

Abjection and Taboo Objects in Edward Bond's Plays

Salma Khatoon

Assistant Professor (English), Government College University, Lahore

Abstract

This paper investigates Bond's predilection for visible forms of violence and madness in his plays. The effect violence and madness create in theatre can be read through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection which hinges on repulsion and disgust caused by bodily fluids. Although she uses the psychoanalytical grid to conceptualize it, the concept can be extended to explain behaviors in a human environment and our responses to it, as abjection affects all facets of social life. The abject, in other words, signifies all that is irrational and threatens to breakdown all the systems, laws, and taboos that protect communities. It is a rejection of things. This paper argues that Bond's plays exemplify this aspect of abjection through scenes of violence, suffering, and horror, and diverse manifestations of abjection appear as taboo objects, emaciated, bulleted, hacked, hanging, and festering bodies. Such varied forms of violence in Bond correspond to different states of abjection that threaten an individual's identity, challenge the social system, and law and order. This paper argues that Bond visually abjectifies violence as a form of irrationality through taboo objects such as dead bodies, living bodies turning into corpses, and execution walls. When placed within Kristevan field of social abjection (not just the psychic abjection) the portrayed violence and horror in Edward Bond's works help explain the functioning, the aesthetics, the politics, and the meaning of his plays. In employing this concept in relation to Bond's plays, the paper also clarifies Bond's employment of obvious forms of onstage violence.

Keywords: *Abjection, violence, taboo, bodies, politics*

Edward Bond's plays delve into contemporary socio-political and economic conditions of people in nonconformist and evocative ways. As a contemporary British playwright, Bond has been quite vocal in voicing his concerns about the socio-political challenges that humanity in the modern world encounters. He asserts that drama "is our only barrier against barbarism" as it changes the measure by which human beings know themselves and create their reality (Innocence; Introduction xxii). His drama is quite often compared to the works of contemporary

British writers as Harold Pinter, Howard Brenton, John Osborne, and John Arden who employ violence in their plays, but Bond's portrayal of macabre aspects of onstage violence verges on disgust and loathing that defies any simplistic interpretation of his works through conventional critical approaches.

This article draws on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection as an unconventional but necessary critical approach to interpret Bond's works. When placed within Kristevan field of abjection, the portrayed violence and horror in Edward Bond's works helps explain the functioning, the aesthetic, the politics, and the meaning of his plays. This paper argues that Bond's plays exemplify the social and cultural aspects of abjection through violence, suffering, and horror. Diverse manifestations and sites of abjection appear in his plays. Multifarious forms of violence in Bond can be described as different states of abjection that threaten an individual's identity, challenge the social system, and law and order. The paper contends that Bond visually objectifies violence as a form of irrationality through taboo objects such as dead bodies, living bodies turning into corpses, and execution walls.

The major critical studies of Bond's works hinge primarily on his concept of theatre as a tool for social change and his concerns with and dramatic treatment of socio-political issues such as violence, war, poverty, injustice, and freedom. It would be in order if this study is contextualized with some relevant critical scholarship on Bond. Christopher Innes, (1992) in his critical study of Bond's plays titled "Edward Bond: Rationalism, Realism and Radical Solutions," examines his development as an artist and the growth of his political and aesthetic vision. Innes states that Bond has grown increasingly radical and didactic (p. 153). He also points out that he is experimental and inventive and his theatre is eclectic as he employs "Surreal fantasy, Brechtian parables, stripped-down realism, Shakespearean revisionism or Restoration parody, the historical epic and even opera librettos" as "interchangeable moulds" for his political message. He further argues that Bond employs extreme forms of irrationality such as naked violence and madness in his plays (p. 168). Innes refers to another difficulty that arises as a result of creating extreme situations of violence and insanity. All the macabre images of violence and aggression coupled with intense moments of pain and human suffering render the final message of hope quite problematic. In the midst of these violent and fatal images, the portrayal of hope and possibility appear unconvincing. Although studies like Innes' analyze Bond's use of violence and madness and their relationship to his political vision, none has specifically analyzed violence, insanity, and other excessive forms of irrationality from the perspective of the abjection.

Stanton B. Garner, Jr., in "Post-Brechtian Anatomies" (1990), discusses violence and the trauma of representation in Bond's plays. In staging the suffering

bodies, Garner argues, Bond's primary concern is to underscore the consequences of violence and to expose the power through its operation on the body. Violence organized through the enclosure patterns on Bond's theatre becomes a radical statement against the operations of power. Besides, pain that transcends the stage and causes extreme discomfort in the audience, in fact, accelerates the process of rationalization. However, the presentation of pain and portrayal of suffering bodies that must be absorbed in the dramatic framework of the plays becomes problematic. It is true that it leads to political awareness but "its unmeasured portrayal on Bond's stage risks transfixing the stage with its agonized presence" (p. 162). Consequently, the extremity of suffering depicted on Bond's stage "dramatizes the erasure of this world within the cancelling gestures of pain" (p. 163).

