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Gothicism as a Mode of Political Critique in Bond's Plays

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Abstract

The correlation of art, morality, and politics is an important debate in literature. Interestingly, this correlation between Edward Bond's plays and his political philosophy has not been explored from the perspective of the Gothic previously. The article's main argument is that the motifs, tropes, and trappings that are scattered throughout the body of Bond's dramatic works evoke a strong image of a dark Gothic world characterized by excessive violence and other forms of monstrosity and irrationality. Gothicity in Bond's plays, then, emerges as a strong impulse, as a driving force through which Bond dismantles the falsifying social and political myths of violence, oppression, injustice, and individual freedom. The article also traces the progression of Gothic impulse in his plays in terms of how it shapes Bond's political and philosophical worldview as an artist and as a humanist. Bond's final message is that people must know and understand the dynamics of an oppressive society by challenging and interrogating the misleading versions of reality, and finally take substantial meaningful action to rectify social and political imbalances. It is this correlation of morality and politics built through Gothicism that informs Bond's radical political and philosophical vision and which he translates into dramatic medium.

Keywords: Politics, society, oppression, violence, art

This article examines the correlation between Gothicity in Bond's plays and his political philosophy. The main argument is that the motifs, tropes, and trappings that are scattered throughout the body of Bond's dramatic works evoke a strong image of a dark Gothic world characterized by excessive violence and other forms of monstrosity and irrationality. Gothicity in Bond's plays, then, emerges as a strong impulse, as a driving force through which Bond dismantles the falsifying socio-political myths of violence, oppression, injustice, and individual freedom. The article also traces the progression of Gothic impulse in his plays in terms of how it shapes Bond's political and philosophical worldview as an artist and as a humanist. Gothic impulse in Bond's plays, then, raises questions pertaining to the necessity for creating art and the role of artist in a society on the one hand, and on the other, becomes a tool for political critique the ultimate purpose of which is to educate people and reform society. Bond's final message is that people must know and understand the dynamics of an oppressive society by challenging and interrogating the misleading versions of reality, and finally

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take substantial meaningful action to rectify social and political imbalances. He states that although he is often called a moralist, he sees himself first as a politician. For Bond politics is an "expression of morality" (Trussler, 1985, p. 71). It is this correlation of morality and politics built through Gothicism that informs Bond's radical political and philosophical vision and which he translates into dramatic medium.

The thematic content of Bond's plays is quite diverse ranging from injustice, poverty, hunger, unemployment, to human rights, tyranny, aggression, revolutions, and counter-revolutions. The world that Bond portrays in his plays is a devastated, desperate world characterized by divergent Gothic forms of aggression and irrationality and his targets are capitalistic oppressive bourgeois regimes, tyrannical families, and the repressive apparatuses of Church and State that perpetuate aggression and injustice. These are the areas where, David Punter argues, "to probe too deeply would be to risk tearing the social fabric, and these are precisely the areas in which Gothic fiction locates itself, and where it tortures itself and its readers by refusing to let dead dogs lie" (2000, p. 411). Gothic texts such as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, *Frankenstein*, *Christabel*, *Lamia*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and *The Blind Assassin* deeply probe individual, social, and political spheres of life in the most unconventional disturbing ways. Bond's radical political philosophy of transformation also locates itself in his unconventional treatment of violence and other forms of irrationality on a Gothic scale.

Writing of his dramatic career, Bond states that when he first started seriously to write plays, he thought his life's work would be the span of plays that "began with *The Pope's Wedding* (1962) and ended with *The Sea* (1973)" (Trussler, 1985, p. 63). He thought that he would begin with a tragedy in which the old man would not talk (Trussler, 1985, p. 13). Even before his first play *The Pope's Wedding* was produced, he'd written about fifteen plays all of which described the world he'd grown up in or was living in. As his sole purpose in those plays was to "describe" it faithfully and accurately, he simply recorded his experiences. When he eventually did produce his first serious play, Bond states, people did not say that those things were terrifying or unusual and that they must do something to change them. Instead, they reacted by saying how Bond had the temerity to put those things on the stage. They did not want to interrogate those things which urged Bond to seek to understand the situation more and to see why things went wrong and what caused them to go amiss and therefore, to find a way to rectify them. "And my plays," Bond explains, "since then have been an exploration of the problems of being a human being in the twentieth century and to try

to find out why things go wrong and how we could correct them" (Trussler, 1985, p. 65).

