

*A Journey to the Contemporary Past: Edward Bond's the Fool, Artist Responsibility
in Light of Power of Capitalist Marketing and Neoliberalism*

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Fictionalized History:

Politicized Literature (A Cultural Materialist View)

The stories through which we make sense of the intricacies of the world around us are everywhere. There are stories telling us who we are as individuals, who other individuals are and how we relate to them. Cultural Materialism dismantles the processes through which this relational system functions. The idea of telling stories, or what is called "cultural production" by Allen Sinfield, "produces concepts, systems and apparently natural understandings to explain who we are individually and collectively, who the others are, how the world works"(Sinfield 2004, 29). *Story of The Fool* is the story of an artist who is taken up by the "polite society", or, in Michel Foucault's words, becomes "a function arranged by the culture"(Ibid 31).

From a cultural Materialist point of view, texts always have a material function within contemporary power structures and since society (re)constructs a text or any narrative fit to its own interest and taste, history becomes subject to subjection. Cultural Materialists' main concern is to bring to light relations of power and processes of ideological/cultural construction and as a consequence to trace the established subjection due to the fact that art, according to Greenblatt, is "made up along with other products, practices, discourses of a given culture"(Bennet 1999, 112). In this way literary texts are put within the unstable social and economic circumstances in which they are produced, and writers' tendency to reconstruct historical past into a modernized story can be considered as the secondary elaboration or indication of the historicized contemporary world. According to Spencer, writers turn to history because "historical subject has involved the recovery and validation of marginalized figures or incidents from the past; in others, well-known events and famous people get presented unheroically, from the critical prospective of their victims" (Spencer 1992, 42).

Edward Bond as one of the Britain's most innovative playwright has constantly turned to crucial periods in the history to highlight the contemporaneity of historical events and to examine the social and political roots of the present situations. Bond's return to history is to stress that stories are lived and we make sense of them because we have been and are in them. Bond wrote many outstanding dramatic works among which *The Fool*, *Bingo*, and *Narrow Road* are considered as pinnacles of his plays in throwing new light on history. Bond's *The Fool* explores alternative understanding of the past and highlights the political changes in the present from a socialist viewpoint. John Clare is a well-known historical character who is given a new lease of life to click repetition of past in contemporary, to give emphasis to the modernized victims of Industrialism and Neoliberalism in the age of Thatcherism, and to underline how art is related to politics and artists should take responsibility to remove the destruction resulting from repression made by power. The play explores the tendency in Bond's theatre to locate texts in a historical and political frame for the interest of its own time. For a Cultural Materialist critic, there is no division between text and context, or between literature and politics. In short, they "politicize" literature through dissident prospective on contemporary cultural politics and dissidence has a considerable importance for cultural materialism. *The Fool* can be studied in the light of cultural Materialism since Bond is concerned with interpreting the significance of the past for

the present or in Brannigan's words "past political events in the spectrum of contemporary"(Brannigan 1998, 7).

Edward Bond took some of his major characters out of history to go through a brief analysis of these issues. His major plays discuss contemporary problems while history serves as a background and this act of fictionalizing history serves the target of manipulation of politics behind it.

"Rational Theatre":

A Reaction to Irrationality

Bond's didactic theatre is an objective analysis of society. He tries to define the right relationship between writing and politics and emphasizes the necessity for an artist to be politically committed. Bond as a playwright living in a neoliberal community is equally concerned with the relationship of dramatic form to social conditions and historical evolution, and class struggle and economic hardship suffuse his work.

To Bond artist has a sort of responsibility to activate and change society through his personal involvement. In *The Fool*, Bond examines a poet who refuses to compromise but his moral commitment is not enough because an artist should have ideological solutions to change political institutions. Bond's art insists upon action and rejects acceptance. In doing so, Bond starts by labeling his works 'rational theater'. Rationally speaking, Bond believes that since there is a meaning to history and an interpretation for the adversity of human, and therefore a pattern to alleviate human miseries, artist should intervene in the reality through effective and immediate action. His 'Rational Theater' is an instrument to change irrational society and that is a responsible answer to the injustice of society. His plays exhibit the violence and injustice hidden in texture of political power.

