

The Role of Imagination and Ideology in Defining Culture in the Works of Edward Bond

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the human mind and its intricacies is what informs the works of the prolific septuagenarian contemporary British playwright, Edward Bond. His distinctive approach toward this effort is redolent with historical and contemporary references. These alert the readers and the audience to the evolution and devolution of the human psyche as a result of cause and effect and the intransigent nature of injustice and violence. The human cultural memory is eidetic to the extent that it is itself capable of understanding that humans are born radically innocent as Bond writes in the “Commentary on the War Plays,” published in his sixth volume of plays, “Radical innocence is the psyche’s conviction of its right to live, and of its conviction that it is not responsible for the suffering it finds in the world or that such things can be” (251). According to Bond the human imagination, combined with reason is the basis of all ideologies which create a culture. The successful integration of these elements results in humanism whereas the human imaginations failure to integrate reason with itself leads to violence and injustice pervading the annals of history and cultural epochs. In the book *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child*, Bill Roper in his essay titled “Imagination and Self in Edward Bond’s Work,” writes, “Importantly, human value, not fiction, is at the heart of the human mind’s use of imagination to understand the world and society; imagination and reason together construct the human self and open the routes of corruption and innocence, through which the self is continually created” (Davis 126). Hence the purpose of this research was to analyse the

symbiotic relationship between the human imagination and reason in creating ideologies which define culture and its problems.

The cultural dynamics of society are a major concern in the works of the contemporary British playwright, Edward Bond. He writes in the introduction to his play *The Fool: Scenes of Bread and Love*, published in his third volume of plays “Culture is the rational creation of human nature ... Art helps to monitor the creation of culture and reflects the past and future in the present” (75). The feature that frames Bond’s definition of culture, and perhaps the most important one, is the human imagination. Human beings need to understand the world and their place in it. In Bond’s opinion, culture, and society are the determinants of human behaviour. We are different from animals since we are endowed with a fertile imagination which is free to be creative or destructive. It is responsible for creating the fiction that makes the world, and our self, understandable to us. In the “Notes on Imagination” published in his seventh volume of plays he writes,

Imagination and reason are closely symbiotic. The story which is imagination’s structure is acquired through reason, through description, explanation and evaluation ... It is an article of faith to ideology that we are creatures of instinct. But really when we behave like animals we do so specifically because we are not animals. (107)

In Bond’s opinion, imagination informs the nature of reality and fiction for human beings, and gives them an understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. Thus Bond’s definition of culture embodies this aspect of human instinct, that is, the imagination as a potent force that moulds it.

The subsequent element important in this regard is one, which is closely linked with the human imagination, namely ideology. In the introduction to his seventh volume of plays, titled “The Cap: Notes on Drama, the Self and society,” Bond says that culture must be a structure of meanings of the world, which understands that it is

itself part of that meaning. It must be a tool for understanding and interpreting the world and its own self. Otherwise it reifies something abstract and meaningless resulting in chaos and sterility. Ideology, for Bond, is the ownership of “Nothingness” which is a phantasmagoric entity that makes the world and our self understandable to us (ix-xi). It is created by the human imagination to integrate human practical knowledge and its power with its limitations like mortality, vulnerability, and chance. Humanness is the successful integration of these two realities through imagination. Ideology is the corruption of this process and is the source of the irrational. Since it is the site of irrationality, it needs to be redefined in order to create a self-aware humane culture.

Bond’s works are his contribution to create awareness about the lack of self-understanding in humans as a species, corrupting the human imagination and leading to the formation of convoluted ideologies. He says in the introduction to his seventh volume of plays that there are three negative solutions to this lack of self-understanding, that is, violence, transcendentalism and somnambulism. He says that transcendentalism is the fictional meaning given to the self in relation to the world, which is a form of madness that renders the mad incapable of social living, or enables the personally sane to live in an unjust society. Somnambulism is the philosophy that culture develops without any insight into the future or relation to the past. Bond relates this mental process, of understanding and giving meaning, to the self and the world to the human imagination, and the negative solutions created by the imagination in the face of failure, to ideology (x-xii). This research will be an attempt to understand the role of imagination and ideology as the basis of self-knowledge and understanding, and as the foundation of all creative and destructive impulses in humans. Imagination and ideology cannot be treated as separate entities because, ideology is created by the imagination, thus they will be analysed simultaneously in this research. For this purpose Bond’s theories about imagination and ideology presented in his prose works in his seventh volume of plays titled, “The Cap: Notes on Drama, the Self and Society” and “Notes on Imagination,” will be explored, and their application in the plays, *Restoration: A*

Pastoral published in his fourth volume of plays, and *The Crime of the Twenty-First Century* published in his seventh volume will be traced. The objective will be to understand the role of imagination and ideology in defining culture and its problems.

