

Edward Bond's Call for Justice in *Summer*

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Abstract—English playwright Edward Bond is a playwright with strong sympathy toward the lower class. *Summer* is his first play to address the problem of social injustice and violence in the modern world. On the basis of close reading, this paper discloses the paralleled ignorance of injustice in both Xenia and the ex-German soldier. What Xenia did to Marthe in peace is just like what the ex-German soldier did to her family in the war. But both of them fail to see their wrong doings due to their ignorance of justice. The aim of this paper is to present Bond's vision of such an issue, his highlight on the importance of struggling for humanness and justice in an inhuman and unjust world, by which the lost dignity of man can be restored.

Index Terms—*Summer*, Edward Bond, justice, humaneness

I. BOND'S CONCERN OF JUSTICE

British literature is renowned for its great tradition of drama. As one among hundreds of great British dramatists, contemporary playwright Edward Bond is worldly famous for his ceaseless struggle in calling for a justified modern society in his works and career, although he is turning eighty years old. His plays probe causes, and disclose effects. "In a Bondian sense, art must deal with the conflict between ideal justice and a wrong interpretation of the justice by ruling class." (TAKKAÇ, 2009, p. 114) In 2001, when John Tusa from BBC Radio interviewed Edward Bond on the problems that he thought people have in general, Bond defined the nature of the contemporary age not as "postmodern" but as "posthumous".¹ In Bond's opinion, human being has ceased to create humaneness at this age. "Bond is a socialist, personally convinced of the revolutionary potential of the working class in this country." (Coult, 1977, p. 62) He is very much dissatisfied with the capitalist system, thinking the capitalist society ruled by money and power has grinded every one down 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.

In the interview, the state of modern societies is sharply criticized as the lifestyles they propagandize are so contrary to the natural, innate expectations that human beings are born with. Bond believes that children are born to see that the world should be like their home. Living in the world should be just like living at home; human relations should be as harmonious as that of a family. As children grow, this need develops into an advanced concept of justice, i.e. that the world is supposed to be a home for everybody. In Bond's words, justice cannot be more than this. However, justice becomes corrupted by capitalist society. People can kill for want of "a right pair of shoes". We are seduced by wants and cease to pursue humanness however existential that need is.

Bond thinks that the human mind must be equipped with the wish for justice, which is regarded by him as the creative law of the universe. Otherwise humanity can never be achieved and modern consumerism will certainly swallow us. As our current social and economic systems are corrupted with various kinds of injustice and inequality, Bond keeps creating plays to warn his audience their existence and the necessity to guard and fight against it. *Summer* (1980), Bond's second play for the National Theatre, is widely accepted by many critics such as David L. Hirst, James E. Young and Mark Armory as a reminiscent war play. However, we can go a step further to regard it as one of such plays to show the injustice that we acquiesce to happen, we permit and we indeed commit all the time. The ultimate horror is not the scenes of war and violence witnessed in the play. What lies deeper is the system and philosophy which gives rise to war and violence.

II. *SUMMER*: A NEW PLAY OF BOND

Summer is written under great influence of Chekhov and acknowledged as Bond's "most reflective and lyrical play to date" (Marowitz, 1973, p. 128). In 1996, Bond translated Chekhov's *Three Sisters* for the Royal Court Theatre. In Chekhovian plays, the focus is usually on the ordinary and everyday life and characters remember the past, suffer in the present, and think about the future. *Summer* proves such strategies of Chekhov have given Bond no less influence. There are five characters in the play, an upper class woman Xenia, her former servant Marthe, their children Ann and David, and an ex-Nazi soldier. Like most of Chekhov's plays, *Summer* starts hopefully on an arrival and ends disappoint with a departure to a coastal town², while the "visit" itself takes an emotional toll on the characters involved.

The play sets in Eastern Europe, Xenia and her daughter Ann leave London to have a yearly vacation in the coastal

¹ See the script of the interview at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/bond_transcript.shtml>

² The exact name of the island town is not given.

town once owned by Xenia's family. Before the war, Xenia lived in abundance with her well-to-do family on the island. They could afford to keep servants. Marthe was one of the servants they kept. However, war changed and destroyed their life, brought her family loss, pain and exile. The German army confiscated their property, imprisoned her father. She was banished from the island in the Mediterranean Sea where they used to live. Years later, when she returns to the island as a summer holiday tourist, she and her daughter encounter Marthe and her son David in her old residence. She also meets an ex-German soldier guilty of committing war crimes on her family, a tourist too. Both encounters provoke very unpleasant memories about the war.

