

Rethinking the Past and Searching for Humanity and Justice in the Modern World: A Study of Edward Bond's Selected Works

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Abstract

Edward Bond, a British playwright offers many invaluable insights into how destructive ideologies that can be transcended by imagination, which he believes still, has the potential to revive humanity and restore the lost dignity of man. He rather lays stress on the need to think and act rationally and develop consciousness of the audience towards those problems of life that require serious attention. For this he prefers to orient the audience to action rather than their passive acceptance of what is shown to them in the theater. Each play of Bond unfolds a traumatic world of human emotions of violence, fear, menace, threat, loneliness, memories and desire to love and be loved and the meaning of life and its ultimate goal. In his attempt to clinch the substance of the meaningful existence, he lays bare the covers of cling and rags of society. His plays uncover this mechanical truth of life with the goal that oddity of life can be summarized to stay away from the onus of the awful forlornness. *Lear, At the Inland Sea, and The Crime of Twenty-first Century, Olly's Prison, At the Inland Sea, Tuesday, Restoration, Great Peace* etc. reveals an absence of psychological stability and deep-rooted desire for love, happiness and emotional stability. They are both expressions of the time in which they are expressed and of the eternal truths of human behavior. They deal with qualities in human life, particularly insecurity, uncertainty, fear, violence and terror that remain permanent for the society. By this type of presentation he wants a social transformation.

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Keywords: violence, fear, modern, struggle, humane, justice, search, stability, humanity

Edward Bond, a British playwright offers many invaluable insights into how destructive ideologies that can be transcended by imagination, which he believes still, has the potential to revive humanity and restore the lost dignity of man. He rather lays stress on the need to think and act rationally and develop consciousness of the audience towards those problems of life that require serious attention. For this he prefers to orient the audience to action rather than their passive acceptance of what is shown to them in the theater. Each play of Bond unfolds a traumatic world of human emotions of violence, fear, menace, threat, loneliness, memories and desire to love and be loved and the meaning of life and its ultimate goal. Most of his plays are in keeping with his concern for contemporary social issues and in keeping with the conditions of human beings in a technological society which leaves dehumanizing impact and ignores human values in pursuit of power. He depicts through his plays how the very power structures designed for the promotion of social good; corrode the society to its roots. Discussing concepts such as war and violence and shedding light on the mutual relations of human beings, playwright lays

stress on the need to think, act rationally and develop consciousness towards the problems of life that requires serious attention. For Bond, individuals are products of historical, political and social problems.(Plays: Two xiii)

All the plays are highly relevant in the contemporary times and offers a criticism of those stressful conditions of the postwar period, which have compelled people to live in a way for which they are not designed. They critically are portraits of the psychological effects of the situation, which prevailed, in the postwar era and the modern world. Bond claims that proper guidance for the future of humanity can be provided if we feel “the need to understand and to interpret rationally our past in order to use the experiences in our present and not to repeat the mistakes committed.”(Klein,1995:408) By his Plays, the playwright make public that human nature doesn't support evil and destructive actions in essence. For Bond, Science and Technology ,the basis for the twin evils) Science and Technology are exploited for the interest of the ruling class. Technology is unable to guarantee the satisfaction of human needs to provide culture, instead deprives people of their humanity.(Lappin,2) Bond argues that people in the capitalist system are commanded by a superstructure constituted by the social institutions. These institutions include the family, the education system, governments, law and economic systems. According to Bond, social institutions represent the interests of the ruling class, or in other words, which causes injustice.(ÖRMENGÜL:252) Bond argues that social institutions corrupt the individual in order to make dutiful and law-abiding citizens. He brings forward the term, “radical innocence” (Plays Six 252)

