

# Reflections of New Naturalism in Edward Bond's *Summer*

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## Özet

Bu inceleme, çağdaş İngiliz oyun yazarlarından Edward Bond'un, *Summer* oyununda, günümüz dünyasındaki yaşam biçiminin çağdaş insanın doğasıyla tutarlı olması gerektiğini ve bireyler arasındaki farklılıkları değil, benzerlikleri görmenin insan doğasına daha uygun olacağını düşündüğünü ortaya koyar. Oyunda, savaş ve şiddet olgularını, insanların birbirleriyle olan ilişkilerinde gözlenen etkilerine ışık tutarak irdeleyen oyun yazarı, insan doğasının özde kötü ve yıkıcı davranışları onaylamadığını savunur. Ayrıca, insanların düşünceleri, duyguları ve davranışlarının doğru yorumlanmasının onların içinde buldukları koşulların tutarlı bir şekilde değerlendirilmesiyle sağlanabileceğini vurgular.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** insan, doğa, barış, savaş.

## Abstract

This study suggests that, of those contemporary British dramatists, Edward Bond proposes in his play, *Summer*, that life in the contemporary world should be in accordance with the nature of modern man, and that taking into consideration similarities, not differences between individuals suits human nature more. Discussing such concepts as war and violence in the play, shedding light on their effects on the mutual relations of human beings, the playwright makes public that human nature does not support evil and destructive actions in essence. Besides, he stresses that thoughts, feelings and behaviours of people can only be properly appraised taking into consideration the conditions under which they live.

**Key words:** human, nature, peace, war.

Holding up a mirror to various aspects of human life, theatre cannot be dissociated from the process going on in the world with regard to human relations, given that relationships between individuals have been natural constituents in almost every human

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affair. Since people have always felt the need to establish sound associations with each other so as to secure their personal and social lives not only within the society they live but also in the whole world, they have inevitably taken notice of the necessity of the operational force of mutual relations. In view of this assumption, whether relations are constructive or destructive, they are of prime necessity for a playwright to communicate his messages based on the personal evaluation of the magnitude of human interactions with an appropriate centre of attention on causes and effects.

It is true that the nature of communications among people is determined by their mutual positions and expectations. It is also true that relations among citizens of different nations are, as anticipated, formed by the attitudes of their countries in the international sphere. People are emotionally influenced as a result of a set of behaviours of others under particular circumstances and as a consequence of suffering brought about by a nation in another during wars which have always been the most spoken, the most feared, the most destructive, but the least profitable of artificially-caused occurrences taking place on earth. In this regard, wars have almost always been a subject of interest for playwrights. Of those most notable playwrights of post-war British theatre, Edward Bond, too, has unsurprisingly been preoccupied with such concepts as 'war' and 'violence' in connection with the nature of human relations. Bond's keen interest in these concepts is reflected quite successfully in *Summer* (1982), set in a country the name of which is not stated, but which could possibly be a Mediterranean one.

The most striking aspect of the dramatist's effort, in *Summer*, is to make known the existing conditions at present and to offer solutions to problems faced by individuals. This may be evaluated as the revelation of a prerequisite for, as indicated by Jones, "new naturalism" (1996:17), reflected in the play as a concept expressing the need to restructure the basic principles of life in the modern world in view of the necessities deeply felt by individual members of each nation. The significance of this term for Bond should be sought in two areas: one is that life must be based on understanding, friendship, constructive communication and respect; the other is that all individuals in a society must be provided with their basic needs to let them have an accomplished life. Therefore, intended to give accurate grounds for making arguments for human survival and the social nature of human existence, new naturalism is not negligible in the writer's perception of a modern world.

Bond regards the concept of new naturalism as an indispensable concern for life in the contemporary world. As far as he is concerned, as understood in his description of basic principles of life and existence in today's world in *Summer*, individuals are expected to re-evaluate the fundamental nature of issues in their lives. He unequivocally

suggests that this should involve a process taking into consideration the needs according to priorities. For the playwright, like every factor contributing to the course of action for improvement in every field of human affairs, new naturalism should be seen as an inseparable part of values in people's mutual relations: it should be the essence of man's character and should play a vital role as an inner dynamic directing people's energies towards the reorganization of life in the contemporary world.

