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Dramatic Publishing

THE BUNDLE

Drama

by

EDWARD BOND

“A complex and marvelously written play.”
(New York Times)

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The Bundle (Code: B47)

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(THE BUNDLE)
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The Bundle was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Warehouse Theatre, London. The production opened on January 13, 1978 with the following cast:

Ferryman	Bob Peck
Basho	Patrick Stewart
Wang	Mike Gwilym
First Keeper	Rod Culbertson
Second Keeper	Alfred Molina
Old Man	Clyde Pollitt
Old Woman	Judith Harte
Ferryman's Wife	Margaret Ashcroft
Pu-Toi	Kevin O'Shea
Lu	Lynda Rooke
Kung-Tu	John Nettles
Woman	Meg Davies
Tiger	Paul Moriarty
Sheoul	Francis Viner
Kaka	Greg Hicks
Tor-Quo	Martin Read
Water Seller 1	Kevin O'Shea
Water Seller 2	Greg Hicks
Cracker Man	Martin Read
Soldier 1	Rod Culbertson
Soldier 2	Alfred Molina
Husband	Christopher Whitehouse
Soldier 3	Christopher Whitehouse
To-Si	Christopher Whitehouse
San-Ko	Alfred Molina
Gow	Rod Culbertson
Tuan (corpse)	Michael Townsend

Directed by Howard Davies

Designed by Chris Dyer

Lighting by David Boshell

THE BUNDLE
A Full-Length Play
For Four Women, Twenty-Three Men (doubling possible)

C H A R A C T E R S

FERRYMAN
BASHO
WANG
FIRST KEEPER
SECOND KEEPER
OLD MAN
OLD WOMAN
FERRYMAN'S WIFE
PU-TOI
LU
KUNG-TU
WOMAN
TIGER
SHEOUL
KAKA
TOR-QUO
WATER SELLER 1
WATER SELLER 2
CRACKER MAN
SOLDIER 1
SOLDIER 2
HUSBAND
SOLDIER 3
TO-SI
SAN-KO
GOW
TUAN (corpse)

ACT ONE

Scene One:	River bank
Scene Two:	River bank
Scene Three:	Grave mound
Scene Four:	Another part of the river
Scene Five:	Marsh

ACT TWO

Scene One:	Ferryman's house
Scene Two:	Road between villages
Scene Three (a):	Ferryman's house
Scene Three (b):	River bank
Scene Three (c):	Ferryman's house
Scene Four:	Room in Court House
Scene Five:	River bank

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

SCENE: Fenland. A river and a river bank in the fens. A bell on a post. A baby left by the river.

FERRYMAN. I ask why the reverend sir sets out so early in the morning. He is not a soldier or a tax collector.

BASHO. The landowner wanted to make me judge of the fenland villages. I answered: not worthy. I have seen the darkness of human life – murder theft death. The *truth* when it is dark corrupts. First I must find enlightenment. Then I will judge. The landowner said: when the old judge dies our court will be empty. Don't seek enlightenment too long. I said: I seek till I find.

FERRYMAN. Will the reverend sir now say what enlightenment is?

BASHO. All creation seeks enlightenment as this river flows to the sea. Does the river ask: what is the way? Men are a dark river. We get and spend, fret and eddy, twist into whirlpools till the water seems to devour itself in its frenzy – we delay. See where the river flows to its mouth and enters the ocean, where the great earth sees the vision of itself in the sky and turns to water. (FERRYMAN helps BASHO from the boat.) May your life prosper.

FERRYMAN. The reverend sir hasn't paid the ferryman.

BASHO. I go to be reborn. Does the midwife charge the child? Is your life so useful, your soul full of such

brightness, your trade done with such courtesy – that you can charge enlightenment a penny on its journey into the world?

FERRYMAN. The reverend sir knows our life is hard, there are so few travelers –

BASHO. For those who suffer there is grace.

FERRYMAN. Grace without food won't help me to row my boat.

BASHO. Not one penny. Will you tell the keeper of Heaven: "Yes, I charged the saints a penny to travel in my boat. I come empty-handed, clothed in sin. Let me enter." You ask me to damn your immortal soul. (Sees CHILD.) A child. Left by the river. These villages are in hell! You see why I seek enlightenment. (To the CHILD.) Why were you left here?

FERRYMAN. The parents were too poor to feed it.

BASHO. They threw you out to die.

FERRYMAN. They laid it by the river and prayed to Heaven that passengers would take pity on it. Take the child on your journey!