Bond's orientation is to depict the injustices of the present society by connecting it to the past and to urge the humanity to find a way out through social transformation based on reason. Klein in Edward Bond's use of *Sociolects in His Dramatic Work* claims that Bond uses different sociolects to reflect the social stratification of the society. Bond employs them to describe a social difference with the upper classes...”(1991: 96) All of Bond's plays provide narrative contexts that call for social change situations which demand some moral action from the characters are automatically endowed with an enlightened perceptive ; they come to it through the concrete social interaction recording in the plays.(Spencer,8) Peter Billingham's *Edward Bond: A Critical Study* (2013) is the only monograph in the new millennium dedicated to Bond's recent work says Bond's new political drama that centers around the problem of defining humanness (17). His works involves constant change, innovation and experiment, another involves consultancy and continuity.(Mangan,2)He is not a playwright who preaches to the audience but, rather ,creates the adequate conditions to bind reason and imagination as a means to understanding reality.(Nicolar,2016:258)

The Crime of the Twenty-First Century is a futuristic play which explores the grave and alarming 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). 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. 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 food and shelter. All the characters are victims of violence and hence fear and the instinct of survival is most prominent in their dialogues and actions. The play reconstructs the horror of war crimes. The characters Hoxton, Grig, Sweden and Grace experience a pathetic living in the dilapidated wasteland as a result of atrocities of war. The characters are helpless. The play ends with a Song named The Site shows hunger is for the establishment of justice.

Bond focuses on the necessity of making people closer to one another in an age in which individuals have been more and more isolated, leave aside the growing selfishness. He defines individuals as an inseparable part of the society and the other individuals. He accepts as true the thought that this will help them to reappraise their responsibilities. (Grecco,1994:371)He is very much dissatisfied with the capitalist system, thinking the capitalist society ruled by money and power has grinded every one and destroyed their souls . He directs our attention to the consumer culture pointing out it is obvious that in the world not many citizens can actually afford to enjoy the benefits of technological development . What goes with material affluence is spiritual poverty and injustice.(Yanhua,84) Cordelia Oliver reports in an interview of Bond in The Guardian: “ What you are seeing, he is surely saying is our own aggressive, abrasive, callous, cannibalistic society with its root in repression and emotional starvation.(Robert,1996: 17)

In **Restoration**, Bond demonstrates how the human imagination creates ideologies, which form violent and unjust cultures. 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. Daniel Jones opines“ The present Social order is in its own form of violence, and that the man can change his society.”(517) Bond is against any kind of violence but he feels sympathy for people crippled by wrong political moves because they are indeed the victims of the system. According to him If a person is constantly dehumanized, he or she will lose some parts of their humaneness, eventually. The same thing inevitably happens to those who are dehumanizing them, under various traditionally legitimate and socially acceptable excuses.

Bond’s theatre has internalized violence which is all pervasive in the world. he has innovated different techniques to visualize violence in society which range from madness to deformity from mutation to suicide. Bond wants to convey the abiding and disturbing presence of violence in all levels of social life. Bond deliberately negates the alienation effect of epic theatre to forcefully convey the idea of violence. In this context Jenny.S. Spenser remarks in *Edward Bond Dramatic Strategies*:

Emphasizes the element the of historical consciousness in his plays “ Bond’s plays immerse actors and audiences in questions in involving history and politics that more popular playwrights may prefer not to face.”(2006:xiv)

Bond himself comments on the loss of a closely-knit rural community that defines the relationship of the individual with the society. The precedence of money over human values has bred a sense of alienation and apathy in the modern man. In his play **The Worlds**, Bond (1980) observes that an industrial society is “characterized by a highly advanced technology, complex forms of social organizations, rapid social change and a strong commitment to economic growth” (109). He dramatically analyses the dehumanizing processes that result in problems like wars, crime, terrorism, poverty, interracial conflicts, psychological disorders which pose an increasing threat to the quality of life in modern industrial societies as well as to human dignity. In an essay titled “History” Bond comments on the nature of truth in History: ...Bond comments on the nature of truth in history truth-like the physical laws of nature comes from the foundations”(1978:111) His representation of historical myths are for social change. For him historicization of events necessarily requires a process of rediscovery.(266)It functions as a critique of mainstream history.His subjective review of the events of history through his dramatic imagination and innovative presentation leads to various ideological questions. His theatre records a vicious impact of an irrational culture emerging as a result of the destructive imagination. He proposes humanness as a solution.