It is true that Bond's earlier plays *The Pope's Wedding* (1962), *Saved* (1965), and *Early Morning* (1967) do not provide any clear definitive answers. They dramatize a process of situation analysis and characters never find any answers as the exigencies demand situations to be interrogated rather than answered. For instance, in *The Pope's Wedding* the title points to an impossibility as it refers to something that cannot happen; the pope's wedding is an impossible ceremony. In the play the Gothic impulse is first seen as a palpable strain in the rough behavior of the gang boys when they fight and snatch Pat's bag and break its strap. The entire scene of bag snatching by rough youths is a precursor to the stoning of the baby in Bond's next play *Saved*. The strain of violence in the play becomes more pronounced when the rowdy boys attack an old man's shack. The play's main character Scopey is a young boy of twenty-two who is very inquisitive about the enigmatic and mysterious old Alen. He keeps asking Alen: "What yoo doo all day?" (1977, sc.6. 260). He also asks the old recluse questions about his past but the old man just drools and can never say anything. What Scopey wants is a definitive response from him and eventually in his desperate attempt to find the answers, he kills the old man and wears his great coat, but ironically, there is nothing for him to discover anything beyond the act of wearing the old man's coat.

The ambivalence and mystery that surrounds the whole play finds its ultimate manifestation in Scopey's motiveless murder of Alen, which raises questions in the reader or the viewer's mind about Scopey's valid justification for killing the old hermit. Bond himself admits that the readers may find the "possibilities" of solutions but there are no finite answers (Trussler, 1985, p. 65). At this point Bond's political or moral viewpoint does not seem to be clear with reference to boys' aggressivity, Alen's mysterious past, and most of all Scopey's equally enigmatic killing of the old man. The dialogue exchange between Scopey and Alen also shows old man's obvious reluctance in answering the questions that Scopey repeatedly asks him about his habits and his past. The reader or audience much like the play's main character fails to find any solutions, but the problems posed by questions about latent and manifest aggressiveness are portrayed truthfully and powerfully. Bond just analyzes and interrogates the questions that the behavior of the gang raises and presents Scopey and Alen's behavior truthfully. However, his political, philosophical, and even moral stance remains ambiguous as is reflected in Alen and Scopey's ambivalent behavior

and in the play's equally ambivalent, inconclusive ending--a characteristic ending that marks many Gothic tales.

In his next play *Saved*, like *The Pope's Wedding*, Bond once again takes up the theme of aggression and anatomizes it through the behavior of unemployed youths Fred, Pete, Barry, Mike and Colin who replicate the behavioural patterns of the boys in *Early Morning* but in a more threatening form. The strain of violence palpable in the first play continues with a sinister intensity in the rough behavior of the young boys. The stoning of the baby in scene 6 manifests the culmination of Gothic strain as the boys first push the baby's pram around and then start throwing stones at it. This scene strongly resonates the bag-snatching scene in *The Pope's Wedding*. Bond imparts to the entire scene a casual tone which is reflected in Len's passive behavior who watches the pelting of the baby silently all the while standing under the trees in the park. Bond presents Len as a figure who, much like Scopey, is inquisitive but remains a passive observer in the scene. The dialogue in the scene of stoning, likewise, is sparse and although the physical action is the focus of the scene, the pelting of the baby is presented as a very casual happening without any reference to the act so that the stoning seems a part of the paltry exchange of dialogue between the group and the stoning happens as a part of the communication.

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*.

COLIN. Missed.

PETE. That ain't'!

He throws a stone. (1977, 79-80)

Bond, once again, raises questions about the nature of man and society through the gang boys' murder of an innocent victim but avoids clear-cut definitive answers.

In the following scene 7 of *Saved*, Len informs Fred that he saw the pram and watched the entire spectacle as he was standing in the trees. He also tells Fred that he saw "the lot" but he did not know what to do (1977, sc. 7. 86). His inaction and morbid fascination with the killing of the baby afterwards shows once again the ambivalence of Bond's social and moral standpoint and his avoidance of any clear answers. Bond wants his readers to watch even more closely the detached character of Len rather

than the characters merged in the group in the previous scene. Len's ambivalent silence and his uncertainty about saving the child reveals Bond's reluctance to provide any clear cut answers to questions of ethical responsibility--the questions that he raises earlier in *The Pope's Wedding* also without providing any definitive answers. His question as to whether or not the child should have been saved by Len is characteristic of the Gothic writing's resistance to provide any clear answers much like *Christabel* and *Lamia* end on unresolved debates. Bond's focus on Len's character and on group behavior in the stoning scene, Len's guilty confession in *Saved*, Scopey's inquisitiveness, and Alen's reluctance in *Early Morning* indicate that Bond seeks a complex response from the audience and avoids any finite answers to social and moral concerns.