The violence is nothing more than irrationality in society. The problem for Bond is complicity of justice in art and unjust society in real life. The "primary objective" in art, as stated by Hay, is "the expression of the need for interpretation and meaning to gain a justice that is not fulfilled in the existing social order"(Hay 1980, 64). To Bond, injustice, oppression, repression and violence account for art's justification. In his interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll, Bond convincingly argues that the "way of reaching a rational society is by irrational means, that is the use of political violence in order to achieve a rational, freer society"(Stoll 2007, 417). Innes also discusses that for Bond confinements, violent actions, and asylums indicate social injustices that inflict pain on lower classes. In fact repression in this society leads to aggression and violence (Brown 1984, 130). Social repression works on mental level and turns into a sort of emotional crippling. To Bond, modern society is so irrational that justice is denied by a society controlled by violence and repression, and exploited by capitalism. Innes explains that Bond's plays "are objective records of subjective illusions"(Ibid, 131). The illusions are, as explained by Bond himself, "because people do live in fantasy worlds that are part of social reality"(Ibid, 132), and as a result literary works are objectively recorded illusions. Bond elaborates "All our culture, education, industrial and legal organization is directed to the task of killing [people psychologically and emotionally]... Education is nothing less than corruption, because it's based on institutionalizing the pupil, making him a decent citizen." (Ibid, 130). Thus, his plays are intended to be a realistic demonstration of the psychology

that perpetuates and justifies politics; a psychology which is institutionalized by political power. The Fool can be discussed as an assessment of the situations in the two different periods: a post-war era and a journey into recorded history. While discussing the political and economic changes that have occurred over the decades of Thatcherism, the play will examine the issue of art and artist's political responsibility in confrontation with Capitalism and the impact that it has on working class culture through the power imposed by economic policies.

Cultural Shock, Social Entropy, Nostalgia for the Past

Bond's desire for a stable present manifests itself through nostalgia for a certain sort of history. These nostalgic representations have the audience visualize the past in the present, see its resemblance to our own world and nourish our psychic desires for the past. To Bond, it is the function of art and "creative imagination" to help creation of culture: "Art helps to monitor the creation of culture and reflects the past and future in the present"(Bond 1987, 75). Bond's contemporary neoliberal society is coincided with capitalistic society of Clare. In his "historicity of representations", Bond dialectically examines current affairs of his own era within a known model in order to confirm/reject the validity of that model. Bond himself explains that "I am writing about the pressures of the past that are misforming our present time"(Brown 1984, 131). Therefore, retelling the story of John Clare is to voice Bond's own current stories of the rise of Neoliberal communities which were the absolute followers of free trade, and the reduced opportunities for a political writer like Bond. Bond, in his interview with Stoll, states that society has a sort of "sectional interests" and in order to protect itself has two powers: "One is force, and the other is the manufacture of myths", which, he continues, "are necessary to maintain an irrational society" (Stoll 2007, 417). Bond's metaphoric play is an easy target for the relationship between power and subversion (dissidence or aggression out of brutality of war-stricken community). In Clare's society, Capitalism, a deharmonizing force to human nature, has brought about a sort of social chaos.