As what often described by Chekhov, things change with time passing, the old die while the young start new lives, and the audience is left to contemplate the meaning of the play. However, in Chekhov social and historical references tend to illuminate and deepen the psychological reality of individual characters. In *Summer*, Bond reverses the equation to suggest that the ordinary people interprets the social-historical matters. Xenia and Ann stay with Marthe who became a caretaker of the holiday flats since WWII. Marthe is discovered to have been living a second life as the survivor of a Nazi prison camp and is now terminally ill. As Marthe's doctor, David is getting ready for his mother's death as supposed a son should be. Xenia and Marthe speak of the past days with some kind of indication they have not done so before. However, Marthe's impending death emotionally charges the situation and allows them to speak, to each other and to Ann, in a way they might otherwise not.

As most reviewers and professional readers noted, the uncertainty and confusion created by delayed exposition creates a high degree of the play's tension; however, the slow reconstruction of the past, and the potential depth it empowers to the characters, is hardly the play's only goal. Nevertheless, the contrasting figures of Marthe and Xenia present the audience with an argument about the meaning of the past, without which, Bond argues, the meaning of "the present" cannot be truly discovered. Marthe, Xenia, and the German tourist, who appears in Scene Four, have survived the big war, suffered family losses, and witnessed cruelties. In the course of three quite common days, the central characters relive, from a distance, that history, which proves to be "shared" in only the most superficial sense. Their talk not only centers on the past, but in relation to it, their present behavior (even down to the most minimal gestures) reflects different class perspectives, different values, different lifestyles and attitudes. Different from Chekhov's characters who often carry with themselves some basic, universal level of humanity, Bond's *Summer* suggests that humanity itself is still in the process of being made, and may be earned and forfeited over time.

In terms of dramatic form and theatrical style, *Summer* is totally different from anything he had written before. "He writes about the effects upon the human spirit of a violent environment. ...prevents the violence from titillating, however much it may shock." (Trussler, 1976, p. 3) Before *Summer*, Bond mainly present extreme scenes of horror and violence on the stage, which is characterized by *Saved*, *Lear*, *Early Morning* and *Restoration*. However, *Summer* doesn't intend to shock. It is more of reminiscent style and featured with thought-provoking dialogues or arguments. Harsh scenes about the war are indirectly presented through dialogue rather than ruthlessly exhibited on the stage. There are strands of action overlapping and intersecting in the play. Marthe is deeply suffering from cancer. Her impending death allows them to speak to each other with unexpected passion. They argue with each other over justice and refuse to be reconciled. Xenia encounters face to face with a former German Nazi soldier. The second generation David and Ann cautiously start an affair, using love-making to reclaim the island and part at the end of the play. With time passing by, the old die, the young start new lives, things go on the direction not as the old expect them to go, only leaving the audience to contemplate the meaning of all, which is often found in the theatre of Chekhov.

III. PARALLELED IGNORANCE OF JUSTICE

In *Summer*, the subject of injustice is explored in details by Bond. The play lays its focus on the aftermath of WWII, the memories of it and the mass destruction caused by it. The question of whether human mind has improved further enough to learn anything from the horrible mistakes committed by ourselves in the past is set between the lines. Superficially the plot addresses a summer vacation which brings several people to meet at the Mediterranean coast. But in fact, the play explores class conflict and long standing injustices which bring open violence and wars in our society.

It's not until Scene Three that the past gets fully revealed, and the future reflected at the end, retrospectively suggests the play's first two scenes in which the tension of the play is mainly between the two women. "The central revelation of the scene is two-fold: during the war Xenia saved Marthe's life, and after the war Marthe testified against Xenia's father." (Spencer, 1992, p. 211) Even after so many years, Martha's scorn and hatred towards Xenia's family has not lessened in degree, as if she has been suffering from a trauma which can never be erased. The scene in which Marthe spits on Xenia's face best illustrates her accumulated hatred, which is the proof that Martha's scars on the soul can never be healed. As a servant in Xenia's family, the way she was treated by the society was inhuman and degrading. They were forced to take their inferiority for granted and think it as something natural and something they were predestined to have. To her, the limited kindness given by Xenia and her family was absolutely meaningless because the conditions in the whole society reduced her life to mere servitude and survival. As she says in the play, "What decides our lives is not what the owners are like. You can live without kindness, you can't live without justice – or fighting to get it." (Bond, 2002, p. 370) What Marthe truly wants is justice, not kindness. Since her life was barely worth living and meaningless in the unjust society she was in, she could not feel gratitude to Xenia for saving her life from the Nazi soldiers. What Xenia does cannot be judged as wrong doing, but characteristically inappropriate. Without hope for enjoying the same

property as her owner, without hope for keeping a decent living, without hope for escape, Marthe was overwhelmed with a strong sense of dissatisfaction and contempt.