Garner's critique of Bond's treatment and presentation of violence is significant in that he points to the problematics of analyzing Bond's presentation of pain and extreme suffering and the efficacy of his political message, but Garner's criticism of Bond's plays fails to bring the idea of extreme discomfort within a theoretical or conceptual framework. This critique of Bond's plays which focuses less on presentation of violence and more on the process of rationalization, therefore, fails to critically analyze and encompass the unmeasured portrayal of visible violence and Bond's radical political vision and links it to a broader social or cultural concept.

John Worthen in "Endings and Beginnings: Edward Bond and the Shock of Recognition," (1975) takes an entirely different position as regards Bond's employment of horrific forms of violence. He contends that Bond's use of violence in his plays is not intended to horrify the audience; rather, it is a dramatic device to give the audience a shock that eventually leads them towards self-recognition and an awareness of the world they live in. Violent situations in his plays have a proper context and emanate logically from the situations initially presented. Even endings are a logical corollary of the initial situations and appear recognizable. Again this critical approach also focuses on how violence is employed as a dramatic device to evoke an awareness of social injustices, but fails to analyze other responses that naked forms of violence may evoke in the audience or the readers. Critical literature on Bond, therefore, offers relatively thin perspectives on Bond's presentation of violence and insanity.

Given Bond's predilection for visible forms of aggression and madness and the inadequacy of these critical perspectives to encompass and analyze the portrayal of subversive forms of violence, Julia Kristeva's (1982) discourse on the abject and abjection in *Powers of Horror* may be employed to understand how violence and its varied disgusting forms evoke a sense of abject and abjection in

terms of what violence signifies and how it makes viewers/spectators feel. Violence in Bond erupts as a sudden massive uncanny presence. Visual forms of violence in his plays are multifarious manifestations of abjection with the consequent movement of his characters towards abjection through violence, suffering, and horror. Between the stage and the audience what is on Bond's stage becomes "abject and abjection" something that turns the audience away from "defilement, sewage, and muck" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Bond's catalogue of taboo objects and his use of subversive images to gothic proportions make his plays nonconformist and unconventional in challenging and casting a doubt on conventional religious and ethical mores of the human society.

The term "abjection" connotes "the state of being cast off." It signifies degeneration, inferiority and lowness of spirit. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva (1982) explains the abject as the human reaction to a looming breakdown in meaning aroused by the loss of the boundaries between subject/self and object/other (p. 2). She formulates abjection as the state when an individual perceives or confronts his corporeal entity or a collapse in the difference between what is self and what is other (p. 2). She argues further that whatever "disturbs identity, system, order" evokes abjection as the state of abjection does not honour "borders, positions, rules" (pp. 2-3). Interpreting abjection on divergent levels, Kristeva maintains that exemplary literature produced by writers such as Dostoevsky, Proust, Artaud, Céline, Kafka, etc. evokes the qualities of the abject in a space where any demarcation melts. The boundary or demarcation may refer to body or self, or to an institution or society at large. Abjection happens when the boundary faces the threat of invasion by anything that is contaminated or contaminating, impairing or impaired. Threats to boundary may be external or internal.

External threats include physical or other types of violence that disturb the equilibrium of the system, causing the demarcation to waver through decay or erosion. Internal threats come from within, thereby jerking the boundary and attenuating it. These threats, intrinsic and extrinsic, evoke a state of abjection, cause confusion and, consequently, turn humans inside out. Abjection, thus, Kristeva holds, is a "massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness" which is disgusting and loathsome. She further suggests that the eruption of the loathsome real into our lives is the abject, the inferior (pp. 2, 4). She cites corpse as a prime example of abjection (as explained in the next paragraph) as it is a stark reminder of our human corporeality and threatens to demolish all physical and psychological boundaries. However, other items—open wounds, shit, sewage, even the thin film that appears on the surface of the milk—may arouse the same reaction. Crimes are abject precisely as they underscore the "fragility of the law" and, that is why, Kristeva explains that the abject "draws [her] toward the place where meaning collapses" (pp. 4, 2).

The corpse specifically exemplifies Kristeva's concept of the abject and abjection. The reason is that it literalizes the breakdown of the distinction between the subject and object that is crucial for the establishment of identity. What humans confront when they experience the trauma of seeing a human corpse (particularly the corpse of a friend or a family member) is their own eventual death made palpably real. She states:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (p. 3)

As Kristeva argues, all images in the quote above—refuse, bodily wastes, and corpses—show abomination. She further states: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (p. 4). While elaborating further the concept of abject and abjection, Kristeva says that "the abject confronts us" with those "fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal" (p. 12). In sum, abjection, to Kristeva, is seen as anything that is irrational, abnormal, or loathsome. Abjection marks the point where boundaries between the rational and the irrational begin to dissolve and the normal appears to be an anomaly with a sudden emergence of uncanniness into our lives.