Bond says in a letter published in his fourth volume of letters that imagination is considered a psychic luxury or indulgence (59). However, the imagination is a concrete reality that co-exists with physical reality and gives meaning to it. He says in “Notes on Imagination,” that a chair exists for a cat physically, but for humans it must exist physically and with a meaning (xiii). In a letter published in his fourth volume of letters he writes, “All our instincts need a meaning to function and the meaning is given to them by the imagination. The imagination has an instinctive intensity yet is always open to new meaning. In this lies the possibility of salvation for our species” (48). Thus imagination is crucial for self-understanding in relation to the physical world and the society and therefore all human value emanates from the imagination. Bond says in “The Cap,” that one can work for a living but what does one live for? A failure of the imagination to give a rational answer leads to the formulation of ideologies, which is a corruption of imagination. Bond calls ideology a belief in “Nothingness.” All ideology is fictional reality that is created by the human imagination to combat fear which is an outcome of human mortality, all that is unknown, the uncanny, natural disasters, fear of each other and so forth. However, he says that he uses the word “Nothingness” instead of “ignorance” or “the unknown” because paradoxically, though it is fictional, it can be true as well. This is so because it gives us a possibility of creativeness and a choice of freedom, for example bricklaying in itself is a creative activity depending upon what it is used to make. It can result in a school or a gas chamber. If the skills of living in the physical world and the creativity that comes from imagination could be integrated, it would result in humanness (xiv-xix).

In *Restoration* and *The Crime of the Twenty-First Century*, Bond demonstrates how the human imagination creates ideologies, which form violent and unjust cultures. The title of the play *Restoration* is

not merely an indicator of the time and setting, but also of the tradition of restoration comedy, upon which Bond draws for the structure and meaning. At the beginning he writes, "England, eighteenth century - or another place at another time" (177). He gives the play a context and then immediately broadens it as an indication that the happenings of the play are not limited to any specific time or place. Thus the specificity of time is relevant yet violence and injustice are not time specific because they have existed since time immemorial. Also, for Bond it is imperative not to interrupt the story as Brecht did through his alienation effect because that, according to him, results in the separation of reason and imagination which allow for analysis. In her essay titled "Alienation is the 'Theatre of Auschwitz': an exploration of form in Edward Bond's theatre," published in the book *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child*, Kate Katafiasz writes, "For Bond then it is imperative *not* to interrupt the story: that is why his plays might sometimes look, superficially, as though they were realist in style. Time and space may be stretched in a Bond play (his plays are interestingly now often set in the future), but they are not vogueishly chopped about" (Davis 36). He calls the play "A Pastoral" to draw a contrast between city and country life and debunk the ideologies surrounding country life, which are that the country offers a more simple, serene and innocent life in comparison to city life which is corrupt. The play begins with a revolutionary song, which depicts an ideal situation where violence and injustice are being rejected: "From now on we'll live in the way that we say / And we won't be told, not this time / This is our world and it's staying that way / This time we're gonna say no / Today we'll live till tomorrow / And tell the bastards where to go" (178). Bond intersperses the scenes with songs sung by characters which represent the working class to highlight their lack of self-awareness and political insight. In the songs the working class characters display political insight, whereas in the scenes that follow they are victims of injustice and violence at the hands of the elite, which they are unable to understand because of the social conditioning they have been subjected to. The working class and the elite believe in false ideologies regarding their status quo and their relationships with each other. In the opening scene of the play Lord Are is shown engaged in some

frivolous activity with his servants while he contemplates the prospect of getting married to a rich merchant's daughter for the sake of dowry. While the scene reflects his shallowness and greed, it also highlights the subservience and helplessness of his servants, especially Bob. Lord Are tells Bob to graze in the field and he complies because he is not only taught to obey his master, but also that his survival depends on it as he says to himself, "I must learn their ways if I'm to survive...I'll chew three stalks t' show willin'. That'll hev to doo" (184). Lord Are's marriage has a utilitarian basis as he wants the dowry his wife will bring, his wife Ann looks forward to the life of luxury her husband offers, and her father Lord Hardache, is greedy for the coal buried underneath Lord Are's land. In his book titled *To Have or To Be*, the German psychologist Erich Fromm wrote at length about the corruption of the human imagination through false ideologies especially an economic system as powerful as capitalism. This gives birth to a mode of existence which he calls "...the having mode" (82). He writes,