The play **Great Peace** is based on a paradox. A soldier returns home with orders to choose a baby from his street and kill it. Two babies live in his street: his mother ‘s and a neighbor’s but unexpectedly the soldier kills his mother ‘s child. From this beginning, Bond depicts a horrific world in which humanity has disappeared after the nuclear disaster to the point that characters are nameless: WOMAN, SOLDIER, SON or DAUGHTER. This dust land is presented as a kind of dead environment in which life should sprout. Bond points out: The characters are not named because although they are not symboling their lives are social forces –and the forces are clarified by the crises. But there is another reason. They have lost their names because they have lost themselves. Names are a sign of our humanity. In a nuclear age we still have to create our humanity (2002: 361) The tragedy of Woman in the play becomes the traumatic acceptance of the killing of her son by his own brother. This dilemma with Herodian traces provides the opportunity to begin a journey to social conscience. For Bond, this violence against the socially marginalized portrays the unjust system of our world. The reversal of the expected killing blurs the boundary between inside (family) and outside (stranger) as a deconstruction technique. In **The Tin Can People**, the economic system controls individuals’ way of life. The Tin Can people become corrupted in a consumer society. On the one hand, they experienced a disastrous nuclear war in the past. On the other hand, they live in luxury in the present. Hence, they are stuck between the past and the present. The tin cans, which are stockpiled in warehouses, insure that this new society will not suffer the scarcity of the old, but they are also the visible sign of the previous culture, with its emphasis on possession and greed” (Reinelt 61). The economic system detaches **The Tin Can** people from a productive way of life. Bond explains that “When the soul loses its mechanical basis it becomes reactionary. Limitless free consumption takes us out of the relationships which creates our humanity. We become like children without a reason to grow up” (Plays: Six 346).

His plays *At the Inland Sea* takes its audience and main character Boy from his bedroom in the present to the inside of Auschwitz gas chamber as Cyanide gas chokes its packed victims to Death, and Back to present again. This experience to the death chamber and his struggle with the unimaginable horror and his return to the bedroom, his world, his everyday life has changed him to an adult who learns about humanity. In *Coffee*, Bond examines the state of mind of those who commit crimes: those who pulled the triggers in the places of execution such as Babi Yar. In Bond's plays the soldier is never simply a killer by birth, he is also a moral being, who despite everything, manages to grasp and preserve his own humanity. Instead of simply following orders Nold in Bond's *Coffee*, refuses to kill the Woman and her mentally impaired daughter. He kills his superior officer, who had given him the order, instead. In an interview with **Glenn Loney** Bond argues that our present age is in bad need of rethinking knowledge of the past. The rethinking of the such knowledge helps us highlight both the present and future: "our age like every age needs to reinterpret the past as part of learning to understand itself, so that we can know what we are and what we should do." (Bond 2006:45) Bond himself declares that he rereads the past in the light of the present to explore the secrets of human reality. This critical practice helps him to depict the social and political problems of the present by showing "Why things go wrong and how we could correct them."

Skeletons sat before stone buttons and stone computers

Stone Politicians and stone officers bent over stone

Maps of the cities they had made dust

Our ancestors who sheltered in caved painted

The walls with scenes of life

These had covered them with charts of Death.(Tin,71)

The above lines highlights the impact of wars which are the outcome of the technology used with inhuman intents. Skeletons operators, stone politicians and cities turned to dust refer to a world deprived of life and humanity. These dehumanized people in the modern world lead to disasters. He questions:

Why were the bombs dropped?