Like the protagonists of *The Pope's Wedding* and *Saved*, the central character Arthur in *Early Morning* also exhibits the same degree of inquisitiveness. Like Scopey and Len, Arthur also seeks answers to the questions about human nature and rational ordering of society. For instance, he repeatedly asks the accused Len why he killed a man standing in the queue (1977, sc. 8.174). Hirst argues that Arthur is the central character of the play and "Throughout the central section of the play (scenes 6 to 15) we see him change from incomprehension at what is going on around him to involvement as the escalating madness and violence of the world convince him to destroy it" (1985, p. 98). When the play's locale changes from earth to heaven, he becomes more inquisitive and asks the Doctor questions of more general nature--questions such as: "Why do men hate life? Is it the light? Is it more comfortable to be mud and ashes?" (1977, sc. 11. 186s).

Arthur unfortunately fails to find answers to these problematic questions. Bond's shift in mode from realism to surrealism in *Early Morning* (1968) is significant as it invites attention on diverse levels and is a sign that the play, like Bond's earlier works, defies simple responses. The play falls in the same group of plays that focus on interrogation of problems rather than providing any answers or solutions and the Gothic strain of madness and aggression which sparks in *The Pope's Wedding*, finds its intense manifestation in the stoning scene in *Saved*, and its fullest manifestation appears in *Early Morning* where the heaven and earth are replete with surreal images of cannibalism, self-eating, and self-rape as extreme forms of monstrosity and irrationality. In a word, Bond's early plays trace the evolution of Gothic impulse as a force that pulsates in latent and manifest shades of violence, madness, and ambivalence. Although Scopey, Len, and Arthur do not find answers to their questions, Bond invites his reader or viewer to particularly focus on these characters.

Scopey's behaviour to old Alen, gang's behaviour towards the baby in the pram, Len's passive watching of the stoning of the baby, and Arthur's refusal to participate in cannibalism are important pointers to Bond's political vision.

Bond's next two plays *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1968) and *Lear* (1971) from his early series further examine the nature of oppression, revolution and counter-revolution. Christopher Innes argues that in his early plays, Bond's focus is on freedom of individual from social oppression but he does not approve of a "solution in the form of a political programme" as it would be an "alternative structure of coercion" (1992, p. 158). This, according to Innes, accounts for the ambivalent endings of his early plays. In *Narrow Road*, Shogo's rule, imperialist Georgina's missionary revolution, and Shogo's counter-revolution fail. Similar political systems are equally condemned in *Narrow Road* as they are in *Lear* which exemplifies the same idea that "Those who overthrow the system by violence perpetuate it" (Innes, 1992, p. 159). The social and political worlds of *Lear* and *Narrow Road* with their political programmes of rebellion and counter-rebellion replicate same versions of oppression which Bond rejects. Once again, Bond analyzes the process without giving any definitive solutions.

However, *Lear* marks a departure from *Narrow Road* in that Lear's last symbolic gesture of digging up the wall that he built conveys the importance of human action in changing society. Although Lear is shot dead, Bond invites the reader or the viewer to focus on Lear's act of demolishing the monstrous wall rather than on his being shot. Lear's action against the execution wall leaves the play open ended for audience to translate the playwright's message into words. Old and tired Lear's last words are: "I can still make my mark" (1978, act 3, sc. 4. 102). Lear's act of digging the wall enhances the emphatic quality and efficacy of his words drawing the reader or viewer's attention to Bond's essential message. Lear's final words and his final symbolic gesture establish the significance of his contribution in bringing a social and political change in society however humble or insignificant his act may seem. It is a political act of change that the reader or audience is invited to continue and accomplish. Although Bond does not provide any ideal solutions to humanity's problems, he differentiates between passivity of Len and Lear's active gesture. In *The Sea* (1973) which marks the end of Bond's first series of plays, Willy and Rose have finally resolved to leave the prison-like sea-side town with its economic oppression and false Victorian moral standards symbolized by Mrs. Rafi. In the play's last scene, past, present, and future come together in Evens, Willy, and Rose. The young couple bids farewell to Evens who signifies past and begin a new journey. As a gesture of

revolt against conventional norms, the play's ending also marks a new beginning like Lear's last meaningful act.

