true.

The idea that human beings are necessarily violent is a political device, the modern equivalent of the doctrine of original sin. For a long time this doctrine helped to enforce acceptance of the existing social order. For reasons the church could not explain everyone was born to eternal pain after death unless the church saved them. It carefully monopolised all the sacraments which were the only means to salvation. To be saved a man had to accept the church's teaching on the way secular society should be organised; if that society ever needed restraining or reforming, the only ways of doing this that the church permitted were admonishment and excommunication. Leaders of church and state often came from the same families; and before a poor man was elevated to any rank in the church he had to accept its teaching on secular society. Those who wouldn't, whether clerical or lay, were handed over to the state to be tortured and burned. This vividly demonstrated to everyone else the eternal hell in which all dissent would be punished. God is a secular mechanism, a device of class-rule.

But because the idea of god is incompatible with modern science, science has been mis-used to formulate the doctrine of necessary human violence. This is a political invention, not a scientific discovery. The man who cries wolf must constantly

shout louder, and, in an analogous way, capitalism has had to drag its hell up out of the ground and set it in our midst. If men are necessarily violent they will always endanger one another, so there must be a strong authority that will use violence to control violence. This authority is the ruling class. It maintains its existence by using violence and being able to organise it politically. The rest doesn't necessarily follow, but in practice it always does: as the ruling class best understands the human condition, its members are the best and most intelligent of human beings, and they are therefore acting only for the common good when they control and monopolise for themselves education, information, art, money, living space, medicine and everything else desirable.

Plato wanted his rulers to knowingly lie. The members of our ruling class are not liars but – worse – fools who believe their own mythology. In ignorance they teach an intellectual corruption, and it is accepted in naïvety. The consequences are heard in bar room chatter, 'We throw babies against the wall because we're animals at heart', and seen in the conservative MP who, some time about 1970, wanted young offenders publicly exhibited in cages.

The ruling mythology has a spurious plausibility. As evidence there are the mountains of bodies from twentieth-century wars, the world-litter of H-bombs, and the increasing aggression of affluent society (which is seen as a very special proof of the incorrigibility of the *need* to be violent). No one could deny that human beings can be violent. But the argument is about why they are violent. Human violence is contingent not necessary, and occurs in situations that can be identified and prevented. These are situations in which people are at such physical and emotional risk that their life is neither natural nor free. I don't want to try to describe these situations in detail here, but as freedom and natural living are so often misunderstood I must point out a few things to make my view clear. Firstly, it is as natural to live in a city as in the country;

whether one is wise to live in a particular city or village depends on what sort of city or village it is. Secondly, mutually sharing common social obligations and restraints is not a repression of our natural egotism; on the contrary, at their best these social bonds are not just the condition of human freedom, they are the essence of it. Thirdly, we create our subjective selves through our objective social relations, and our self-consciousness is not primarily the fruit of private introspection but of social interaction. Fourthly, I am not substituting one absurdity for another by claiming that although people are not innately evil they *are* innately good. Human nature is not fixed at birth, it is created through our relation to the culture of our society. It could be said that every child is born an orphan and must be adopted by its society. The only innate part of our nature can be seen as the capacity for this social, cultural adoption; it is our natural biological expectation of society. As human nature is created by society in this way, it is possible for us to bring up people to be, within reasonable limits, good. All that is necessary is a culture which is sufficiently rational. Abolishing violence would not in itself create this society; the truth is that violence can only be abolished as part of the creation of this society. However, I don't want to go further into these points now. I only want to make clear that the cause and solution of the problem of human violence lie not in our instincts but in our social relationships. Violence is not an instinct we must forever repress because it threatens civilised social relationships; we are violent because we have not yet made those relationships civilised.

Clearly two people punching one another in the street could give rise to misunderstandings about this. But I can't see how the extraordinarily complicated organisation, research, dedication and skill, as well as the long periods of excitement, tedium, discipline and indifference needed to invent, make and deploy hydrogen weapons can be put down to the individual need to be violent, when they are so obviously

the products of a social organisation. There is some excuse for saying that, if I punch my neighbour's nose, I did it because of my violent instinct; but to blame the creation of H-bombs on the human instinct for violence is close to intellectual charlatanism. Yet that is the received idea of an age of science!

Because human beings are very adaptable we have to put anything into its social context before we can say it has caused violence. For example, a woman may enjoy living in a high-rise flat with a good view; but if she has young children she may worry about the height and may smack them if they run on the balcony. Routine, elementary work may make people trapped by it aggressive; but if it takes a woman out of an isolated flat so that she can talk and laugh with some friends, then it may be enjoyable. A couple who share a small, dark room with other people might for a few weeks think they were in paradise if they got a small, dark room of their own. Sport releases energy through skill – that is, creatively – and this makes it enjoyable; but it may cause frustration and aggression in people who pass most of their life as spectators not only of sport but of almost everything else, people whose political role is being a ball and not a player. There is a popular idea that mass-spectator sports are a safe means of getting rid of necessary aggression. This piece of potted wisdom must have amused a real joker like Hitler.

Fortunately the causes of human violence can be easily summed up. It occurs in situations of injustice. It is caused not only by physical threats, but even more significantly by threats to human dignity. That is why, in spite of all the physical benefits of affluence, violence flourishes under capitalism. There will always be minor human aggressions; even in Utopia people will fall in love with the wrong person, forget proper gratitude, lose their temper; but whenever there is serious and constant violence, that is a sign of the presence of some major social injustice. Violence can't be contained by an equal or even greater force of counter-violence; it can't be sublimated

in games; it can't be controlled by a drug in the water supply (because this would also remove the creative tensions necessary to any society); it will only stop when we live in a just society in which all people are equal in all significant respects. Human beings are much more likely to be violent than many other animals, but in a curious way this is a necessary part of their ethical development: no human society can be a lasting or stable home for injustice. 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. The only alternatives to this – which in the last few years technology has made possible – are the destruction of our species or, perhaps even worse, its dehumanisation.