... the statement '*I* [subject] have *O* [object]' expresses a definition of *I* through my possession of *O*. The subject is not *myself* but *I am what I have*. My property constitutes myself and my identity. The underlying, thought in the statement '*I am I*' is '*I am I because I have X*' - *X* equalling all natural objects and persons to whom I relate myself through my power to control them, to make them permanently mine. (82)

According to Fromm, this adulteration of imagination which leads to the formation of fitting ideologies, leads people to believe that they are following their own will and keeps them ignorant about the fact that their will is itself conditioned and controlled (83). Hence Lord Are's marriage culminates in violence and tyranny at many levels, that is, of the elite against the working class, the elite against the elite, and the working class against itself. Lord Are murders his wife and manipulates his servant Bob into incriminating himself and becoming a scapegoat for his master. Lord Hardache decides not to implicate Lord Are in the murder of his daughter and

blackmails him for his coal. Bob and his mother incriminate Frank, another servant, for petty theft. The only character who is shown to have self-awareness and courage is Bob's wife Rose, who tries desperately to obtain an official pardon for her husband, and also tries to help Frank. She is a symbol of hope in the play, since she has the self-awareness to try to battle injustice though she is alone in this endeavour, as she says in the last scene, "What have I learned? If nothing, then *I* was hanged" (275).

The Crime of the Twenty-First Century is a futuristic play, which explores the grave consequences of a nihilistic culture stemming from a destructive imagination. David Davis, in his introduction to the book titled *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child*, writes, "The quote at the start of his play *The Crime of the Twenty-First Century* is Thatcher's 'There is no such thing as society' and the play explores the implications of the forces behind such a statement and the struggle against them" (xvi). Bond writes in the "Notes on Imagination," that "When imagination is made destructive it may seem to be anti-life. ... All owning societies must produce Cultures of Death (sic); both slave-owning societies and modern consumer democracy are Death Cultures (sic)" (107). The title of the play depicts the time period in which the play is perhaps set, and also of the nature of the culture that exists in it, that is, a criminal culture. The setting of the play seems almost surrealistic because the desert-like description of the landscape and topography, in the opening scene, is too desolate: "The site is an open space that was once a yard or two or three ground-floor rooms. It is in the 'clearance', a vast desert of ruins that stretch for hundreds of miles and have been flattened to discourage resettlement ... The site is littered with rubble and dust. Some of the rubble is gathered in heaps" (219). It seems as if the past has been deliberately erased and Bond gives no background or explanation regarding the setting or the characters which appear in the opening scene. Hence the first impression is that of starkness, but as the plot gradually unfolds, grave complexities of the human situation are exposed by Bond. The events of the play revolve around Hoxton, a woman in her fifties, who lives alone in a cell among the ruins, and a small group of individuals who come to her in search of shelter. All the characters

are victims of violence and hence fear and the instinct of survival is most prominent in their dialogues and actions. Bond says in the “Notes on Imagination” that a destructive imagination is the simulacrum or replica of instinct not reason (107). He writes,

In owned society the imagination may conform to ideology, lose its autonomy and take part in society’s crimes; or it may seek autonomy in the only way ideology and social thinking leave open to it - that is, commit crime. Punishment corrupts criminals. They are corrupted when fear or need forces them to believe that their crime should be punished: then they have accepted authority’s false story - the ideology which justifies society’s injustice and which was the cause of their crime ... All crimes are attacks on injustice and are gestures of support for the victims. Of course such statements sound meaningless and absurd. That is the tragedy of our situation ... Ideology is embodied in bricks and mortar, in customs and attitudes and psychology; it becomes a motive for action. (110)