In a letter to Tony Coult, Bond admits that his early plays were "problem" plays as he was conscious of the "weight of the problems" but he dramatized only analysis. He says that he gradually realized that he must not write only "problem plays" but "answer plays" or at least "plays which make answers clearer and more practical." He further maintains that in his later works he has become more conscious of the strength of human beings to "provide answers" which aren't always "light, easy, or even straightforward, but the purpose- a socialist society- is clear" (Trussler, 1985, p. 68). In other words, Bond's dramatic career has journeyed from the problem plays to the answer plays and this journey as an artist is characterized by eclectic and radical nature of his theatre. As a radical artist, Bond has a political vision of human society and he believes in educating the people to enable them to understand themselves so that they can change their circumstances. In his introduction to *Bingo*, he states that art is always rational as it always insists on the truth, and tries to express the justice and order that are necessary to sanity but are usually destroyed by society. "All imagination is political" and art is the expression of moral sanity (1987, p. 5).

In *Bingo* (1973), *The Fool* (1975), and *Bundle* (1978), Bond particularly focuses on the role of art in creating a sane society and the role and responsibility of artist in this regard. His political vision becomes clearer in these plays as he openly debates an artist's relationship to his surroundings. The Gothic in these plays locates itself in insane behavior and the horrifying effects of a vampiric society that has gone berserk. *Bingo* presents the last years of William Shakespeare's life, 1615-1616. Bond invites the readers and spectators to focus not only on Shakespeare as he appears as a character in the play but also on the characters of the Old Man and the Young Woman. Bond's point in the play is that an artist's life and art must show commitment to his society but Shakespeare, he continues, failed to show this "need for sanity and its political expression, justice. . . . His behavior as a property-owner made him closer to Goneril than Lear. He supported and benefitted from the Goneril-society- with its prisons, workhouses, whipping, starvation, mutilation, pulpit hysteria and all the rest of it" (*Bingo*, 1987, Introduction, p. xii).

To punctuate his political message and to illustrate insanity and madness that result when the innocent suffer, Bond employs a web of motifs, images and symbols that evoke an image of a dark Gothic world. The brutal treatment of the Old Man and the Young Woman in the play exhibits the most prevalent patterns of the Gothic tradition of violence and insanity as discussed in the previous chapters. These figures typify

social relationships that exist in an unjust environment and are set in contrast to Shakespeare's character. They are the victims of a violent insane society characterized by monstrous commercialization and cut throat competition. The Old Man is Shakespeare's gardener. His wife explains that he was impressed into the navy during war. He was brought home when a man who intended to kill someone flourished his axe and accidently hit the Old Man's head with the blunt end. The effect of his disability on him is that his mind is that of a child now. He is a boy who remembers "what's like t' be a man. He still hev a proper feelin' for his pride, that yont gone. Hard, that is--like bein' tied up to a clown. Some nights he come hwome an' cry all hours" (1987, sc. 2. 25). Hay and Roberts observe that Old Man is childlike and asserts his naturalness against "Shakespeare's confinement." Both the Old Man and Young Woman present a "poignant account of what has been done to them, and their sanity . . ." (1980, p.187).

Like the Old man, the Young Woman is another hapless victim of an inhuman ruthless society. The constables capture her for vagrancy and the Old Man protects her. Orphaned and rendered homeless by the land enclosures, she wanders through the countryside: haunted and haunting like Georgina. Flogged for a crime she has not committed, she has now become as childlike as the Old Man. They are the outcasts; wanderers who like Lear and half-crazed Gothic figures of *Coffee, The Crime*, and *Innocence* are living on the fringes of a society that is disintegrating and falling apart in the presence of a great artist, namely Shakespeare. They are the victims of social morality and are eventually destroyed by it.