Mummer's play:

Peasant Culture VS Polite Society

The notion of nostalgia and the existence of the old values are emphasized from the opening scene, in which laborers perform a mummer's play for Lord Milton, a master who the laborers have to work on his lands. In the middle of 19th century, Mummer's play was widespread throughout Britain and Bond set the scene with this kind of play with its famously elemental theme of death and resurrection which points to death or passing of the old and establishment of the new. The simple action of the plot in mummer's play corresponds to the rustic life of peasant world and existence of a fool in this type of play correspondingly indicates the seemingly damn fool of things the agrarian characters from a peasant culture do in the so-called "polite" world of Industrialization which are probably depicted through masked actors in Mummer's Play. As Bond explains to an American director " They should be very competent dancers and singers: it is their culture, and they can still express themselves in it" (Hay 1980, 201). In this way Bond ensures the process of tradition between the old system and the new one but what he emphasizes is to truly depict "their culture". From the beginning the peasant society is portrayed as a cultured one. It is depiction of a world as being in a peasant culture and as a result an oral, materialist and

rationalist world. The collapse of the social system is manifested in the migration to town and this corresponds to an accelerating development of Capitalism. Distinguishing such an agricultural world from the "polite world" of Industrialization is to highlight a threat to the old culture. Bond describes that "the play shows destruction. The social and economic system then existing was destroyed ...life is turned into a wound as the old culture is destroyed." (Hay 1980, 199). Here, culture functions as an instrument of reactionary ideologies. In words of Sinfield "culture contains contradictions, ambiguities and tensions which allow dissident or subversive perspectives to be articulated" (Sinfield 2004, 109). Bond depicts his dissident prospective through different individual reactions to the capitalistic "polite society".

Clare's Passive Non-conformity and Fantasy Reality

Bond divides the play into two different parts and everything from the structure of the play to the ideology goes very well with this division. In the first part, John Clare, the artist, is depicted like the other members of his class. The only difference is in his reaction to the new exhausting conditions. Clare is not taken part in the rumpus by villagers and is not centralized by Bond for the purpose of proving his non-conformity who is too shocked to confront the transition. From the very first scene, he is distinguished from the others due to his overflowing feelings and sympathy towards others. Through the second scene, Clare hears the natural resources and forest trees are being destroyed to make more farmlands to be more beneficial for landowners. In this scene the pressure on him is more tangible because nature - forest, river, and swamp – as sources of inspiration for artists are used for personal advantage leading to less income for working class. He attempts to sympathize but there is no one to understand him. Having idealistic goals without fundamental means of attaining them in a neoliberal community makes life tough for people, especially an artist.

His short and passive presence in scene three, with the central image of the stripping of the Parson by the rioters, best proves his standpoint. Clare comes up brilliantly but he does not participate in rebels. While villagers are at the center and facing the reality of their lives, Clare, wandering in his imagination, has a fleeting appearance and all that is in search of Mary who is epitome of exhilaration and liberty to him. Malcolm Hay states that Mary's "astuteness and aptitude for surviving is contrasted with Clare's romantic vision of her-he is offstage chasing an illusion" (Hay 1980, 202). But the contrast is fit to this character. Clare is one member of the rural community facing the break-up of their traditional way of life in the wake of nineteenth-century industrialization and enclosure. Bond himself stresses in the Introduction of the play that if a person can't relate himself to society, 'his passions and emotions turn inward, in a way I've described, and relate only to himself. He invents a fantasy reality.'(Bond 1987, 74-75)

Bond, by portraying a deluded poet confronted with the reality, has exerted all his influence to intensify the psychological pressure resulting from this change. Clare's delayed reaction to the change makes him more like expressionistic characters. Living in hallucination makes a foolish person of Clare.

In that chaotic situation, Clare prefers to be in search of Mary who is a merciful release from all the uprising for him at the moment. Bond, metaphorically, leaves Clare free for the purpose of showing that it is tremendously necessary for an artist to