Bond’s emphatic socialist statements make him seem obviously sympathetic toward the working class characters. However, though he criticizes the authority for perpetuating an unjust system, nevertheless he clearly depicts them as victims of a corrupt imagination which has been conditioned by an irrational culture. If there were a reversal of roles, that is, the working class either rose to the upper class level, for example the character of Shakespeare in his play *Bingo*, or the working class people got a chance to wreak vengeance, for example, the peasants his play *The Fool*, violence and aggression would ensue. In *The Crime of the Twenty-First Century* Bond portrays a future based on these notions. As in other plays by him the authority figure is not present in the physical sense, but nonetheless the present death-like status quo and the pitiful condition of the characters is ascribed to the violence they

are subjected to by an ideology based authority figure institution which is the army. The dialogues between the characters are mostly monosyllabic and defensive, since they are all fearful of each other. Grig, a man in his sixties is the first to visit Hoxton, followed by Sweden, a young renegade in his twenties, and lastly Hoxton's adolescent daughter Grace, who she had abandoned because she was forced to choose her own life over her daughter's. Hoxton tries to chase each of these vagabonds away from what she considers her territory, even her own daughter, so profound are her sense of fear and the instinct of self-preservation. All the characters tell each other about their experiences in order to argue and defend their actions against each other or the society, for example, in the first scene, when Hoxton tells Grig to leave he says, "Left me place-no permit. Wife was dyin ... I come away. Do no good there. The street'll feed 'er- or let 'er go: best in the end" (223). Sweden also tells Hoxton and Grig about the violence and cruelty he has been subjected to at the hands of the army, so much so, that he mutilated himself to extract a tracking device surgically implanted inside his body by the army to escape. Hoxton talks about being forced out of her house but says she doesn't remember much. Later she confesses to her daughter that she helped poor women abandon their children by giving them to childless couples in exchange for money. However, when she couldn't find couples who wanted to adopt children, she was forced to murder them because women kept leaving their children at her doorstep. Sweden also confesses that he was in prison for life because of car theft and arson. He says in the fourth scene, "Not that it makes no difference - get life for everythin" (236). Thus in an irrational culture fiction can become reality because the circumstances force the human imagination to create that reality. Bond quotes an example of how fiction becomes reality in "The Cap." He narrates a recorded incident of the Second World War in which at a Nazi camp it was mandatory for the prisoners to wear caps. A prisoner missing a cap would be shot. The creation of such an absurd rule is an example of fiction, and the actual shooting of prisoners is what makes it a reality (xxxvii-xlii). The brutalisation by the army of civilians under such fictitious ideological pretexts, depicted in the play, is a universal phenomenon. The characters are not only pitiful but helpless in

what they do. Hence none of them can be blamed as Hoxton says in the seventh scene, “‘Oo’s t’ blame? I don’t build cities ‘n put people in armies ‘n prisons. If this is penance, I paid it” (249-50). Sweden’s murdering Hoxton and Grace is a consequence of the helplessness he feels. He asks Hoxton before he stabs her in the seventh scene, “Tell me ‘ow to live! Out there! No eyes! No face! Tell me! Suggest it! ... I want t’ live – not die there like ‘n animal - dog with no eyes! ‘Elp me t’ be ‘uman!” (251). These are the questions of human drama Bond exposes the audience and the readers to through this play. Bond writes in a letter contributed by him for this research and forming its “Appendix ” about his later plays that, “In these I push the human situation to an extreme because its (sic) these situations that reveal the true reality of human “being.” I define myself as an extremophile” (1). Hence, in both plays, he attempts to redefine the conventional notions about culture by creating awareness about the problems in the existing cultures, and ascribing their existence to the human imagination and the ideologies it creates. However his philosophical notions presented in his later prose works like “The Cap” and “Notes on Imagination” are extremely abstract in nature and instead of only redefining existing concepts like rationalism and socialism, they present new concepts like the concept of “Nothingness.” Thus the prose needs extensive analysis and explanation before it can be applied to the text which can be a hindrance for certain readers and audiences. However, Bond acknowledges being philosophical, which shows that his aim is not to highlight problems but also to create awareness about the philosophical notions that lead to the creation of a particular culture. Bond writes in the “Commentary on the War Plays,” published in his sixth volume of plays that “The human mind’s strength is that it is not determined by instincts but generates culture; its weakness is not that we inherit animality but that we inherit history and the culture of the past” (253).

It is very clear that perhaps no reader, member of the audience or researcher of Bond’s works can withstand the shock of his portrayal of the savageries of humanity without being aroused or provoked in some way. Either a hurried negative conclusion about Bond’s objectives can be drawn, or a thought process will be instigated.

Bond takes responsibility for this and says in a letter published in his third volume of letters that each member of the audience will either be a better or a worse person, but it is possible for them to choose, within limits, which (142).