If that could be told simply they would not be dropped.(Tin-95)

Bond highlights the violent impact of the corrupt social order by focusing mainly on the reshaped image of Lear in his play *Lear* who is the chief source to comment upon the plight of societies victimized by the political whims of the ruling class. *Lear* represents most characteristics of the irrational authority. *Saved* displays a direct representation of a capitalist society as the play is set in contemporary Britain. It charts a series of events in the lives of a group of working class men and Women. It explores the dehumanizing industrial environment and the moral emptiness of the working class world and the beastless and brutality that are the result. The Play *Bundle* is based

on an invented story from the life of 17th century Japanese haiku master Mastro Basho. The Buddhist poet in search of wisdom chooses to continue his pilgrimage rather than save an infant abandoned by the river. Bond's character Wang in the play *The Bundle* also supports such ideas:

WANG: We live in a time of great change. It is easy to find monsters – and as easy to find heroes. To judge rightly what is good – to choose between good and evil – that is all that it is to be human.

(The Bundle.218)

All the plays deal with important issues concerning the social construction of family roles, attacking certain essentialist theories of mothering and opening up a discourse on family life. In *The Children* when Joe talks to his puppet just as his mother talks to him and hits it in the same manner. It shows the Child's feelings for the mother. Joe says:

Anything goes wrong in our house Mother hits me. Don't know why? As if I am supposed to change the world.

(The Children.6)

He scolds puppet, hits, leaves it and then again picks and hits it many times and at last asks hold of it by the leg and drags it out behind him. The troubled relation between father and a daughter is presented in the play *Tuesday* where daughter turns her boyfriend's gun towards her father and pulls the trigger. The relationship in a way exposes its sterile and dead form. According to Chen Bond's theatre, the character in extreme moments is usually purposefully performed as devoid of predictable emotions in order to emphasize the situation rather than the character. The fact that the character does not seem to be shocked by the shocking moment is also reminiscent of how Bond describes the site of accident time to be the peaceful centre of a storm. (Chen,230)

Shelia in *Olly's Prison* murdered only because of not giving response to his father. For Bond violence that we witness in the contemporary world is in fact a "release of aggression created by the dehumanizing restrictions of an industrialized society" (Scharine 67). Pam, in *Saved* is a product of barren world and has turned emotionally barren since she feels no love or compassion for the child. These plays hold particular interest because of their speculations on the nature of family life and its social construction. Bond should be sought in two areas: one is that life must be based on understanding, friendship, constructive communication and respect; the other is that all individuals in a society must be provided with their basic needs to let them have an accomplished life. The Tree poem of *The Bundle* reiterates:

The tree endures the changing seasons

We cannot wait for spring or live long in winter

We cannot

We must change.

(The Bundle Poems.219)

He directs the audience to observe social evils of the society from different perspective. “The challenge – or problem–for the theatre goer is two folded. There is an escalating violence in the play which makes very tough demands on an audience: and there is no apparent escape from it.(Hirst,135) According to Bond ,the theater deeply explores what it means to be human. Humanity is not something natural, it is something build by humans. It raises an essential and urgent question: " *How to be human? "* " *Making human society* , he said, *to find ways to create our humanity, destroy the world makes us inhuman ...*

" *We do not have to live like this*

- *working for their masters*

- *launch their bombs*

- *eat their shit*

Why should we throw ideas

that allow us to live? " ***War Plays III***

Bond maintains that the irrational and cruel system that is generated by the capitalist world order and its social institutions results in the growing isolation of man, and makes the outside world alien and hostile to him (*Plays: Two* 8). Members of the ruling class experience self-alienation. This mainly stems from the fact that they turn into being socially moralized and corrupted in order to keep their power within the system. “The rulers are as repressed as they exploit. Indeed, aggressors need to be even more strictly conditioned to function socially than those they oppress” (Innes 131). Lear’s daughters are alienated from their own existence in Lear’s system. Their self-alienation become more obvious when they take over the rule of the country. For instance, Bodice gains a great power after she and Fontanelle have defeated. Lear. However, she is unhappy. She is baffled by the situation she is in:

War. Power... I’m forced to sit at this desk, work with my sister walk beside my husband. They say decide this and that, but I don’t decide anything. My decisions are forced on me. I change people’s lives and things get done - it’s like a mountain moving forward, but not because I tell it to... I’m trapped. (*Off, a clock strikes rapidly. Silence. She thinks about her life, but not reflectively. She is trying to understand what has happened to her.*) I hated being a girl, but at least I was happy sometimes... Now I have the all power... and I’m a slave. (*Lear, 62-63*)

Bodice suffers from self-alienation. She controls the whole country, but she cannot control her own life. She is a slave of the system which is an entity over all individuals. Bodice has to act in accordance with the course of the system; she is not free to make her own decisions. It is due to

this nature of power that whosoever ascends the escalator of power is obliged to submit oneself to its mechanism. This process never ends as it only imposes self-destruction on its victim figures. However, Bond never misses his moral vision in encapsulating the need for basic human faith by presenting a logical and rational analysis of the nature of existence and social problems. The play thus becomes highly significant in its relevance to the present. The image of Lear brings out the ugliness of the totalitarian control, which reduces man to the level of a tool. Lear in power becomes a superman and without power he is reduced to the level of a tramp. Both these images serve to highlight the nature of power more clearly. When Lear is a superman people are herds to him, when he is a tramp they become loving brethren to him. When in power, he thinks of the welfare of people, but only in terms of a herdsman who would assume control of their fate, depriving them of their individual choice or freedom.

According to Bond, the roots of violence lie in something he calls “social morality”, by which he means a form of violence that is both initially invisible and indirect, and is internalized by the individual in the course of his/her socialization process. Thus, only a fundamental change in society can truly abolish violence. But in Lear, Bond shows that the power structures of the ruling class are astonishingly firm and stable. One of the central motifs in the play is the wall which, as the play progresses, comes to symbolise the political power that no ruler can do without. In this play, power is based upon a complex web of violence and vicious circles of oppression. But Bond also uses the image of an imprisoned animal in a central scene in the play, indicating that the individual is captive to a network of oppressive social norms and thought patterns from which he must free himself to achieve true humanity. Hope seems inappropriate in the face of Bond’s view of society as unalterable and of violence begetting violence, but Bond can nonetheless not be regarded as a pessimist - and he does not regard himself as one - because he never lapses into resignation and inactivity but continues to believe in the perfectibility of mankind and society. This belief shows itself, especially clearly in the figure of Lear, who like his Shakespearean namesake, undergoes a process of self-recognition and learning which eventually gives him an insight into the truth about himself and others. The turning point in his development comes on the court scene when he looks into a mirror and thinks he sees an animal in a cage. What he actually sees is the individual who has become alienated from himself, trapped in a cage constructed of norms, rules and regulations that contradict his true nature. Lear was a tyrant, and so were his daughters, they were some kind of fascist rulers while Cordelia, though originally expected to be a bringer of democracy, turns out to be a communist tyrant. After much suffering, Lear, both individually and politically, becomes a common man and is found to instigate a struggle for a new revolution against the old revolutionaries among the people. He becomes a voice, though feeble, against the newly emerged dictators who suppress all kinds of anti-government voices and dies as a protestor. His death occurred at the time when another revolution is on the horizon. Whether this revolution reaches its objective or is suppressed or eventually results into another case of ‘power corrupts’ is not shown, perhaps because Bond wanted to end with hope for a better future. They do not propagate any political ideology but are committed to continue to question and unmask the existing hegemony. According to Hay and Roberts For them art is, as Bond puts it, “. . . it’s about how men relate to the world and each other; it’s not a private or even individual experience, but one of the ways society creates its identity; it’s not primitive and dark but rational and constructive Art is the most public of activities” (1980:69). A playwright puts onto the stage, all that which enables his audience to recognize a common shared humanity, beyond the class structure of society. Art in

general and drama in particular has an inherent capacity to articulate and to communicate all that is difficult and unacknowledged.

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