

Marxism in Edward Bond's *Saved*¹

Asst. Prof. Asmaa Mukaram Saeed
Department of English
College of Education (Ibn Rushd), Iraq

ABSTRACT

Saved (1965) has been categorized as a unique play by Bond in which it tackles the suffering of the proletariat after the industrialization of the British society and the aftermath of the 2nd world war that produced a generation of no morals, values, and concepts. The generation suffers from poverty and strives hardly to survive and secure their basic needs in life. The play was rejected at the beginning because it criticizes the social layers of the British society in a cruel, inhuman, and shocking way, yet years later the play proved to be "one of the great modern plays" (Michael, online). Bond attacks capitalism and the structure of the family on economic, psychological, and spiritual levels. The play proves that poverty and slow starvation destroy the family ties as a real representation of human suffering.

المستخلص :

ان مسرحية *انقذ* (1965) قد تم تصنيفها كعمل متفرد من قبل الكاتب ادوارد بوند حيث تتناول معاناه والتي الطبقة العاملة في المجتمع البريطاني بعد ثورة التصنيع والمشاكل الناتجة بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية ادت الى انتاج جيل لا يتمتع بالاخلاق او المبادئ او القيم الفاضلة حيث عانى الجيل من الفقر والموت البطيء جوعا لتأمين ابسط احتياجاتهم. لقد تم رفض المسرحية في بادئ الامر بسبب النقد اللاذع لطبقات المجتمع البريطاني على جميع الاصعدة كمجتمع قاسي ولا انساني وبطريقة صادمة ولكن بعد مرور سنوات تم وصفها ك(اعظم مسرحية حديثة) في الزمن المعاصر. بوند يهاجم الراسمالية وتأثيرها على تفكك الروابط الاسرية على مستوى الناحية الاقتصادية-النفسية-والروحية. ان المسرحية تثبت ان الفقر والموت البطيء جوعا هما اهم عناصر تدمير الاسر ومرأة حقيقية للمعاناة الانسانية.

-Key Words

الرأسمالية Capitalism فقر Poverty انحلال Degradation الكادحين Proletarian فكر Ideology

In this regard, The Marxist wave prevailed all over the globe in the second half of the 19th century that calls for social, political, and economic justice along with equality as described "the philosophical, economic, and historical ideas and theories articulated by Karl Marx (1818–83), which have become some of the most influential intellectual forces of the twentieth century" (Klages 50). Therefore, many literary works were interwoven implicitly or explicitly with the Marxist ideology and concepts. As for Bond's play that portrays the working-class people at their worst condition, any keen audience would easily figure out that it is a poor's cry to have a decent and human life apart from the upper class's exploitation. However, he does not provide a window for the audience or the reader to have sympathy for

¹ How to cite the article: Saeed A.M. (2023), Marxism in Edward Bond's *Saved*, *Multidisciplinary International Journal*, Vol 9 (Special Issue), 187-192

those characters and the bad conditions they live through. The play gives a vivid portrayal of the bare truth of the working-classes during the 1960's.

To set his social atmosphere, Bond alternates the setting of the play between places that depict the social life in London where people are supposed to gather and communicate civilly with each other. The setting comprise Pam's working-class, cramped home where she lives with her parents and Len; a café where Pam tries her last attempt to get back with Fred; the stiff young man whom she has a baby with; and a park, a place that is supposed to be for recreation yet it becomes the murder scene of one of the most horrifying scenes in the play, if not in British drama in general. Moreover, the play begins and ends in the same setting, which is the living room. However, none of the actions that take place here are ordinary, social, and everyday events. They are encapsulated with domestic abuse and both physical and verbal violence, which reflects the state of mind of the characters involved in the action along with moral degradation. Bond uses a realistic dramatic technique and adds more satire to give his social subjects more force. (Hirst 49)

As far as "the class of workers who are industrial wage earners do not possess capital or property and must sell their labor to survive." is concerned; Marxism is a critique of the capitalist economic system as inhumane that exploit the poor to nourish the rich's life. The capitalist mode of production, according to Marx, creates class distinction i.e. Owners and workers, and empowered the owners to appropriate the products of the workers' labor power as their property and right. A proletariat, in a capitalistic system, is marginalized and obliged to work day and night like a machine to earn his daily living. Such actions alienate the worker from the products of his work and the worker from him or herself. Man has been living in a state of alienation since the dawn of time. Many of the characters are alienated by their ability to avoid communication with one another and to withdraw from the world. They are unable to communicate their emotions. As a result, modern man has buried himself in life. Hence, "[t]his double alienation marks capitalism as a particularly Dehumanizing form of economic organization, particularly for the proletariat, who become commodities for owners to purchase." The worker has to sell his labour power and himself as a commodity because of the capitalist exploitation of tiny details in his life (Klages 51-52). The drawbacks of capitalism might be depicted in *Saved* clearly since it tackles the effects of capitalism on the characters' lives.