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APPENDIX

19-02-08

Dear Aqsa Kaleem,

Thank you for your letter. I will try to answer your questions. Firstly I would advise you to read the introduction in the 8th volume of my plays. It is called *Freedom and Drama*. It was originally written for a book published by the French Ministry of Education when my *War Plays* were put on the baccalaureat examination. This is the latest published paper about my drama theory. You should also read *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child* Edited by David Davis (Trenton Books UK ISBN 13:978-1-85856-312-1/ISBN 10:1-8f856-312-7- Pub. 2005). This is initially about my plays for young people but it also contains various papers that cover most of my work. I think its (sic) necessary for you to read Vol 8 of my collected plays (Methuen). It and Vol 7 contain the first four plays in the *Colline Tetralogy* as it originally was, but it is now a Pentad with a final fifth play yet to be published. This is my latest exploration of the problem of being human within the self and the modern world. You should also read the shorter plays I have written for *Big Brum Theater-in-Education Company*. These shorter plays were written to make my latest ideas on drama (in the pentad) available in a suitable form for young people, mostly teenagers but, for example, *Tune* (not yet published) was written and performed for children as young as nine.

I think that in general what you say of my work is correct. But its (sic) important that you read some of the later plays (the BB plays and *Coffee, The Crime of the XXIst Century, People, Born*). In these I push the human situation to an extreme because its (sic) these situations that reveal the true reality of human “being”. I define myself as an extremophile.

I avoid the expression “human nature” because it suggests something permanent, something given to us which we *must* be (you cant (sic) kick against nature). Instead, we are a conflux of two

things: our species capacities, our genetic potential, and the situation in which we exists (sic). Instead of thinking of that situation as given and external, as if it were a chess board (sic), and we were the chess pieces being manipulated on the board by the hand of (what?-fate?) according to determined rules, we could compare our situation to a shore line (sic) which takes the sea, the external world, into itself, and the sea and the shore interact and mould each other. The external is also internal and the internal modifies the external. We are a close relation to our “site” and drama concerns particular situations on the site - chosen because they are critical. This is also a way of understanding the events of history.

But of course the “external” divides into many divisions. For instance, other people are also an external-and-internal (the e-i), but to us they are an external. I think imagination may penetrate this particular barrier into the e-i the other, of other people. We can imagine the way they are in the world - we can only rationally *understand* how a stone or a piece of furniture is in the world. Drama and history are caught up in these constant fluxions. Its (sic) why art cant (sic) be reduced to a science, because then it would be a science that contained an anti-science, a science which constantly aggressed against itself. Imagination in society and often in the individual is a similar self-aggression – but that is the whole purpose of drama, to elucidate the logic of these situations – and as the situations are the material world sited in the imagination, hen (sic) we can talk of the logic of imagination. This is an existential imagination which absolutely must include the ontological – we cannot escape from our material reality but are not reduced to it. All ideologies deny this because they place an absolute determinant outside human consciousness and activity. The logic of imagination combines with the logic of reason to make or corrupt humanness. The logic of reason is exemplified in the facts of a stone or a table – but they can have no humanness, of course. That comes with the logic of imagination interacting with the logic of reason. This means that just as we can define what a table is and, say, weigh a stone so we can define the logic of humanness in any situation. Put broadly, this logic is what enables us to most fully understand our situation in our moment of history – because we *are* that

understanding, it is present not just in our consciousness but in our *self-consciousness*. We can say what situation most closely combines the two logics. For instance, you can say that there is a determining God but this must be a fact about the material world, because that is where he, she, it or they (sic) must be. If you say no, God is in a spiritual reality (or, as Hegel says, there is a spirit of history) then you still have to place that spiritual reality into the material world. Instead people pray to the spiritual to bring rain in a draught or to help the victims of an earthquake. This is simply illogical. The problem is of course that in earlier historical stages it is logic to invoke God, that is appropriate in stages in the shifting fluxions of sea and shore I spoke of above. But when we know more about the material world (as throughout history we do) then the former logic collapses into reactionary, or pitiful, illogicality. If there were a God they (sic) only appropriate prayer would be to ask him, her, it or they (sic) to explain the universe. This would be blasphemy... and you then have to explain why God wishes to preserve our ignorance. All this argument may appear complicated, but it is simple: it is the effect of the two logics that has all the complications of history and the mystifications of ideology.