The Old Man is finally shot by his own son and the fate of the Young Woman is even worse and more brutal than Old Man's. The focus on her body after the authorities have hanged her shocks the audience with its Gothic spectacle. Through the disturbing details of her hanging corpse, Bond invites his reader or viewer to focus on her body that remains suspended on the gibbet for many days. Her execution is clearly Bond's demonstration of the cold bloodedness of all social, political and ethical systems in dealing with the destitute and the underprivileged. The focus given to her swinging corpse on the stage shows that Bond gives the young victim enough stage time and space so that the audience can clearly discern his underlying message. Bond, thus, redirects the reader or viewer's emotional response by inviting attention towards the hanging body which constitutes the key to understanding his radical political vision of change. The focus underpins the excess of violence perpetrated on this hapless girl and helps the reader decide which characters to watch most closely and which characters will lay the greatest claims on their feelings. She is a Gothic manifestation

of the effects on people of monstrosity, of an irrational society where the artist overlooks his political role in condemning an unjust social system. The execution of the Young Woman and the Old Man's death raise disturbing questions about the role and responsibility of an artist in creating a sane, just society and his failure in doing so as an artist and as a human being.

Botting argues that the questions Gothic narratives raise "of the reality of strange incidents are framed with different issues: of rationalism, democracy and religious organization, and their relationship to individual freedom and social control" (1996, p. 114). In other words, the Gothic is closely tied to social issues. This statement outlines the converging point of Bond's social realism and the Gothic elements in his plays which underscore institutionalized forms of evil. The graphicality of the Young Woman's hanging corpse is disturbing and here the Gothic strain manifested in the surreal image of the dead woman's body becomes a "psychological, architectural, theatrical, and visual statement about man's relationship to his surroundings" (Bloom, 2010, p. 115). The Young Woman's hanging corpse is the effect of what happens to a society when an artist evades his social and moral responsibilities. As a representative of business world, Shakespeare refuses to play his role as a responsible artist. He could have averted the tragedy, but he did not "act" responsibly. In dramatizing the institutional and legal victimization of the Old Man and the Young Woman, and an artist's failure to prevent tragedy, Bond's *Bingo* uses devices and strategies which throb with the Gothic strain, not just satirically, but "politically to display social and psychological oppression" (Botting, 1996, p. 94) through the Gothic horror of hanging and shooting.

Bond's next play *The Fool* also deals with the same theme of art and its relation to human society. But this time the victim of oppression is the artist John Clare unlike the poor victims of *Bingo*. John Clare exemplifies through his degeneration from sanity to insanity his inability to reconcile his art to life and to see his life as separate from art. Consequently, he neither remains an artist nor a sane member of the community towards the close of the play. *The Fool* also questions the responsibility of a society in giving artist a respectable place and freedom of expression. Clare's gradual degeneration unfolds the spectral extremes in an artist's life who either loses his hold on sanity like Clare when he refuses to sacrifice his art for life or commits suicide like Bond's Shakespeare when he fails to accept his moral responsibility as an artist. The result is artist's social isolation and individual fragmentation in both the cases.

In *The Fool*, Bond decks out his ideas on art and ethics in divergent forms of irrationality. Writing of how the Gothic permeates the social and individual worlds, Botting states that Gothic shadows "flicker among representations of cultural, familial and individual fragmentation, in uncanny disruptions of the boundaries between inner being, social values and concrete reality and in modern forms of barbarism and monstrosity" (1996, p. 156). The play's final scene set in a mental asylum clearly highlights Clare's individual fragmentation in uncanny description of his shrunken body. His inner artistic being, social norms, and concrete reality have reduced him to a puppet. Twenty-three years have elapsed since Clare has seen his wife and when Lord Milton and Patty come to visit him, Clare has become a shrunken, old puppet who mumbles incoherently. His face is white and his head "nods like a doll's" (1987, sc. 8. 150). Clare has now become his own Gothic double. Hay and Roberts describe Clare as a "double-image of intellectual energy and physical decay" (1980, p. 214). His physical and mental fragmentation is horrifying and the presence of other prison inmates intensifies the effect of this physical and mental derangement. As the cell door opens, a man in a straight-jacket is pushed into the room. He is "*old, grey, dressed in grey, and completely unrecognizable. He makes rhythmic sounds. . . . The man writhes from side to side but doesn't resist being propelled. His neck is stretched stiff*" (1987, sc. 8. 150). The man in straightjacket constitutes Clare's double self. However, despite the apparent bleakness of the scene, Bond's argument in his introduction to the play is that he did not intend it to be without affirmation: "In this scene I've tried to show that rational processes were still being worked out even in the apparently insane world of nineteenth-century Europe" (Trussler, 1985, p. 79). Although Clare is reduced to a "shriveled puppet" (1987, sc. 8. 150), Bond "follows this description with an apparent paradox: 'Clare is a rational man in this mad scene even more than at other times . . . It is vital that Clare's rationality is what finally emerges for us from the scene, because otherwise his return to the asylum can only be read as a defeat'" (qtd. in Hay and Roberts, 1978, p. 211).