be in pursuit of his dreams in order to be involved in his literary career. As an artist he should be different from the others. Therefore, the only place to shelter in from the suppression of state power is the imaginary space. Ghaderi, considering the destruction of Clare's heroism says that "Clare is not messiah; he is the little poet in everyman-as the creator of his/her self" (Ghaderi 2002, 94). Bond himself in the Introduction of the play states that "Creative imagination is a necessary element in culture, and without it we are denatured animals without even the security of belonging to nature"(Bond 1987, 76). But, Clare's "creative imagination" should serve society to cause a change rather than serving the interests of the society. Because, to Bond, "imagination" as a desire to make an artist "create", "isn't random fantasy. The artist's imagination connects him to his audience's world as much as his knowledge does"(Bond 1975, xi). From this point of view, he is depicted not as a non-conformist, but as an apparently passive character. Madness is a good reward for a non-conformist artist who lives in a dream and does not like to face reality. By drawing a parallel between the rural culture and the urban lifestyle alongside his history versus contemporary and locating the text in a political setting of dissent, Bond displays the cultural shock threatening the artist's community. In this sense, John Clare's collapse of mind is similar to Bond's own trauma resulting from the crucial limitations imposed on the artists by the state power. The kind of responsibility a working-class artist like Bond should claim is clearly glimpsed in David Hirst's assertion on Bond:

Ought not the responsible socialist artist to be involved with the working class and the traditions and theatrical venues appropriate to a Marxist culture? Is it not the duty of the writer conscientiously furthering a social revolution to devote himself whole-heartedly to this end by living with the class he wishes to promote and by employing his talents to inspire and educate them? (Hirst 1985, 2)

In such a situation, Bond wants Clare to be a legislator for his pressurized rural community but he is not able to encounter because on the one hand, his people are fragmented, and on the other hand, art, in this society, has become a prey to the commercial racket.

The Fool pictures how Clare is marginalized after change. He should conform to predefined literary norms in order to gain acceptance and if he doesn't accept the environmental modes, he will be excluded. Therefore it is the process of inclusion and exclusion of an artist which makes a considerable play of Bond's *The Fool*. In the second half of the play, Clare is not depicted as a passive character (artist) and comes to speak for and on behalf of his community and Bond focuses his attention on the character of Clare to juxtapose him with his society. Also, the definition and conception of truth and the way the different characters view it explicates the lack of understanding between an artist and his community and the value of art in that society.

Truth after Ugly:

The Portrait of an Artist as a Battered Boxer

Clare's illusion of the first half of the play is more vividly illuminated through Charles Lamb's behavior in scene Five. Charles likes Clare's poems because he believes "Clare

tells the truth" but truth to him" shelters in the gutter" and "when it is scarce its price goes down"(Scene V, 121).It represents his worthless conception of "beauty and life" which, he agrees, are not the same as truth. He says: "Keats went to Rome to find truth-and beauty and life. He died there. Truth is after ugly" (Ibid). Charles Lamb believes that "truth is not governed by the law of supply and demand"(Ibid). And it is clear that in a society that is governed by these laws the artist is sufficiently fortunate not to write at all. His statement on truth is more representative of the world Clare desires to contact.

The truth of their life is more elaborated through the precise nature of the relationship between patron and artist in Scene Five. The interchange of dialogue between the main characters is interspersed with the practical fight of the boxers and it is done absolutely on purpose. It lasts the whole scene and while the main characters are discussing life and a stench of inhumanity is emanating from their dialogue, simultaneously, the boxers are developing a vicious fight. While Mrs. Emmerson and Lamb are patronizing John Clare, the backers are supporting their fighters. Bond himself believes that "at the end the two halves of the scene-the fight and the debate-should become one"(Hay 1980, 210). The scene ends as John Clare and the knocked fighter, both, are left alone by their backers. The point as explained by Hay is that "the boxer has been knocked about without even being paid for his pains; meanwhile, Clare is still expecting to be paid for his verses"(Ibid, 210).

In words of Spencer, the scene is "the objective reactions between labor and capital (fight), the contradiction of which are reproduced in the relation between artist and patron, and the human consequence of which are presented in physical and mental suffering (the boxer's beaten body and Mary's deranged mind)" (Spencer 1992, 70). In this scene, while the fighters' backers refuse to back them in case of defeat, Admiral, Clare's benefactor, rejects any support for the poetry criticizing the landowners or "polite society": "Those remarks...which criticizes the landowning classes-smack of radicalism"(Scene V, 124). These are bitter realities of a neoliberal community. In this part, Bond wants to stabilize Clare's position as an artist through his oppositional poems which result from the grievance Clare has been nursing against the Capitalism.