The real political problem is this: not how can we be free in society but how can we be free in history, because we can have the former at the expense of other people's unfreedom? But altruism, the desire (or, as I think, need) to help others who suffer, is an obvious aspect of humane-ness. This leads to the complications of our situations and our ideologies. Brecht's terrible temptation to do good, the inquisitor who burns his victims for their own sake, Stalin who tries to produce (sic) humanness to a formula and not to its self-creativity: the material stone sculpts the sculptor's hand, just as he or she sculpts the stone into some image which it naturally isn't (though art probably in some way must reflect the process and not just the act of creation: and given our present bewildered state that explains the chaos and destructiveness of present art – and of post-modernism, which really reflects the process of money). These processes are difficult to describe except in a broad abstract way – but they become immediate in drama, because there the two logics meet and either (in human consciousness) seek to destroy each other, or one to destroy the other, or else to involve human

creativity and not our destructiveness. Its (sic) why Hitler found the Jews physically repulsive or why religious fanatics can regard the woman's body as meat: which ultimately is Aristotle's definition of the slave as human cattle. Its (sic) because we do not have ideas but inhabit ideas, and so they inhabit us, that reason is impotent to deal with its own irrationalities. Only the confrontation in drama can elucidate these crises by changing the elements of which they are made – reason alone can only rearrange them. This lies behind Dostoevsky's obscure and confusing (and unhelpful because so easily mis-understandable) (sic) idea that two and two are sometimes five. In *that* sense they *always* are, because the meaning of *four* always depends on its situation. Situation to humanness is what the environment is to evolution.

You specifically ask about “boundary” in *Notes on Post-Modernism*. I don't have the text with me, but I think that in the context I was saying that there are always historical limits to our understanding of our material situation, ultimately of the universe. Yet the mind seeks explanations (or spiritually accepting accommodations to ignorance) and authority then takes on the right to explain the unknowable. That's why I write that whoever controls nothingness controls you – but instead of controls I said owns, because it's a matter of social authority: those who own God own more money. I hope this is clear. Its (sic) really material power claiming power over imagination. So limitations (which is why nothingness cannot be put anywhere – it isn't nature abhorring vacuum, but nature being in a vacuum) and so ideology may plunder it endlessly as a way of strengthening and making more insidious its power. You go on to ask me if I feel “sympathetic” towards the authority figure I describe in the notes. What is “sympathetic” in this situation? Does it mean understanding – those who do not understand themselves or their historical situation – say, the Christian inquisitors or nowadays young suicide bombers (ask, ask, ask *ideology* why they have to be young). (sic) In talking of logic and reason I have not mentioned emotion, which is a product of the self and so at the very, and obvious, least is close to imagination, where it may be both cause and consequence. Then one wants to flee to something like Spinoza's intellectual love of God (which I take to be, imagination's love of reason, and not as it

suggests reasons love of reason!). (sic) Then I think “sympathy” is irrelevant. You have to have compassion for those who suffer, revenge is the absence of compassion and so always inhuman (how can you pity someone for the suffering you *inflict* on them?). Schopenhauer regards compassion as the only basis of morality – but can you have intellectual compassion? In the presence of avoidable suffering its (sic) human to feel anger – but flashes of anger cannot seek reason. Anger is, then, defensive because we put ourselves in the place of the victim, but are victims helped most if we understand the aggressor? And so on and so on - up to Rousseau’s claim that the thief has the right to be hanged in order to protect his (the thief’s not the hangman’s) property. Am I to be a philosopher or a human being? The creativity of drama is that it activates these situations so that they can be seen both immediately and from the distance – and more, drama elucidates the conundrum of why these things are so, enabling us to understand history not as if it was our self understanding it but as if we were someone else understanding it, not by placing us outside the problem but by creating the problem in our self, so that we must then privilege the other as if he or she or they were ourselves: the mechanics of altruism. This of course is abused by contemporary entertainment, which seeks to induce revenge because its (sic) good for business: the revengeful are always hungry and are always naked seeking furs.

I hope these comments are useful. They are intended to be suggestive rather than to be complete, of course – to suggest how, to understand and recreate ourselves, we need to use and understand material reality without limiting ourselves to its reality. I will send you a copy of a letter which might be useful and you should also read some of the things I list above. Then if I can be of further help to you, please let me know. Thanks for writing to me. I send you my best wishes for 2008 and hope that your country may be at peace in that year.