The action of the play is centred upon the past and present experiences, interpersonal relations, expectations and aspirations of five people. Four of them are presented in the opening scene: two, Marthe and her son, David, living in the coastal town where the action of the play takes place; and the other two, Xenia and her daughter, Ann, coming from England to visit them and the town where Xenia once lived. Making the lives these characters accessible enough through long dialogues at the beginning of the play, Bond establishes a proper ground for the deliberately articulated messages he intends to put forward about their peculiar features and mutual relations in the following scenes. These dialogues also present implications based on the striking knowledge of humanitarian values, and reveal the playwright's assessment of the nature of human life and the significance of his existence in the modern world. Bond wants the audience to see his play as an initiative intended to enable them to look at the affairs of the world from a perspective concordant with modern sensitivity. Because, he believes that such an initiative is more important than every other concept in order to create an irresistible urge towards the creation of a better world, as understood in his description of what he can achieve as a playwright:

The artist's function is to create public images in which the audience recognizes themselves and confirms their identity. Art formulates a method of self consciousness that places individuals in a world and interprets the world in accordance with human needs and possibilities. Its purpose is not only to reveal new truths or reclaim old ones but to show how man can reshape experience from the circumstances the world provides. (Lappin, 1987:11)

A better world, as Bond puts it in the play, must be established in accordance with the laws of justice, humanity, independence, and of course, nature. Interestingly enough, the natural environment is presented as a force having a major role upon the lives of the characters. Xenia's comment on the change in the appearance of the landscape makes this point clear without doubt: "At least they've left the sea where it was" (1). The need for the protection of environment is also suggested through Marthe, who is suffering from a deadly disease, and whose only happiness is to watch the sea from where she sits. Although Bond's play is not basically related to what should be done for the protection

of nature or natural heritage, this vital issue, which can never be ignored in the contemporary world, is stressed without interfering with the development of the basic theme.

In Bond's estimation of contemporary world, everyone must be aware of where and in which circumstances he is living and what possible facilities he obtains. Not only adults but also children are included in this crucial process. The playwright's assessment is that children -with another idiom, the younger generation- who are to undergo a process of enlightenment do not necessarily keep on the atrocity their fathers once exerted and they are not supposed to resume their fathers' war. This point, expressed by Xenia, is brought to mind as a must for the establishment of an ideal ground towards the process of betterment at global level: "It would be a terrible wrong to a child to force it to fight its parents' battles. We do them enough harm without that ... Children have a right to know the world they're in" (11). The writer stresses that handling the case of children must be the first and foremost step towards achieving this vital objective. The most significant deduction one could possibly make out from this expression is that the acknowledgement process is to start at a very early stage of life because children occupy a place which is not, due to the nature of life, of secondary importance. Bond makes his personal opinions on this particular issue as follows:

There is always a direct link between the mind of the child and the mind of the adult. As the child grows, it learns that the outside world is not what it thought it would be. That it is not in fact the map, which the child created by inscribing itself in it. The story which the child needed to become human is, at the same time, used by society to corrupt the child, to make the child inhuman. I don't think we have human societies. (Köppen, 1997:103)

While focusing on human nature and mutual relations in view of new naturalism, Bond lays exceptional emphasis on the significance of past experience on the present lives of individuals. The play abounds in examples indicating the view that past has an impact on the present lives of individuals. Xenia's case provides us with a luminous explanation as regards the playwright's understanding of the issue. She is presented as a person who feels the urge to visit the place where she was born. She is pleased with the things that make her busy there. The most important of all, memoirs of her childhood refresh during each visit, which makes her visit significant. She believes that it is a kind of privilege for her to speak the language she first learned. In short, she is attracted not only by fascinating natural entities but also by human merit. (Stuart, 1999:178)

The playwright's focus of attention on new naturalism as a force dominating people's lives and convictions is not only limited with what is revealed about Xenia.

Marthe, who has been suffering from an incurable illness for some time, is also a character worthy of consideration in view of Bond's message involving the characteristic features of new naturalism. However much she is conscious of the fate awaiting her, she leads her life like an ordinary individual and resists all harsh realities of life. Even her approaching death, in Marthe's sound personal view, is only a part of the continuity in the natural process. Her belief that "Death is the most certain of all the things yet it's the thing people try to create the most doubt about" (12) is the demonstration of the willpower that makes her live to the full at present. Due to the fact that she is fully aware of the rules of nature, Marthe is conscious of the natural termination of human life. However, this does not necessarily mean that she is a person oblivious to what is going on around her. Bond creates her as a character trying to maintain intimate relations with those around her in spite of her incurable illness. The distinctive feature about her life is that she only does not want to involve the others in her suffering. Thus, Marthe's case is a unique example of Bond's attempt to create a dramatic work that "will inevitably serve as a social function" (Jones, 1996:17) rather than reveal personal interests of some particular people.