The Gothic impulse locates itself in Clare's physical and mental disintegration and imparts an emotional depth and focus to his tragic situation. Bond wants the reader or the viewer to focus on Clare's character as a part of an inconclusive statement that they are invited to complete. Although there is little recognition of responsibility of Clare's failure as an artist and his eventual mental fragmentation either on the part of the patrons of art symbolized by Mrs. Emmerson and Lord Milton or on the part of Clare himself, Bond stresses that he intends the play's meaning to be discerned by the audience rather than by the characters: "I want to make the play be more a statement to the audience which the audience has to complete. I want to say, look, this is what

happened, this is the story of the man's life. This is what made these things happen" (Trussler, 1985, p. 10). Bond's *Bingo* and *The Fool*, thus, underpin the need for a sane society founded on the principles of freedom and justice. Through the portrayal of Shakespeare and Clare, Bond states the case that humans have the means to get rid of the tragedies that caused destruction, pain, and suffering in the past but an "unjust society returns the tragedy- and multiplies it a hundredfold" (1987, p. xxxvii). Such stark societies that replicate tragedies are Gothic in their manifestations of all forms of monstrosity and coercion. Bond calls just society an exemplary society and believes that in such a society "it would always be wrong to kill" (1987, p. xxxi). Paradoxically, in unjust class societies portrayed in *Bingo* and *The Fool* neither the artist has any realization of his hand in exploitation and killing of innocent people, nor does the society realize what he has done to an artist.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the monster and the creator Victor Frankenstein confront each other with opposing viewpoints. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in *Jekyll and Hyde* also come face to face as each other's shadows and as representatives of antithetical modes of thinking: rational and irrational. Likewise, Poe's characters in his stories confront their own dark selves. In other words, Gothic world is confrontational. Arthur, Lear, The General, Trench, Hecuba all confronts their irrational societies by confronting their shadows first. It is after this initial confrontation that they emerge as sane rational beings despite their apparent madness, blindness, and helplessness. In their ability to encounter irrational, oppressive systems as well as their own irrational selves, they exhibit a moral strength. In contemporary times, most of the people deny that irrationality exists in the modern civilized world. In "Four Pieces" Bond argues that human society is irrational, and very unjust in terms of how humans distribute money, jobs, education, houses, status, power, and cultural privileges. Bond is of the view that injustice in one aspect breeds more injustices in all of them. Injustices, he says: "stick together" (1987, p. ix). They breed like a monster. But most of the people, according to Bond, remain in a state of denial and when they are made to realize the existence of injustices, they end by defending them (1987, p. ix). "An unjust society twists values" (1987, p. xxxvii). "Politically, the struggle for justice is inherent in the use of reason within society" (1987, p. xxxix). Bond's theatre is a call to people to use reason in their struggle for peace, justice, and equity and his protagonists in their journey of self-discovery exemplify the possibility of change.

Bond's first series of problem plays ends with *The Sea*. His second group of plays which provide answers to problems include *Bingo*, *The Fool*, and *The Woman*. The

second cycle of plays culminates with *The Woman*. His *The Bundle* and *The Worlds* also deal with his radical political philosophy that advocates left-wing anti-institutional political violence. Writing of Bond's evolution as a political artist, Nightingale argues that Bond has modified his ideological stance on violence since 1971. Initially, he believed that violent revolution was destructive, but in 1977 Bond was arguing in favour of political violence which he though was justified and could help foster a more rational society (1982, p. 392). This is Bond's more overt political statement in *Stone*, *The Bundle*, and *The Worlds*. The unnamed Man in *Stone* kills the Mason who gave him a stone to deliver at his house. The stone becomes a symbol for irrational exploitative forces as the Man has wasted his entire life carrying this burden on his shoulders. By the time he reaches the Mason's house, he has grown lean and old. The only way for him to rid himself of the oppressive burden is to kill the Mason. In introduction to *The Fool*, Bond says that the world economy depends upon exploitation and aggression. He also points to the deep and destructive ironies that beset our society and our anti social behaviour that destroys it (1987, p. 69). In *The Master Builder*, *The Bundle*, and *The Worlds*, Bond makes clear statements about the overthrow of an oppressive capitalist ethic through the use of violence.