The opening scene of the play suggests many ideas when Pam brings Len, a man who met the same night, to have physical relation with. Firstly, the degradation of moral values is stated as Pam drags a stranger to her bed to satisfy her sexual desire. Secondly, she takes him to the family house where her father keeps interrupting them when getting involved in the physical intercourse as it indicates that Pam cannot have a separate and independent life due to the low financial status almost all worker class suffer from. The girl is not ashamed at all when the father comes and goes in the living room when Pam and Len engaged in an immoral relation. In return the father shows no sign of resentment towards such disgraceful behavior on part of his daughter. It exposes the emptiness and vulgarity of the characters' lives and the kind of cultural and social background they live against. When Pam brings Len to her home for the first time, Len expects to be taken to Pam's bedroom, yet he is seated in the living room instead:

Len. I thought yer reckon yer was on yer tod?

Pam. E's late for work.

Len. O. Why?

Pam. Why?

Len. Yeh.

Pam. I don't know.

Len. Reckon 'e saw?

Pam. Shouldn't be surprised.

Len. Will 'e be long?

Pam. Don't arst me. (*Saved* 13-14)

The father- daughter relationship is barren and sterile. The father is preparing himself to go to work at night as a typical symbol of the working class who works day and night but drenched in poverty. “The play precisely defines a familiar working-class situation where incompatibility develops into hatred through an inability to communicate. The refusal to speak to one another is the ultimate expression of the barrenness of this culture”(Hirst 53). The bad relationships experienced by Pam with both Len and Fred is a reflection to her father-mother relation. It is worth noting that her parents are living under the same roof, yet they are totally disconnected physically and spiritually. The mother remains only for the sake of money given to her by her husband as a supporter who brings her bread at the end of the day. Although Bond introduces the scene rather comically, he gives a realistic image of working-class family life, which is enforced by the social circumstances imposed on them by society. Pam flirts with Len in the family’s cramped living room at the expense of her father who keeps interrupting the scene while preparing to go to work. But what is more important is the fact the Harry, Pam’s father, is preparing to go to work at night, a fact which gives another realistic image of the family’s financial condition. Harry works a night shift, which means the family struggles to make ends meet; thus, he is forced to accept working in night shifts to support his family. Nevertheless, Bond does not seem to provoke these social factors at the beginning of the play when he starts with the flirting scene and everything else goes in the background. Yet, as the play progresses, more images of the ugliness of the social disenfranchisement start to appear. The plight of modern British generation has been tackled by all writers not only Bond but also Harold Pinter who “portrays an example of the generation that has been raised on the principles of power and money without any education. He focuses on the golden past when generations were raised according to a system of ethics, culture and education. He presents in his drama samples of the people who control and rule the world; an ignorant greedy generation that is also the product of war” (Jajo and Marwa 1222)

Len is a another laborer character described as a skinny male character cause he hardly earns his living. He even moves to live with Pam in their flat along with her father and mother. However, Pam after a while kicks him out because she is financially burdened by many commitments on top her child whom abounded by his parents to face horrible death. The theme of dehumanization and brutality is traced when Pam as a mother leaves her child in the park and eventually stones fatally. She is selfish and indifferent mother who pursue her sexual desires at the expenses of her duty as a mother. Also, Fred the child’s father share many things in common with Pam especially when he escapes his responsibility as a father similar to Pam, the irresponsible mother. Pam says in the fourth scene "I don't understand yer. Yer can't enjoy stayin' 'ere. It's bad enough bein' stuck with a kid without 'avin' you 'anging round me neck" (86). Bond sheds light upon the capitalist system which cause and produce inhumane characters who lost even their basic instincts i.e. maternity and paternity as they are victimized by war. However, their crime is inexcusable and immorally rejected “I ain' goin' a see yer no more.” according to capitalism, people are treated as objects, seen as a source of getting money. As a result, human beings are no longer humans since they lose their sense of humanity. “ The system [capitalist] that has pauperized and enslaved them” (Muthanna 93). Consequently, a person might be subjected individual in the way s/he sees and acts in the social world. In scene six Fred tells Pam that he won’t see her when he knew about her pregnancy. Pam’s comment on her parents’ disintegrated relationship reflects the fact that the house they live in is not a happy house, nor is the surrounding environment a healthy one for rising logical, mentally-stable individuals. Pam’s lack of passion and self-respect is due to the fact that she lacks a good role model to follow. Both her parents disrespect and abuse each other. Thus, she grows up to become this young woman who cares about nothing but her attraction to Fred, who is very vulgar and abusive with her. Her cynicism and pessimism are indicators of her belief that she is a victim of her social circumstances; thus, she takes out her feelings of resentment on the other characters, especially Len. Even when she has the baby, she completely ignores it and leaves it to cry continuously in scene four while being busy with other things. Her carelessness after some time leads Fred and his gang to abuse the baby and then stone it to death. However, the death of the baby does not stir any emotions inside her and she continues her running after Fred, only to be rejected by him at the end. Through these interrelated relationships and violent actions, Bond draws the attention to the conditions that rule the working-class people. The rules of a society determine how other members, especially the poor ones, are allowed to live. It is well-known fact that the aftermath of the WWII caused small and cramped estate homes became the solution which created many social problems that would change London forever during a time when the rich got richer and the poor got poorer and angrier. The British society deprived these characters of their economic and social stability that can provide good life. As a result violence and outrage stem