The relation between human condition and natural existence in the play must be regarded as a way of disclosing a discussion concerning the nature of life. In this respect, the writer's truth-seeking probity in the critical, objective evaluation of human life and mutual relations is worthy of closer scrutiny. Bond thinks that a lost generation will ultimately cause invaluable human values to get lost, and somewhat philosophically asks the youth to re-embellish their lives with the memoirs of the past. The more they merge their past experience into their present lives the better their future world will be; and more important than that, they will be able to direct their future lives more appropriately. For this reason, providing a viable, instructive historical background is an inevitable factor in the making of the future of mankind. Bond claims that proper guidance for the future of humanity can be provided only if we feel "the need to understand and to interpret rationally our past in order to use the experiences in our present and not to repeat the mistakes committed" (Klein, 1995:408). Nevertheless, while proposing such concepts, he insistently tries to emphasize the belief that the evil in man cannot be eliminated completely, so he focuses on the relevance of constructive communication as far as possible against the danger of destructive behaviour to lessen the effectiveness of the evil in man.

The responsibility of people to make every attempt to weigh up basic principles of life is overtly stressed in *Summer*. Characters are presented as individuals having free will and power to control the issues concerning their lives. David's thoughts as regards his mother's case are noteworthy for Bond's purpose of establishing a sound, exemplary individual ready to devote his energy to what is needed by mankind. Although he is in

desperate feelings for the deplorable situation of his mother, David never loses his patience, and encourages her to keep calm about her own reality:

As long as you are alive you must choose how to live - even though the end's inevitable. You must agree to die. Otherwise you can't die in peace. The time will come when you can't fool yourself. But you won't be prepared. When that happens to someone they die in bitterness. I've seen it. I don't want you to die like that. (16)

The effort of the son to help his mother to protect and strengthen her spiritual mood is, without doubt, an example of Bond's view of new naturalism. David is a representative of the unification of the hearts of people. He is fully aware of his mother's fate, but this is not an influential factor disrupting his belief in the natural process. The most important thing that helps him to console himself with the thought of his mother's hopeless condition is that he helps his mother to spend the rest of her life in peace. Besides, the fact that he has an affinity for Ann is not reflected as a factor preventing him from sharing his mother's distress. This kind of a mood is especially important when the overall manifestation of life in the modern world is viewed. This is a remarkable phenomenon implying that Bond aims at creating a present-day person as an ideal model for the present-day society. It is perhaps this inspiration that makes him think that the future of humanity "is choosable, and it's malleable, we can form it, we can have what we want" (Coult, 1979:47). This inspiration is also important in that it provides human beings with a proper image of themselves intending to evolve a new consciousness with reference to aspects of their lives at large. (Itzin, 1986:85-86)

Four of the characters in the play are presented with their own names, as mentioned before. The fifth one, German, who is included in the action of the play in Scene Four, is presented with his nationality. He is on holiday in the place where he once spent a period as a soldier. Through German, Bond aims at inserting in the play his understanding of the significance of mutual relations of people of different nationalities within a perspective directed by the influence of past occurrences and their reflections on people's present lives. German's existence also serves as an ingredient for the presentation of the playwright's personal ideas about wars in general and World War II in particular.

It should be noted that Bond ascribes a somewhat different dimension to the question of war with the inclusion of German in the action of the play. He distinguishes between the involvement of Germany in World War II and Germans as individuals. The gist of this seems to be that the playwright claims the innocence of soldiers taking part in bloody actions during the war. Although Bond never feels a voluntary compulsion whatsoever to alleviate the unsympathetic reality of war, his modest remark implies that

he feels obliged to call attention to the curable disease in the hearts of men for he puts forward the thought that soldiers mostly take part in evil actions because of the forces which control them rather than vice versa. His presupposition is that people can understand the nature of things and see how conditioned they become under certain circumstances if they consider the issues in their lives without prejudice. (Rogdanov, 1996:36)