Bond's attitude is represented by the speech of Marthe right up until the moment of her death, false kindness and limited sympathy is not enough to correct the destiny of the lower classes. To restore human dignity, what we need is a radical change in people's minds and the structure of society. To achieve full justice and make the world a better place, it is necessary to reexamine and restructure the fundamental human relations.

In another speech of Marthe, she makes this point even more clearly. When Xenia insists that Marthe should have the sense of guilt for showing evidence against her father and accuses her of being ungrateful, Marthe answers in this way:

"What guilt? Let us talk about ourselves. People in my generation had to depend on your family in order to live. But why should that have been? Your kindness made us beggars. It made some of us grateful, which was worse. There can never be enough kindness to make the world human. If you spent your life being kind people would still die of ignorance and neglect. Much more is needed... The foundations of your world were crooked so everything in it was crooked. Your kindness, consideration, consistency were meaningless. And the good you did was meaningless. In your world the good did evil. What could be worse?" (Bond, 2002, p. 392).

No matter how far two mothers have led their disagreement, their children Ann and David secretly fall into a love affair. The point that Bond is trying to vindicate through such a plot designing is that children should not continue their older generation's misunderstanding, hatred and conflict. "O she knows too much about the past. It would be a terrible wrong to a child to force it to fight its parents' battles." (Bond, 2002, p.361) Although experience from the past is of referential value in order to learn how to live the present life. For the hope of building a more peaceful and balanced society, Bond suggests in the play that new generation should throw away hatred of the older generation and bring a new vision of tolerance, mutual respect and justice.

Starting from Scene Three, the play shifts from the theme of social issues to the theme of war. Xenia met a German who once invaded the island and comes back as a tourist with his son and daughter in law. The fact that he was a German soldier in WWII tells his involvement in crimes committed on the island. However, after many years he appears at the crime scene without any sense of guilt. What his unit did to the island was terrible. They slowly turned the island into the place of death. They tortured people and kept them as hostages in small huts. Being frantic in the crowded rooms, the natives didn't know what was facing them the next day. When more and more people were killed, the island became too small burry them all. So, the Germans simply throw the victims into the sea. When they find this was not time and money consuming to bury the victims, they just treat them as human waste.

Like Xenia's ignorance about her exploitation of the poor, the German soldier is ignorant about their crime on the natives of the island. He is completely misled by the Nazi glorification of the Arian race in their propaganda, stubbornly holds that what the Nazi soldiers did in the past was for the good of the whole mankind. His mind has not changed even so many years after the war, and there is no burden on his conscience. He is still convinced that the mission of German soldiers was just and righteous, what they did was to eliminate everything defective for the benefit of a more purified and civilized planet. So, he still claims to Xenia that their task was not to destroy but to defend.

The German soldier even justified his wrong doing by saying that he was just a small part in the mechanism of Nazi, thinking that this can give him an excuse. He transfers all the blame on war ideology and the army leaders who were in charge.

"That's an army for you. Take the clothes off your back and put you in uniform. Take your name and give you a number. Take your head and stuff it with orders." (Bond, 2002, p.384)

However, according to Bond, although he was not the one to issue the orders, he did join the group to perform them without questioning, which really matters and cannot be denied. However insignificant he was in the military hierarchy, his stealing of war ideology to wash his hands cannot restore his innocence.

The soldier's monstrosity shocks Xenia. It is unexpected for her to see that who can be so calm and insensitive after committing such extreme crimes. "You invade us, bomb us, rob us, for our good!" (Bond, 2002, p.386), she utters in big rage. It is hypocrite to say you do that from clemency after hurting someone and curbing his freedom.

As the viewers gradually realizes, Xenia's real life ended long ago; for her, the war and its aftermath "ruined everything," and the memory of that leisured, comfortable life is beautifully envisioned:

"When I was a girl we went to the islands almost every day in the summer...Mother and father would bring their friends for the day. There was always some young man who could play the mandolin. The women sat under silk sunshades and the men rolled up their trouser-legs and stood in the shallows to fish... In those days my happiness frightened me – it was so great I thought I would die of it." (Bond, 2002, p.397)

However, what Xenia fails to see is that there is a parallel between what the German soldiers did to her family in the war and what she and her class of people did to Marthe and the lower classes in peace.