Thus, in an era that the business has shifted from production to selling, it is not so strange for Bond to show that books may be conceived not by authors, but by publishers who authorize the production of art. The scene is the peak of realizing the cruelties of neoliberal communities toward pure art.

Another noticeable issue that Bond, here puts forward is to highlights cultural changes through what Garner, Jr. calls "biological materialism". Looking at the body of his characters to discover the material ground of culture is another technique in Bond's theatre. Garner, Jr. explains that "biological materialism", which underlies Bond's theatre, "grounds the political and the economic in human corporeality" (Garner 2007, 158), and this is metaphorically shown through the bodies battered in the boxing ring. Bond uses the body as a sign to prove the existence of power in order to claim violence within the structure of society. By confronting us with the beaten body of the defeated boxer, Bond reminds us of the stripping scene when the rioters were comparing the softness of the stripped Parson's skin with the hardness of their lives. The Parson's body exposes the audience to view his privilege over the others:

"Where you took that flesh boy? You took that flesh off her baby. My ma. They on't got proper flesh on em now" (Scene III, 106). Bond, in this part, engraves power on human corporeal being to verify the biological as site of political contest. Through juxtaposition of The Parson's white flesh with rustic starvation, Bond exposes the peasant to ecological changes.

Similarly, Radstock's support must be purchased by Clare's mental suffering exactly like Boxer's physical suffering; and it is not strange for a society which has excluded the ecstasy of rural life and included the spoiled nature and factories or, in better words, dowry of Industrialization into love poems on rural life and rustic existence. Spencer declares that Bond likes to acknowledge that "the poet's creative vision is grounded in experience"(Spencer 1992, 71). John Clare lives in a society that "bills are never paid and promises never kept" (Scene V, 122) and there is no sign of simplicity of rusticity. He says "on't see no nymphs in our fields but I seen a workhouse"(Scene V, 126).Edward Bond poses this question: How can we expect from a wise poet-as an apostle-who always "tells the truth", distances himself from "free thought".

John Clare, as an artist living in a modern and capitalistic community, is afraid of losing his poetry's quality. Also, quality is something forgotten in market-dominated community. Clare's own poetic future appears in the figure of the beaten boxer and Mary Lamb's madness. Transformation of labor into commodities can best be matched with Mary's complaint of the produce she has purchased: "They are going off before you can get them home....The tomatoes were quite blue"(Scene V, 127). She is afraid of starving in a houseful of food. The abundantly existing food can't satisfy her hunger as it can't Clare's. It proves that in such a society the commodity no longer provides nourishment and in fact satisfaction. Bond has cleared up that the overabundance of food has brought fear to them. This is another proof to the "accursed wealth" and the unhealthiness which has completely filled Clare (Bond)'s mind. In the introduction to Bingo, Bond frankly elaborates the nature of such community: "A consumer society depends on its members being avaricious, ostentatious, gluttonous, envious, wasteful, selfish and inhuman"(Bond 1975, xiii).

Bond is portraying a society that concerns basic "human needs", in Raymond Williams words "as something more than consumption...which from the dominance of capitalist marketing and advertising tries to reduce all human need and desire to consumption" (Ghaderi 2002, 82). In fact, literature since the 1960s has looked increasingly like a commodity. Fredric Jamson argues that "capitalism has for a long time been absorbing all cultural production and making art into one more market activity"(Sinfield 2004, 331), and this is called by Sinfield, "commercialization of mass culture", what is there to empower the authoritative authenticity (Ibid, 331). In Bond's society, the executives believe that art should create the right atmosphere in which business can operate and, therefore, any attempt to produce "cultural production" cannot be independent of the wicked world of the commercial culture. This form of capitalism or what Sinfield calls "commodity capitalism", in the society of John Clare, corresponds to the "welfare-capitalism" of Edward Bond's own era when state support was decisive in recognizing the status and ideological role of literature and the arts.