The focus of the playwright on war also aims, openly, at revealing the natural order in military systems that are difficult, even mostly impractical, to interfere with the help of those who are integral parts of them. Bond's meticulous assessment of the case leads him to put the blame not on soldiers fighting in the trenches but on politicians causing wars. While bringing the overall magnitude of extermination camps in the play, Bond reconsiders the case of soldiers who do not have any other alternatives, and offers conclusive judgements about their innocence. He thinks that soldiers are not in a position to do it in another way, to violate established rules of the natural order of armies at war. However, as participants in war, they can still make a critical assessment of human condition as seen in German's appraisal:

Men are animals. We can't be trusted with another man's wife or his money. Not even with our own daughters. No one's safe on our streets at night. If we don't get our fodder we whine. What saves us from ourselves? Culture. The standards of our fathers. They struggled for centuries to make them strong. (35)

German's assessment of the lack of consistency as an irrepressible feature of human life reveals that he questions, even-handedly, irresponsible actions of human beings in order to "capture the living force of reality" (Shelden, 1985:33). Through German, Bond tries to delineate the true significance of the problem first, and then directs the audience to make a self-evaluation of the issue under discussion, that is, the lack of consistency in people's behaviour and how it affects human life at large. German acts both as a person taking part in the centre of the war and as a critic commenting on the war from various viewpoints, deliberately indicating the ultimate need for consistency in people's actions. The writer intentionally utilizes German's case to establish a proper ground that will enable him to reveal his view that each individual is expected to make a great effort to be a part of a perfect whole which naturally provides individuals with what they need most for their lives.

The episodes German recounts are lively and arousing instinctive feelings in respect of the inhuman nature of war. However much he was once among those responsible for the actions committed in the place where he is a visitor now, he does not support either one or the other side participating in the war. He impartially contributes to the way Bond

makes public his ideas on war. German might in some respects be considered as a spokesman of Bond. Blaming not soldiers but politicians for the destruction and immense suffering experienced by those who are not responsible for the outbreak of the war, German declares a kind of philosophical thought consisting of repentance about their own actions. He is now in a position asking to be forgiven by the sufferers. His comment, "Ah, that war. Terrible. Terrible. Terrible. So much killing" (30), suggests a critical evaluation of wars by an ex-soldier who has a high esteem in the playwright's consideration.

An additional point to note about German's philosophical view of war is made clear when the case of those killed in the concentration camp on the island is reflected. This does not show that Bond considers Germans a race causing only destruction for mankind; he only wants to concentrate on "the system and philosophy which gives rise to such events (Hirst, 1985:85). German reminds the audience of the hardships faced during the period of war under conditions on an island. And he goes on suggesting his ideas based on a critical approach, bringing to light a feature of the war concerning the bodies of a lot of people killed there:

In a war bodies are a problem even to Germans. Take them to the mainland? More work, porters, boats, more lorries to take them from the quay to the hills. Throw them into the sea? No tide. The beaches are fouled....They had been sealed up in caves and pushed down cracks. The soldiers said if the island was a coat the pocket would bulge! The order came: exhume the dead and throw them into the sea. ... The bodies were thrown into the sea. But there was no tide. The bodies won't go away. The sea will not take them. It is as if it was against us. The sea will not take them. ... A dead woman clutched a child in the crook of her arm and floated on top of the sea as if she held the child up out of the water to see us. (32-33)

This description, coupled with the insertion of a somewhat dubious expectation of a better future for humanity, makes public that there is still a lot to do for the groundwork of an acceptable order in the world over so much enmity for virtually no useful purpose. Bond wants to make the audience convinced that even the sea does not collaborate with people in their brutal actions. His main objective in establishing this sort of an interrelation between human actions and the response of nature to such actions is presumably to direct the audience's attention to the new naturalism he aims to stress in the play. By presenting a picture of this kind, the playwright not only criticizes and demeans the war but reminds us of the inevitability of the precautions to stop wars and to focus attention on nature as an infallible example inspiring confidence in people to



establish a way of life suiting nature as well. Therefore, defining nature as an active agent interfering in the brutal actions of people must have been intended to provide the contemporary world with a test case for the understanding of the distinction between what is done and what is to be done, pointing out the “abstract imperatives from the ‘species being’ of the human commodity itself”. (Eagleton, 1984:131)