from starvation and suffering. Bond's concept of culture in this play, as well as his other works, is that a society that lacks culture is a society that lacks logic:

When society breaks down and its structure no longer works, its members - because they are sane - criticize it and wish to change it. And if it was simply a matter of rationally observing the breakdown, they would always see it and change would be easy. But economics and politics are deeply obscured and cluttered in cultural explanations. When society is no longer able to persuade us, so that its madness can shelter our sanity - then we ourselves become mad in our daily life. We react irrationally to the breakdown - and there is crime, despair, cynicism, racism and war. (Bond 88)

In Pam's case, her actions of violence towards Len and her neglecting and even drugging her baby with aspirin makes one but consider examining the circumstances and conditions of her home, society, and economic situation that lead her to act irresponsibly. What lies behind these actions is something greater and grimmer than a one-sided attraction for Fred.

Bond focuses on Pam's frustration of being abused and rejected by Fred and her resentment of Len's lingering around and delves deeper than that to a wider and darker social factors. The culture they live in is a harsh one, hence their actions are harsh. (Gordon 9). The inhuman scene of stoning and killing the baby in the park is no more violent than the fight scene between Harry and Mary when she strikes him on the head with a teapot. Their long silence is interrupted by Harry's response to Mary's flirting with Len. This domestic violence, again, reflects a deeper social and economic struggle that conditions them to live like this. This fight is a familiar scene in working-class homes where financial deprivation usually leads to resentment and disrespect and eventually to such silences. Hirst adds:

The refusal to speak to one another is the ultimate expression of the barrenness of this culture: a more articulate couple might bicker, abuse one another verbally: Harry and Mary have no tools to help them; the fault is seen to be both theirs and society's. (53)

All characters in the play, except for Len, are reduced to the level of animals because of their way of life, conditioned by their social and economic limitations. The lullaby sung by Barry, one of the characters who participated in killing the baby, is another example that gives an insight into their cruel culture. Barry sings as he pushes the pram:

Rock a bye baby on a tree top
When the wind blows the cradle will rock
When the bough breaks the cradle will fall
And down will come baby and cradle and tree
an' bash its little brains out an' dad'll scoop
'em up and use 'em for bait. (*Saved* 63)

Bond sees this action as a result of a capitalist society that exploits its labor force without having to provide them with any cultural, social, or economic tools that may help in their advancement. "Capitalism is introduced as a tyrannous system that uses everything in the characters' everyday life as suppressive tools to enforce its values and maintain its continuity" (Hussein 681). What is worse than these characters' behavior is the action taken by the government against the working-class people, which lead to such atrocities. Bond comments on this atrocity in the play's Author's Notes:

Clearly the stoning to death of a baby in a London park is a typical English understatement. Compared to the 'strategic' bombing of cities it is a negligible atrocity. Compared to the cultural and emotional deprivation of most children its consequences are insignificant. (7)

Violence is portrayed as a social act for these characters. It is their way of life, especially for Fred and his gang whose violent actions towards Pam's baby seem more natural and instinctive for them than anything else. The play situates the audience in front of "an extreme situation and then they have to identify not the situation but themselves" (Morgan).

MIKE (quietly). Reckon it's all right?

COLIN (quietly). No one around.

PETE (quietly). They don't know if s us.

MIKE (quietly). She left it

BARRY. It's done now.

PETE (quietly). Yer can do what yer like.

BARRY. Might as well enjoy ourselves.

PETE (quietly). Yer don't get a chance like this everyday.