BASHO. Take the child! I have to cross mountains where there are tigers. Crawl through swamps – unless someone loves knowledge enough to carry me on his back. Beg – and go without. You take it.

FERRYMAN. We're as poor as its parents. And our house is an ignorant place. With the reverend sir the child would grow wise and good. People will take pity on him if he has a child.

BASHO. Ah . . . No. Knowledge must be loved for itself. I would be like an organ grinder with a monkey on his back. If the child had been big it could have carried my bundle. Then Heaven's purpose would have been clear. No, it was put here to tempt me at the start of my journey. Shall the sage turn back and never get further than his doorstep? Child, I am Basho the great seventeenth-century poet. I

brought the haiku to perfection. Listen!

The saints' feet are hands

Washing the dusty earth

On the narrow road

That leads to enlightenment.

I am often asked to recite that. Of course, you understand nothing yet. But my words are a blessing. Child, we are both by the river at the start of our journey. Yours may end at this river. I shall cross many rivers. Neither you nor I has a coin to pay the ferryman or lay on our eyes. Learn to be patient. Would the sky alter by one tear if I took you with me? Does the ant on the mountain ask the pines why they sigh? One can take nothing into the mirror of eternity but the vision of oneself. (BASHO goes. The FERRYMAN stands by his boat and looks at the CHILD.)

FERRYMAN. In my house you'd be hungry. Wake up at night with the cold. And I'm not a good man. My wife wouldn't be able to save you from my wicked temper. Wicked. Sometimes I wait all day and no one comes. On those evenings I couldn't stand your crying – though I was crying myself. If you'd dropped off the back of a carriage the lackey – (Starts poling.) – would have been sent to pick you up. The coachman would have been flogged for jolting. You're a poor man's child – you must learn to understand. Be grateful to your parents. Look at the good cloth you're wrapped in! They could have sold that and lived like lords. Your mother didn't have a cloth to dry her eyes. She looked down at you and said: "Now the cradle clothes are a shroud." Yes, well. You have much to understand and forgive. The poet was right: patience. (A curlew calls. The FERRYMAN stops.) There'd be no harm in making sure you're properly wrapped. (He starts to punt back to the CHILD.) You could have kicked your clothes loose. Or they could be too tight. Your parents didn't want to hurt you. I owe it

to them to look. You're not crying. It can't be too bad. Perhaps the worst's already over. It would be wrong to wake you. I'll just straighten your clothes. (The FERRYMAN gets out of the boat, goes to the CHILD and arranges its wrapping.) I won't pick you up. Better not. I'll tell my passengers: a little boy. A mouth to feed now, two hands to work later. Sow in spring, eat in winter. (He goes back to the boat.) Whoever gets you's in luck. They'll fight over you. Heaven must have meant you for someone better than me. If I took you I'd be stealing from the gods. This is the passenger bell. (He rings one note on the bell.) They ring and I come. I help them into the boat. Young and old, rich and poor, innocent and some so guilty the river couldn't wash them clean. I take them all across. That is the bell. (The FERRYMAN gets into the boat and begins to pole.) We have no children. Heaven was kind. It knew we couldn't feed them. When you welcome us to Heaven you'll understand why I left you. You'll be young and happy forever, we'll be old and soiled. (The curlew calls. The FERRYMAN stops rowing.) Terrible to be poor. We have nothing and the world is a mouth wide open saying: "Give!" We must be hard to live. Yet at any moment a curlew can call and we are lost. (The FERRYMAN poles back to the CHILD.) God knows what my wife will say. I'll leave you outside the door where she'll find you. Then she'll be guilty. Or say a god came walking over the water as brazen as anything and when I lifted my hands to cover my face — you were dropped in them — Tch! She'd box my ears! No supper tonight. She'll say: "If I feed this I can't feed you." (The FERRYMAN picks up the CHILD.) This is a bad thing. Not a wise one. We throw kindness around as if we were kings. Yes, I shall eat tonight — I must be strong to work. So I have taken my wife's bread. She'll go without every night. Soon she'll grow weak. Her life will be half a life. She's

shared my sorrow for years. I love her. Yet I betray her for love for you. I kill her. (He poles.) Where is the wisdom in that? If you understood, you'd be shocked. Look, I row gently so that you sleep there on the floor of my boat. Your fingers lie on your chest like chips from a gravestone. I must hope you're dead. Or you die in the crossing. Then all I need do is dig your grave. That would be best. We'd be spared the results of this folly. Where is the wisdom in that?

SCENE TWO

SCENE: The same. Night. Fourteen years later. The FERRYMAN fishes from the boat. WANG sits by the shaded lamp.