Violence is getting cheaper nowadays – cheaper, because it is usually punished lightly. (Political violence is sometimes an exception, for obvious reasons.) By keeping it cheap capitalism shows its self-serving wisdom. If it punished it severely it would provoke even greater unrest and violence. This would show that the scapegoat device no longer contains violence (not least because we are no longer a sacramental society) and this is the real reason why Tory governments don't after all put offenders in public cages. But more important, in an effort to free itself from the increasing barbarism that severer punishments would provoke, capitalism would have to look again at the causes of violence. Capitalism can't do this because its political ethos is competitiveness, and it cannot afford to admit that under the pressure of economic struggle this leads not only to commercial aggression between firms but also to commercial aggression by firms against the public. This is seen in the way that commerce often misuses technology and industry so that they exacerbate social problems, instead of solving them and helping to create a humane society. Of course, I don't mean that our class-society should punish criminals more severely; on the contrary, it is a mark of its

decadence that it no longer has the moral right, and probably not even the political authority, to deal with violence – with hooliganism, vandalism and crime – any more than it has the intellectual vitality to understand it. It's easy to see that capitalism has made its ethos of violence very readily available on TV, but sometimes it's not noticed that it sells it at very reduced prices in its courts. Capitalism has made violence a cheap consumer commodity.

There are four features that can be used to classify violence. One, it is used either to maintain injustice or, two, to react to injustice; and three, its users are either conscious of its cause and significance or, four, unconscious of them. Probably the cause of an act of violence is often a mixture of these things, and this could be true for both sides of a confrontation. These four features work in this way: the ruling class has a conscious, though false, rationale for its violence; it calls this the maintenance of law and order. At the same time, it unconsciously fears its victims and so tends to be violent anyway. On the other side, the victims of unjust social relations may act violently to make these relations more just. Their degree of consciousness can range from workers protecting their jobs by smashing machines to a revolutionary party fighting to take over a whole country. Or, finally, they may merely react violently because of an unconscious motive, an unidentified discontent. When this happens their victims may be innocent – indeed they may be chosen for them by the ruling class, as sometimes happens in racialism. In some respects the young murderers in *Saved* belong to this group. Some of their cries while they murder the baby are ruling-class slogans. This is the way in which working-class anger and aggression can be used to strengthen the unjust social relations that cause its anger and aggression, and the ruling class can recreate, in an increasingly inhumane form, the social conditions which it claims as the justification for its power. This persecution of victims by victims results from a culture which must surely be one of the

most abject intellectual conditions the human mind could achieve; its most pitiable manifestation is working-class support of fascism.

All four forms of violence may occur together, and that is one reason why there is so much confusion about the cause of violence and why so many mistakes are made in dealing with it. The only rational way to respond to violence is to change the conditions that give rise to it; and the only way that that can be done, or even the first steps towards it can be taken, is by decreasing the gap between reason and social organisation. Obviously it would be better if everyone understood the origin and significance of violence, but equally obviously the victims of social injustice don't have their education in their own hands. At school they learn the mythology of their own natural nihilism, the absurdity of life and the futility of altruism, glossed over with a few Bible stories. Working and living in a very complex, capitalist technocracy forces them to behave in ways from which it is easy for them to draw the same conclusion, so that the mythology seems to be constantly affirmed by experience. Perhaps the increasing barbarism of modern civilisation will force people to look more closely at the nature of man and society, and then society might be reformed by becoming increasingly more rational. But it is unlikely that change will be so easy. Capitalism is inimical to reason.

I believe in solving political and social problems in rational ways whenever possible. The dangers of violence, even in a just cause, are too obvious for me to think otherwise. Violence has no romantic attraction for me. Sartre's notion of finding oneself through violence seems to be absurd and unreal. But many people don't have the chance to ask whether they should be violent. The question does not even occur to them. If it did the only alternative open to them would be a fruitless martyrdom. To ask the question means you are already in a privileged position. If you decide never to use violence you have still done nothing to make the world less violent. That can only be

done by making it more just. I am not a pacifist, we have to say what things are and not what we would like them to be. Reason is not yet always effective, and we are still at a stage when to create a rational society we may sometimes have to use irrational means. Right-wing political violence cannot be justified because it always serves irrationality; but left-wing political violence is justified when it helps to create a more rational society, and when that help cannot be given in a pacific form.

We have to understand that not only is capitalism destructive in war and peace, but that it is as destructive in peace as in war. Its peacetime destructiveness is caused not so much by naked force as by its false culture. This false culture is hidden by its interpretation of culture – they come to the same thing – but its destructiveness can be clearly seen in its waste of life, resources and human energy. Worse, it is an intellectual attack on mankind. Culture is the way we live, and when it is nihilistic, cynical or despairing, then there are waste and violence at all the stages of our life and in all our relationships. Nehru said it cost a lot of money to keep Gandhi poor; we can add that it takes a lot of violence to keep a capitalist peace, and that under capitalism war can never lead to peace. Using violence to create socialism out of capitalism would not mean introducing violence into the peaceful politics of a world of law and order; whenever you walk quietly down the orderl street of a capitalist society you are surrounded by the hidden debris of waste and destruction and are already involved in prolonged act of communal violence. Violence is not a function of human nature but of human societies.