Just as the relation between men and nature is put forward with prominent significance, so is the need for people to have confidence in one another stressed in the play as an integral part of the core of human relations in view of the principles of new naturalism. Making the lives of the characters closely interdependent, the writer binds the fate of people to one another especially in dire circumstances. For instance, having to put up with the same deplorable, miserable conditions in the concentration camp, the residents of the town -as seen in Marthe’s expression- never tried to sacrifice the lives of the other people in order to guarantee their own future. Marthe’s comment is a kind of justification about human condition: “People seem to be able to bear almost anything. A few prayed. Some cried. Others cursed. No one turned to the wall. We looked at each other” (24). Bond focuses on the necessity of making people closer to one another in an age in which individuals have been more and more isolated, leave aside the growing selfishness. He defines individuals as an inseparable part of the society and of other individuals. He accepts as true the thought that this will help them to reappraise their responsibilities. (Grecco, 1994:371)

Bond reveals an impartial approach when he demeans wars as cruel occurrences in the history of humanity, which may be assessed as a conviction reflecting an impartial approach to the nature of life and existence on earth. Although German is classified among those who came to the coastal town and took part in the actions that deteriorated, even destroyed the lives of those who were struggling to cope with their own problems, it is noteworthy to know that he also lost his own family in the war. The writer is totally aware of the association that he wants to provide when he includes the loss of German’s family, too, in the action of the play in order to generalize the effects of war with an aim to point out that there can be no winner in an event if people are killed and if families are separated. Indeed, Bond is of the opinion that such consequences are obstacles that are difficult to overcome in an endeavour to make the first move to establish new naturalism which he believes is actually indispensable for the future of humanity.

In *Summer*, the playwright does not only exhibit problems but also recommends solutions, the application of which is not impossible when the condition of the world at present is taken into account. His main proposal for the solution of problems felt heavily by almost every individual in the contemporary world is based on the concept of logical behaviour that he sees as the milestone of new naturalism. He emphasizes the importance of universally acceptable logical behaviour in the discussions between

German and Xenia, whom German had contact during the war. German's decisive and honest confession that "We must learn to live in a new world" (30) is a straightforward definition of the inevitability of a common objective that will enable people to live in peace on earth. Besides, it sheds light on the need for "a new definition of our freedom" (Köppen, 1997:101). Bond believes that, however undesirable the past might have been, it is still possible to construct the future in a desirable way.

The search for a way to save the future of humanity indicates, beyond doubt, that the past is full of memoirs that nobody will want to experience once more. Yet the playwright is optimistic in spite of the fact that the past experiences never seem promising. His belief that only the establishment of a reasonable order, as understood in the play, can contribute to the establishment of new naturalism makes him impose his ideas which he thinks are to be shared by every individual suffering from man-made disasters. He also includes poverty and inequality in his list of man-made disasters. In fact, he strictly supports the notion in the play that poverty and inequality will unquestionably disrupt the effort to incite people to live in an ideal world. He stresses the need again and again that hardships of individuals should not be neglected whatever the cost is. He reveals that it should not be disappointing to see that poverty-ridden individuals collaborate even with the enemy, a case which no one would normally accept. In fact, it is not openly stated, but the playwright tends to think that conditions rather than ideals force people to behave out of their will, and that under peculiar conditions thanklessness or disloyalty may be the normal behaviour as seen in Marthe's response to Xenia, who accuses her of thanklessness:

What guilt? Let us talk about ourselves. People in my generation had to depend on your family in order to live. But why should that have been? Your kindness made us beggars. It made some of us grateful, which was worse. There can never be enough kindness to make the world human. If you spent your life being kind people would still die of ignorance and neglect. Much more is needed. .... The foundations of your world were crooked so everything in it was crooked. Your kindness, consideration, consistency were meaningless. All the good you did was meaningless. In your world the good did evil. What could be worse? (42-43)

In view of these assertions it can be suggested that as long as such is the case in the world Bond's fervour and hope of an ideal way of life on earth can never be realized. The playwright is aware that an awful lot of incidents can be stated when it comes to factors that prevent the establishment of the order in his mind because there is not much to be taken as the source of inspiration that will allow human beings to live in a better

world. Yet Bond thinks that the debilitating effects of the present state of affairs should not be seen as signs indicating that the future of humanity will certainly be worse. He wants the audience to accept as true the fact that it is the first and foremost responsibility of every individual member of the modern world to make our planet a more inhabitable place. Bond's view is that life should continuously keep changing for the better and that individuals should share the principle that they have to look for reasons bringing to the fore the common features of human life, not differences. Believing that human nature, in essence, reveres what is ideal for humanity in every respect, he suggests that people can adopt certain principles of new naturalism as factors to enable them to lead a life compatible with the basic necessities of civilization.

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