WANG. It's not our boat.

FERRYMAN. Not now.

WANG. Why not?

FERRYMAN. It went in taxes.

WANG. Why?

FERRYMAN. No money. So few passengers.

WANG. Why?

FERRYMAN. Robbers. People don't like to travel.

WANG (after a slight silence). The wind ruffles my sleeve like the water. What are taxes?

FERRYMAN. Taxes make sure the country's well run.

WANG. Father —

FERRYMAN. Shh!

WANG. But . . .

FERRYMAN (after a slight silence). I'll try to explain. It's true: the other day I got this cut on my head. I took two hefty young men in the boat. They said they were going to join the emperor's army. What a pleasure for an old man to row two strong young men to their glory. In the middle of the stream they laughed and said: "Give us the takings." I said: "Boys, you're my only passengers this week and so far you've given me nothing." Then because they were angry and because they wanted to amuse themselves, they said: "Let's sink the boat." I said: "Boys, this boat is the landowner's." Their whole manner changed. If the boat had been mine they'd have sunk it. With so many robbers about the police have many more important things to protect than us. But if they'd sunk the landowner's boat they'd have been hunted down to the ends of China. So, that's taxes: the soldiers left me the boat and only cracked my head . . . Shh.

WANG. No insects on the lamp. Cold.

FERRYMAN (half sighs). I wanted to catch a fish for your mother.

WANG. Who owns the river?

FERRYMAN. You're keeping the fish away.

WANG. Who owns the fish?

FERRYMAN. What fish?

WANG. Why do we fish at night?

FERRYMAN. The landowner owns the river and the fish. We can't afford a license to fish.

WANG. So we steal the fish.

FERRYMAN (slight pause). I will try to explain. The landowner owns the boat and the river and the fish. You could say he owns us — he owns the only way we can live. In return he keeps us safe. (WANG moves as if to interrupt.) Wait! You sit on the bank in the sun and wave your arms to keep off the insects. Some still bite — but not many.

Well, if the landowner didn't keep the robbers away they'd come down the chimney and take the food out of your mouth! We're his property. It's in his interest to look after us. There.

WANG. We steal the fish to stay alive to pay taxes so that there'll be no more stealing and the —

FERRYMAN. I often wonder who your father was. A priest — or philosopher — or a footpad. I think you — (The ferry bell rings, sharp and clear in the dark. Immediately WANG douses the light. The FERRYMAN fakes his voice to sound as if it were coming from the far bank.) Who's there — so late?

BASHO. Basho.

FERRYMAN. Basho? . . . Oh, reverend sir, one moment! (Splashing as the boat is poled toward the shore. The lamp is lit.) Is it really the reverend sir?

BASHO. Am I known? My fame goes before. I've walked through a thousand valleys and climbed to the top of the world, crossed so many rivers and watched the pole strike the water a million times. My journey has lasted fourteen years. They seem like fourteen lifetimes. (As the boat approaches the light falls on BASHO. He is old and tired and dirty. His feet are bound in lumps of rag.) Tap tap tap through China. I've worn out seventeen walking sticks. My feet are bound with rags! I picked them out of the rubbish in the corner of a graveyard. They'd been used to bind corpses' mouths. Ferryman, is this the way to the deep north?

FERRYMAN. This is your village.

BASHO. My village?

FERRYMAN. Yes, reverend sir.

BASHO. My village? This is my village?

FERRYMAN. Yes, reverend sir. (The FERRYMAN steps from his boat and goes to take Basho's arm to help him into the boat. WANG holds the light so that it falls on the

Ferryman's face.) Welcome!

BASHO. This is a dream!

FERRYMAN. No, reverend sir, I am the ferryman —

BASHO (turning around in a circle). I've taken the wrong road. Walked in a circle. I must go back. Where is the road to the deep north? (Faces the FERRYMAN again.) Where? Where? (The FERRYMAN goes to BASHO to help him, takes his arm to lead him to the boat.)

FERRYMAN. But, reverend sir, be comforted!

BASHO (striking him off). Get off! A vision sent by the devil! Get off! This is the king of the dead! (BASHO falls in a faint.)

FERRYMAN. Water! He's fainted! The poor old man! (WANG sets the lamp on the ground, fetches water from the river and throws it in Basho's face. BASHO comes around spluttering.)

BASHO. . . . what? . . . (BASHO faints again.)

FERRYMAN. He's fainted again! Water! Quick! (WANG fetches water from the river.)

WANG. Who is he? (WANG throws water in Basho's face. BASHO comes around.)