FRED throws the stone. (*Saved 70*)

The gang starts throwing a stone at one of them, then considering the possibility as a one in a lifetime as one is not usually left alone with babies without supervision. They whisper in the ears of one of them and encourage him to stone the baby in the stroller, and reinforce the action after it is done by participating in the act of killing the baby. They act as a pact and cease to think of the reasons and justifications for the way they act. The act becomes a reflection of brutality and cruelty as the baby stands as a representative for the helpless members of society while the gang symbolizes the out of controllable savage crowd of society. Furthermore, the recipient of violence is being symbolically deprived of its human dimension that is characterized by feelings. In the play, the baby is reduced to a sub-human aspect in the way it is unseen, the way Pam regularly drugs into a coma-like sleep, the way Len does not intervene while it is being stoned, and finally, the way Pam pushes the stroller after the baby is murdered without even glancing in the stroller (Rabey 79-80).

For Bond, social injustice leads to such violent acts. Thus, it is not only their guilt, but the society's guilt as well. And this can only be stopped with the establishment of a new society based on equality among all classes similarly to what Karl Marx call for. "The social consciousness has changed, decisively. Society is not merely a false system, which the liberator can challenge, but it is actively destructive and evil"(Mhayyal 919). Bond defends the play by saying that is it optimistic (*Saved 7*), hence the last scene when Len repairs a broken chair in an attempt to mend the wounds of the fragmented family. The play is about violence as much as it is about the circumstances and conditions in which such violence occurs. (Worthen 466)

Lastly, The child murder scene is grotesque in its depiction of human cruelty and the ease it is manifested on a defenseless infant. Pam leaves the child in the pram to be stoned to death by a bunch of dunkers Fred is one of them. The violence unfolds in a horrific manner and turns to a vicious game for the enjoyment of the killers. One reason for their cruelty, Demling contends is because they view the child as an object and not a living being. When one warns them not to hurt the child, they reply, "Yer can't. . . . Not at that age. . . . Course yer can't, no feelin's. Liken animals" (*Saved 67*). They call the baby ugly and are disgusted by it unbeknownst to them, it is the audience that is disgusted with them to the bone. As the audience, we cannot see them as humans. So, capitalism forces man to put on false faces and live his life through inherently contradictory and false values. The characters of the play are victimized by both the Capitalist system and the war impact. Bond's play aims at indulging the spectators to judge the capitalist system

and avoid all the negative results of the war urging them to be part of creating and constructing a new healthy society embracing their human instincts back again.

WORKS CITED

1. Bond, Edward. *Saved*. Methuen, 1966.
2. ---. *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*. Methuen, 2000.
3. ---. "Edward Bond: *An Interview by Giles Gordon*." Interview by Giles Gordon. *The Transatlantic Review*, No. 22 (Autumn 1966), pp. 7-15.
4. Billington, Michael (13 May 2016). "Torture and baby-stonings: why we need shock theatre ... in small doses". *The Guardian*. ISSN 0261-3077. Retrieved 20 May 2021.
5. Bond, Edward. *Plays One: Saved, Early Morning, The Pope's Wedding*. London: Methuen, 1977.
6. Donnelly, Mark. *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics*. Pearson Education Limited, 2005.
7. Elewomawu, Richard Adewale. "Swinging Sixties: A Social History of Britain, 1960 – 1970." *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Management Studies*, Vol. 3, No 11, 2017, pp. 16-22.
8. Hirst, David L. *Modern Dramatists: Edward Bond*. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1985.
9. Hussein, Median Mashkooor. "The Scars of Capitalism in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Kew Gardens*". *Alustath Journal*. Vol(60) issue (4)2021. P(681-692).
10. Jajo, Dr. Muayad Enwiya and Marwa Ghazi Mohammed. "Social Satire in Harold Pinter's *Celebration*". *College Of Education for Women*. vol. 26 (4) 2015. P.(1222-1229)
11. Klages, Mary. *Key Terms in Literary Theory*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.
12. Marx, K. *Capital: Volume 1*. Bens Fowkes (Trans.). London: Penguin Books.1990.
13. Mhayyal.M. Basaad. "Arthur Miller's Tragedy as Reflected in *The Crucible*". *College Of Education For Women*. vol. 24 (3) 2013.P(917-928).
14. Muthanna, Assist. Instr. Ansam. "John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* As a Naturalistic Novel". *Al-Ustath journal*. Number extension 216–volume one 2016. P(91-108)
15. Morgan, Stephen. "Edward Bond Rare Interview." YouTube, 20 Apr. 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sJU1k_TsyA 00:04:07
16. Rabey, David Ian. *English Drama Since 1940*. Pearson Education: London, 2003.
17. Worthen, John. "Endings and Beginnings: Edward Bond and the Shock of Recognition." *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1975, pp. 466-479.