In the second part of the play, Bond portrays Clare as a falling character due to his

insistence on staying a real artist and standing against social norms. Clare finally returns to asylum, not because he is mentally ill but because he is an asylum seeker to be protected from political problems. An artist's persistence to be an "artist", under neoliberal principles, pushes him forward to become an outcast. He would rather be a poet and admits the consequences- "I've eat my portion of the universe an' I shall die of it"(Scene vi, 139).

John Clare is depicted as a fool in this play and in order to historicise the problem of the contemporary writer, we can interpret the artistic function of John Clare in comparison with a Shakespearean Fool. They, both, are dependent on their patrons: both should be patronized; their role is to remind the truths which are ignored; however the society is immune to the sting of sarcasm found in their voice and none of them threaten society, because whatever they say is considered as foolish statement.

Oppositional Intervention:

A Conclusion

Bond sees that it is necessary to understand the history of Britain's social and political institutions in order to alter them in the future. Retelling the story of John Clare is to voice Bond's own current stories. The play proves that exchanging the acceptance of plausibility of current stories for an artist's preposterously ideal world leads to his marginalization. Therefore it is the social reality that affects artist's perception of his surroundings. In this way artist becomes a victim of what Colin Sumner calls "circle of social reality": "Understanding produces its own social reality at the same time as social reality produces its own understanding"(Sinfield 2004, 28) and, considering his social reality, an artist should create a story to prove that "the standards of plausibility aren't universal but culturally specific"(Ibid). Bond's method of study of past and present is a form of dissidence, a view that all forms of representation are engaged in political struggle. Bond considers the connections of political power and violence in a society that reduces human beings to commodities. Bond's "rational theatre" is a kind political persuasion or as Innes explains, his "objectivity is not impartiality but a particular political bias"(Brown 1968, 139). That is why Bond has altered Clare's biographical accuracy. The history is becoming. According to Sinfield, we should produce "a version of reality which is promulgated as meaningful and persuasive at a certain historical conjuncture" and this should be "reproduced in terms of other practices and other historical conditions" (Sinfield 2004, 113). By giving an account of history from a different prospective and crafting a dialogue with that historical figure, Bond shows convincingly that many of the contemporary issues in politics and culture have their antecedents in the historical past.

Thus, return to history and renewing it through rewriting enables us to regard, in Dollimore's words "the society that demonized than about the demonized themselves" (Dollimore 1996, 15). As a matter of fact, the society demonizes through the culture. Through Clare, Bond shows that the cultural production cannot be immunized from "the prevailing stories" of social reality in the "there-is-no-alternative" era of Margaret Thatcher.

Bond wants to clarify that there should be a snob value in a real writer's work and this is shown within this ironically parallel situations that there is still a glimmer of

hope. According to Hay, Bond wants to communicate a double-image of Clare at the end: a kind of physical decay and intellectual energy. He quotes from Bond that Clare "begins as a healthy, punky young man and ends as a white-faced, red-cheeked, grey-haired clown with a nodding head. An image of decay and ruin yet with some manic life in it. ..." (Hay 1980, 214). Bond wants us to see the imaginary energy still shining inside Clare and this is "creative imagination" that everyone has inside himself and "is related to rationality and through this to human values" (Bond, 75). Therefore the duty of an artist is to create a meaning for irrationalities of the world.

Self-identification of Bond with the miserable position of John Clare is to illustrate the dark side of destructive effects of Capitalism and Neoliberalism on art and culture in the communities dominated by free marketing rules and commercialization. In a modern neoliberal community art is valuable when it is for market's sake, or "money's sake", and not for art's sake.

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