The Bundle (1978) is a radically political play that continues Bond's political commitment as an artist although it is different from two earlier series of plays. Like *The Woman* this play too makes a political statement in favour of anti-establishment violence. The radical nature of the play's statement that it might be necessary to use political violence or revolution in order to create a free and just society is not a new idea as it was already implicit in the last scene of *Stone.* Bond had explored the idea on a theoretical level in the author's note on violence which he wrote as an introduction to *Saved* (Trussler, 1985, p. 15). It had been already developed in his earlier play *The Woman* and recurs in *The Worlds*. In these plays, Bond constructs an alternative parallel discourse of violence and counter-violence to create situations where "'oppression is made to identify itself,'" and human beings must "'tread on its toes and make it declare itself'" (qtd. in Hay and Roberts, 1980, p. 228). It is interesting to see how Bond's engagement with aggression and insanity moulds reader's or viewer's perception of rational ordering of society and urges him to read carefully the signs scattered across his works to understand human situation by identifying mutant forms of violence and irrationality.

In *The Swing* again Bond dramatizes the monstrous forms of violence and social madness in the presentation of a community that goes berserk and starts to "tear itself to pieces" (Hay and Roberts, 1980, p. 231). In the play, Bond once again engages with

the concept of insanity and contrasts Skinner's political madness with Greta's harmless insanity. It through these contrasting forms of madness like the contrasting forms of violence in *The Bundle*, *The Woman*, and *The Worlds* that Bond punctuates the contradictions inherent in a regressive intolerant society that imposes constraints on people's freedom in the name of law and ethics. The ostensible reason for Greta's madness is the assault she claims is made on her in the yard that night, "but this may or may not be fictitious; what is more important is that her madness is inherent in the way she feels constrained to live" (Hay and Roberts, 1980, p. 232). People in such a restrictive society fail to express their natural feelings for fear of societal pressures. Greta exemplifies the contradictions inherent in such societies, the tension between people's natural feelings and their sense of guilt at having harboured them which eventually leads to the inevitable outcome of their loss of sanity. In scene 2 of the play where she is teaching classics to Ralph, Skinner's son, she asks him abruptly if he has ever seen a woman's breast. To this, Ralph does not proffer a clear answer. While she is reading from *Aeneid,* she slowly uncovers one of her breasts and takes it out. She then asks the boy if it is beautiful. Bond deliberately keeps it ambiguous as to whether she is asking the young boy about the beauty of the excerpt she is reading, referring to her watch fob, or her breast. Ralph wants to touch it but she covers herself and sits. She then asks him if she shocked him and says: "We must understand our lives and then act as if we didn't. There are women Ralph--men go to. I understand them too. But we can't speak of them. We must be as silent as this book-" (2003, sc. 2. 297-98). Greta's act of revealing her body might be taken by a conventional society as subversive but Bond invites the audience to focus closely on what Greta does and says to the young boy. Highlighting the subversive nature of Gothic writing, Botting in introduction to his book writes that it is "seen to be subverting the mores and manners on which good social behavior rested" (1996, p. 4). Bond subverts through Greta's behaviour and her repressed desires the myths that society has invented about social and moral propriety. A restrictive society cannot understand people like her as it forces a code of moral conduct on them and stifles their desires.

Another representative of such a destructive society is Skinner whose political madness is more lethal than Greta's harmless insanity. Whereas Greta is a victim of a restrictive society, Skinner's social madness destroys the lives of innocent people like Fred. The overall effect that Bond produces through these paradoxical forms of insanity is a thorough subversion of ontological certitudes. Inverso argues that over and over the Gothic "violates our sense of epistemological proprieties, repeatedly it undermines any sense of objective reality" (1990, p. 51). The madness of Lear, Bodice, Fontanelle, Hatch, the General, Clare, Georgina, Greta, Skinner, and that of

insane characters in *Coffee, The Crime, Innocence,* and *The Balancing Act* presented on a Gothic scale of intensity repeatedly undermines all sense of objective reality.