"In the play it is Xenia's family who are therefore as much to blame as the Nazis whom they pretended to assist in order to betray their plans to the partisans. Xenia finds it impossible to understand how her father could have been arrested by the very partisan... - as Marthe points out- 'the foundations of your world were crooked and so everything in it was crooked.'" (Hirst, 1985, p. 85)

The strong tie lies between these two subjects is the injustice that the strong gives to the weak. The difference is just in the scale of damage, one being tangible and obvious, and the other less visible, but more durable and hard to be

removed. Their ignorance of their own injustice makes them moral cripples.

IV. CALLING FOR JUSTICE

In his essay “The Rough Notes on Justice”, Bond provides his own formulation of the meaning of the word “justice”. In Bond’s opinion, this notion can be understood as interplay of three separate entities. In the first place, there should be legal justice to ensure that everyone is equal before the law. Second, there should be fair economic and organizational principles to shape the society we live in. This social order will reflect the social justice that exists in one society. Third, there should be equal distribution of power. In *Summer*, the characters’ identities are established in relationship to certain economic and power distribution, and not until that distribution has been fully revealed is the onstage situation, or its meaning, entirely grasped by the audience.

According to Bond, the quantity of power one has decides the amount of justice one can get and the kind of legal protection one can be served. However, the capitalist social system which is expressed by the amount of money one possesses. The more money one has, the more power and justice he obtains. “Each human being undergoes a similar dehumanizing experience under the pressure of socialization” (Castillo, 1986. p. 81). Bond perceives it is exactly this unequal distribution of power to be the block in all attempts to create a just society. That is why *Summer* draws the map of a society which is ruled with entrenched relationships, such as repression and submission, superiority and inferiority, dominance and impotence. In *Summer*, the gap between social structures is large and class differences are obvious. This can be nothing else but outcome of unjust social principles.

In each society, those who have no financial influence are usually the ones blamed for most of the ills. If a poor person commits a crime, he certainly gets the deserved punishment. But nobody tries to investigate what causes his committing crimes and what dissatisfaction he is with life? Since the connection between financial power and social problems is not clear, Bond is concerned for the fact that the poor, the unemployed, the working classes are driven to the verge of madness is not perceived by the uncaring and unperceptive public. (Bond, 2000, p.37) Taken as villains and criminals, these people are put in prison cells and execution chambers. The upper class only charges them for their sins. In such a way they become victims of social injustice. In *Summer*, such kind of ignorance the upper class held toward the lower class is evident as they decide everything and compel the lower class to accept whatever they decide. What American theatre director Peter Sellars³ says can best illustrate this: “We make policies for homeless people thinking we understand them well. Actually, we know nothing about them except our prejudice.” (Sellars, 2013).

Edward Bond sees the difficult position of the lower classes clearly. In a society ruled by strict hierarchy, those at the bottom of the social ladder get little chances to meet with the demands of this modern age. They seem to be driven out of the social competition, which can provoke in them rejection and despair. Their condition is made worse and worse by constantly being reminded that they are unfit to be part of the global stage. Like American writer August Wilson calls, “You don’t count if you can’t consume.” So, Bond urges that our society should change from how to punish transgression to how to stop crime and violence, how to prevent it and avoid it. It is more important to react before crime happens rather than after it takes place.

As far as Bond is concerned, “the struggle for humanness is the foundation of the human psyche” (Bond, 2001, p.312), the best deterrent to guard against crime is justice. “The present social order is in its own form of violence, and that man can change his society.” (Jones, 1980, p. 517) The criminality that generates crime must be studied and discussed. Since most social programs which should bring reforms are not seriously taken into consideration and put into practice, he accuses the government of not doing its best in reintegrating the lower class back into society:

“Those who govern do not know what a person is. And the governed do not know what a government should be. Instead the evil do evil and because there is no justice the good must do evil. How else can they govern the prison they live in?” (Bond, 2000, p. 2)

Since the gap can not be healed one day, Sellars suggests that the upper class should not turn their backs to the other, fear them and demonize them. The upper class should first be open to the lower class and accept their ignorance to their interest as part of our reality that has to be accounted for, which is exactly what Bond calls for in *Summer*, “for he knows that any change will be slow and difficult” (Jones, 1980, p. 517).

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³ Peter Sellars (1957-), one of the leading theatre, opera and television directors in the world today. He is also Professor of World Arts and Culture at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles (UCLA) As the Artistic Director of the 2002 Adelaide Festival of Arts, he advocates changing the performance arts and their role in contemporary life to bring the worlds together.

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