BASHO. The water! Enlightenment!

FERRYMAN. Sir?

BASHO. Enlightenment. The water on my face . . . Enlightenment! I have enlightenment! The meaning of my journey! — Heaven has shown me the mirror on my doorstep! Enlightenment!

WANG (to FERRYMAN). . . . What is enlightenment?

BASHO (kneeling).

I travelled the earth
To the gateway of Heaven
Who kept the door? Doubt!
How many turn back
At the last

Help me. (The FERRYMAN helps BASHO to his feet.)

WANG watches.)

WANG. What is enlightenment?

FERRYMAN. Yes, sir, teach us!

BASHO. I crawled over China like a fly on the back of a mirror. I reached the bright silver river at the edge. The glass cuts. That is the moment the crowd turns back. I crossed the river. Now I am on the other side, on the mirror of eternity. Every pillar in the temple sees the altar from its own angle. The sun dazzles from afar, those who live on it see by its light. I have found the little stone that holds the laws of the world in your hand.

FERRYMAN. Sir — ?

BASHO. Do not ask for enlightenment till you're ready to lose all. I look into the mirror of this river. If this mirror appeared in your boat — a little round hole in the bottom — you would block it out —

FERRYMAN. Sir!

BASHO. You do not seek enlightenment.

FERRYMAN. But for Wang? This is the boy who was left by the river.

BASHO (not remembering). Left by the river . . . ? (TWO KEEPERS jump out of the darkness.)

SECOND KEEPER. Ha!

FIRST KEEPER. Ho!

SECOND KEEPER. Got you!

FIRST KEEPER. At last!

SECOND KEEPER. Red handed!

FIRST KEEPER. Where's the fish?

SECOND KEEPER (going to search). In the boat!

FIRST KEEPER (grabbing BASHO). What's this?

SECOND KEEPER. Three! Buyer from town!

BASHO. Leave me alone!

FERRYMAN. Sirs, this is Basho the poet.

BASHO. My arm.

FIRST KEEPER. Where's the fish?

SECOND KEEPER. In the bush.

FIRST KEEPER. I'll arm you!

FERRYMAN. Sirs, this is the poet from our village. (To BASHO.) Reverend sir, don't be angry. They were boys when you left.

SECOND KEEPER. Is he a poet? Throw him in the water and see if he shouts alas!

BASHO.

At the moment of enlightenment

The devil springs

What is knowledge

Except that the world is evil!

The landowner's made me a judge. If ruffians like you protect the law — it's time I came back. (The TWO KEEPERS go a little to one side.)

FIRST KEEPER. Poachers don't talk like that.

SECOND KEEPER. There's nothing in the bush.

FIRST KEEPER. No harm in stepping careful. (The TWO KEEPERS go back to the others.) Sir, we're sorry we frightened you.

BASHO. My arm!

SECOND KEEPER. There are a lot of bad people in these parts.

FIRST KEEPER. In the dark — we can't take risks. The floods are bad. Every harvest is spoiled. The young men run off to the swamps and turn into bandits and poachers.

BASHO. It's almost broken!

SECOND KEEPER. We try to do our duty and carry out the will of Heaven, as it says in our oath.

FIRST KEEPER. Not easy these days. A judge will understand.

SECOND KEEPER (picking up the rod from the ground). What's . . . ! A fishing rod!

WANG. Walking stick. I cut it for the poet. His is worn out.

FIRST KEEPER. So! We meet a poet and a saint all in one

night!

FERRYMAN. We heard the bell. So late – we knew it would be urgent. So we hurried.

BASHO. Take me home. (The TWO KEEPERS watch WANG and the FERRYMAN help BASHO into the boat.)

SCENE THREE

SCENE: The village burial hills. Refugees camp among the gravestones. They are near the limits of exhaustion. They wear rags. On the ground: bundles, and a cooking pot over a dead fire. Among the refugees are the FERRYMAN, his WIFE, LU (a young girl), PU-TOI (a young farmer), KUNG-TU (a middle-aged shopkeeper) an OLD MAN and an OLD WOMAN. It is quiet.

OLD MAN. It's six days.

OLD WOMAN. The flood should have gone down.

OLD MAN. It always goes after six days.

OLD WOMAN. Even four.

OLD MAN (crying). That's all the rice we could bring. No one could help us.

OLD WOMAN. The landowner won't let us starve, brother. (The OLD WOMAN beckons the FERRYMAN to one side.)

OLD MAN. All this water.

PU-TOI. That'll take days to go down.

OLD WOMAN (aside to the FERRYMAN). Did you get the rice?