Another example of subversion is Bond's frequent killing of children in his plays. The first victim is the baby in the pram in *Saved*. But after the controversial scene of the pelting to death of the baby in *Saved*, Bond was careful not to provoke his audience emotionally which is why the killing of the children in *Narrow Road*, *The Woman*, *Jackets*, and *Innocence* either happens off stage or a paper doll is used for the victim. Bond admits that if he went on stoning babies in his plays, the audience would not notice it (qtd. in Innes, 1992, p. 169). Besides, the controversial provocative scene in *Saved* might have evoked an emotional response which could overwhelm the audience and prevent a rational evaluation of surrounding realities. It could submerge the audience in petty sensationalism by playing on their emotions. Bond, therefore, states that he had to discover "'ways of making people notice, of making those things effective.'" Paradoxically, Bond also realizes the necessity for shocking and disturbing the audiences in order to involve them emotionally in his plays. For that, he says, he must find ways to make that "'aggro-effect'" more complete (qtd. in Innes, 1992, p. 169). The killing of innocent children is a form of visible violence that does activate audience's imagination, shocks them, and involves them emotionally regardless of whether the scenes of killing take place off stage or in front of the audience. The Gothic strain manifested in the killing of innocent children enhances Bond's "aggro-effect" through subversion of conventional moral standards and underpins Bond's message without compromising the dramatic effect. Bond takes advantage of the Gothic's potential, manifested in his preoccupation with violence, for a critique of an irrational world. Through these killings he portrays societies that are actually insane because they are irrational, intolerant, and unjust. It is not usually expected of people to commit such atrocities as killing innocent children, yet they do. Irrationality deprives a person or a society of any true understanding either of himself or of itself. Bond considers such a society more dangerous than insanity of people like Hatch, Greta, Old Woman in *Coffee*, mad Hoxton in *The Crime*, and above all, Viv's madness in *The Balancing Act*.

Innes argues that Bond has gradually become more radical, didactic, and more optimistic in his plays. Consequently, the alternatives that he offers to modern situation are "impractical" and contradict Bond's early stance in *Lear* (1992). But Bond's later plays *Olly's Prison* (1993), *Coffee* (1996), *The Crime of the Twenty-first Century* (2001), *The Balancing Act* (2003), and *Innocence* (2011) return to the image of the a dark, devastated, and sealed-in claustrophobic space haunted by violence and

insane spectral figures all of whom are victims of aggression and irrational conflicts and wars. The spectre of violence returns in Bond's most recent plays. Each of these plays is a variation on the theme of contemporary violence and its physical and psychological effects on individuals particularly, and on humanity in general. Bond does not propose any definitive solutions to humanity's problems; he portrays the effects of unreasoning violence and the portrayal is stark and naked. The picture of the world that emerges from these plays is that of an unjust destructive world characterized by violent exploitative capitalist forces of cutthroat competition, and scientific and technological excesses. The Gothic in these plays primarily locates itself in extremities of violence, its destructive power, and excesses of irrational behaviour of the inhabitants of these worlds. Bond's plays, then, bring a critical eye to bear on human world by means of the Gothic treatment of aggression and madness that often characterize Gothic writing. Bond's argument that he makes in author's preface to *Lear* is that "men are not dangerously aggressive but our sort of society is" reveals the self-destructive aspects of the human world that Bond portrays in these plays (1978, p. 8).

In sum, Bond's dramatic world dramatizes monstrosity in all its varying forms of violence and insanity presented through themes and images that hark back to the Gothic world. His plays don't just tell a story; they make a political statement, as Bond himself says, to those watching, a "'statement the audience is invited to finish'" (qtd. in Hay and Roberts, 1980, 198). The audience is left to determine the relevance of the plays' statements to their own lives and to respond to Bond's invitation to reinterpret aggressivity and madness, relocate it, and finally act so that the dream of a humane world can materialize. Hope is humanity's great asset and Bond retains hope in humanity's resilience to fight evil. As a political moralist, Bond stands his ground firmly and refuses to be either hopeless or silent because hopelessness, as Freire argues, is a "form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it" (1970, p. 91). Gothic impulse in Bond's plays punctuates the need for change so that people can live in a compassionate world. In *Summer* Bond reiterates, "We remain human only by changing. Each generation must create its own humanity" (1980, p. 410). In short, Bond's critique of conventional ideologies primarily emerges from the Gothic elements of violence and social insanity. The gothicity located in his treatment of divergent forms of violence and social hysteria raises issues about the defining limits of civilization and of the human potential to combat them. His plays exemplify Barrett's definition of art: "Art is the collective dream of a period, a dream in which . . . we can trace the physiognomy of the time most clearly" (1962, p. 41). Reading Bond from the perspective of the Gothic provides a thematic and structural framework to

critically interrogate some of the major concerns, anxieties, fears and horrors of the modern civilization.

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