LETTER TO ALAIN FRANCON, 21 11 13

Dear Alain,

Dominique Valadie is unique, an irreplaceable actress. She has had a profound influence on my writing. The play "Dea" (its about Medea) is inspired by her. The "meaning" of Dea (the woman) is in what follows from the burning of the coat at the end "Innocence" -- Dea (the play) is illuminated by the burning. I think Euripides returned to Medea in The Bacchae -- it was part of a trilogy, with Iphigenia and one other play. The other play is lost. If it had not been lost I think the history of drama -- and of society -- for the last two and a half thousand years would be different. We would be and understand ourselves differently. I cant imagine anyone but Dominique playing the part.

I wrote the parts in "People" for the actors you originally cast. The soldier Postern (Gate) comes out of the earth at the beginning of the play because for years he has lived his death. And he is the dead man who has learnt to wink at the man he is going to kill. He has lived with his own death but the wink protects him from living his deadness. It does this by ironising death. The wink means he has an unquenchable desire for life, for an innocent (unwinking) life he cannot live. That causes his passionate insistence on the innocence of the young man called Someone. If Someone is innocent he, Someone, is alive -- and then Postern thinks he too can be alive because he is still among the living and not in the kingdom of the dead. But for Someone, this means that Postern is stealing his life. Postern needs illusions, Someone is looking for reality where he can find, be, himself. Its not "a fight to the death" (to use an English phrase), its "a fight to the life" -- that is not a fight to stay alive but a fight to be alive: and that is the most intense and uncanny need the living can have.

I wrote the parts for specific actors but as importantly I wrote the play specifically for you. You will be able to guide whichever actors play the parts. You never do anything arbitrarily but likeme try to find the meanings of the situations. Increasingly my plays enter what I call (after the fifth scene of "Born") "problem five," or, rather, the situation of problem 5. At Big Brum we have found that in the latest shorter plays Ive written for them (A Window, The Edge, The Angry Road) that I increasingly go into "site 5." ("Site" means a place plus the total situation at that place.) Its like crossing a boundary into another site, another reality, where the problems refine themselves and become more insistent and intense, acute and accurate, the absolute confrontation of innocence and the terminal-malignant (revenge). Ibsen talked of peeling an onion. But it isnt like that, its like cracking nuts. The core (meat) of the nut fragments the shell, breaks it. Its not like peeling an onion as if the layers of the onion were shrouds. Instead, the nut core breaks open the shell. You could stick the layers of the onion back on the onion, you could
not put the shell of the nut together: you are in site 5. If you try to go back to site 4 you are nowhere. The difference to a play by Ibsen (or another writer) is simple. In most plays a character might enter site 5 but the rest of the characters remain in the earlier site and find the one who is in site 5 odd, strange, mad -- it might be Hedda Gabler. When she kills herself the doctor says "People dont do such things" -- but in site 5 everyone does such things. In my plays, now, the whole play enters the site, crosses the boundary, and all the characters are in site 5. The play has passed though a gate (postern) into another area of reality, the characters share the same problem which is specific to the site. I say "site 5" but in the Big Brum plays (and probably in "People") its more like crossing a series of boundaries. All the characters have crossed each boundary and so they share the same problem or situation. They dont have to agree with each other (they remain antagonists in a drama) but they understand what the others are doing and seeking. Its not like descending to different Freudian levels of reality (or only incidentally like that), instead its that the logic of the situation changes at each boundary: the logic is "how to be human?" in the new situation. The situation is new because the problem is understood in a new way, or presents itself in a new way. This is what makes the drama modern. In the drama, in the play, reality has a new perspective on itself. Perhaps Beckett's characters are supposed to be in site 5 -- but they arent because they never have to go there, they simply begin there: and you cant do that. If you try to do it the audience cant enter site 5 because they are not taken on a journey there -- they cannot use fiction to orientate themselves in reality: which means, to take them into reality because reality isnt a state but a meaning. They merely watch from outside. The journey there, the arrival, and then the being there, is what defines and makes drama modern. At Big Brum we've found this as the problem, the subject, of my plays which the production has to create. Drama has to develop in this way if it is still to have use. Its the only way its fictions can enter reality. If I can help you let me know.

The conversations between me and David Tuaillon are now to be published in English. David would be able to elucidate any problems in a way that relates them specifically to French drama and the present situation in France.

If you work in theatre you are used to losing actors. Its unlike the losses in any other occupation. There someone can be replaced in the way you might replace part of a machine that doesnt work. But an actor is both a single part of the play and the whole of the play -- because that is how actors interrelate in a play. You have to learn to use the losses as gains. I will tell you a story. Beethoven found he was losing his hearing. It was a cruel disaster for a composer. But he learnt to understand it in a way that made it a gain. He said "It is my deafness! Mine! Only mine! No one else's -- mine! And I will use it in my way!" I like the story very much.

------- Edward