Building on this concept of abjection, violence in Bond acquires these Kristevan dimensions. As any form of violence is irrational, abnormal, and loathsome, it evokes abjection. Violence and its multifarious loathsome forms in Bond's dramatic world can be described as different states of abjection that threaten an individual's identity, social system, and order. Bond objectifies violence as a form of irrationality, an uncanny emergence, and a loathsome site where all rational order of the exploitative unjust human society collapses. Abjection operates in Bond's plays through taboo objects, dead or living bodies turning into corpses, and execution walls as a visual presentation of abjection in the Kristevan sense of the term. Aggression in Bond's dramatic world, appears as abjection, particularly in *The Sea*, *Passion*, *The Swing*, *Innocence* and *The Crime of the Twenty-First Century*. Taboo objects and the sites of abjection in these plays confront humanity as they threaten to breakdown rational mind, disturb identity, and signal human reaction to such a breakdown. Bond employs these subversive objects as a means to dismantle conventional myths of progress and civilization and Kristeva's concept of

abjection helps the reader understand the complex dynamics of naked and crude forms of violence on his stage.

Varied forms of violence evoke abjection in Bond's plays. One such play is *The Sea*. With its locale of a humble English seaside village, *The Sea* (1978) portrays the looming danger of extinction of human species. The play's time is early 1900s and it presents Mrs. Rafi, the bully who crushes everyone's feelings, and the village haberdasher, Hatch, a sullen, crazy short man full of apprehensions about aliens from outer world who, he claims, are pilfering people's brains and substituting them with machine parts. The moronic figure of Hatch feels the threat of human extinction as his paralyzing anxiety gnaws at his mind. He attacks a drowned man named Colin. In scene vi of the play, Hatch, holding a knife, walks towards Colin's body, falls on it, and hacks it in a frenzy:

HATCH. "... Kill it! Kill it! Kill it! At last! What's this? Water! Look, water! Water not blood? (Stabbing.) Kill it! Kill it! (He stops.) More water? (Stabs.) The filthy beast!

WILLY (to himself). Hit it. That's an innocent murder.

HATCH. No blood. Only water. How do I know he's dead? Surely, surely! (Stabs.) There, that's hard enough. Hack his throat. Cut it! Tear it! Rip it! Slash it! (Stops stabbing. Rambles on quickly to himself.) Still no blood! Oh who would have thought of this? Surely they die? Why come here, why do anything, if you're not afraid of death? Yes. Their world's dying and they'll die if they stay-they know! Of course they die! Yes-- watch and see if they bury him! You can't bury something that's still alive. (Looks off stage.) Hide, Mr. Hatch. They're after you". (pp. 149-50; sc. vi)

Hatch's slashing of the dead body exemplifies Kristeva's concept of the abject and abjection. The dead body, Hatch's own self alienated from the social structure, and society at large can be linked to Kristeva's concept of the boundary under the threat of assault. Abjection happens when the boundary is under the threat of invasion by anything that is contaminated or contaminating, impaired or damaging. External threats include physical or other types of violence, that disturb the equilibrium of the system, causing the demarcation to waver through decay or erosion whereas internal threats come from within thereby jerking the boundary and attenuating it. These external and internal assaults evoke a state of abjection, cause confusion and consequently turn everything inside out.

In case of Hatch, Collin's dead body represents the external threat of invasion by the aliens who, Hatch hallucinates, will contaminate the earth. The corpse disturbs the equilibrium of Hatch's small world, threatens the boundary of his society with its threatening presence, and psychologically disturbs Hatch's inner world. He sees the corpse as dirty and contaminating in the same vein as other

bodily fluids that Kristeva cites as disgusting and loathsome. The boundaries between Hatch/self and body/other, sanity/insanity, and war and peace symbolize the threat of the alien attack. Colin's body/corpse causes this marking to falter that reflects Hatch's internal fear at the sight of this cadaver. It springs from within him and he wants to expel it. His condition evokes a state of fear, which is central to Kristeva's concept of the abjection.

Hatch imagines that "he has killed an alien when Colin's corpse oozes water instead of blood" (Hirst, 1985, pp. 119-120). His mad brutal act of slashing the body is reflective of his anxieties about the survival of human race on the earth and he projects this anxiety onto Colin's corpse by violently chopping it. The abject loathsome corpse elicits from Hatch a prelingual response as he stabs the dead body repeatedly. He perceives the dead body as a threat, as an outcast and tries to expel it from his human world by disfiguring it. Hatch believes it does not belong to his world; consequently, his psychological state projects the fear of the other/alien on to "individuals and groups in society who are on the fringes and are stigmatized (Arya, 2014, p.20). Such outcasts are deemed a threat that legitimizes their expulsion from the social fabric. They are 'cast away(s)', abject, lowly, and despicable in their otherness. This is the social and cultural aspect or dimension of the concept of abjection.

Hatch's anxiety about an invisible enemy is a misdirected search for monsters from the outer space who, Hatch hallucinates, will eventually take over sapiens. Ironically, human beings themselves, Bond suggests, may morph into those monsters, as the dead body that Hatch disfigures is the corpse of another human being much like him and not a creature from the space. Hatch's search for an alien is a misplaced search for an enemy of mankind which, in fact, lives within humans, either concealed like Mr. Hyde (in R. L. Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) or horribly corporeal like Mary Shelley's monster, Frankenstein, which is, in fact, a creation and an extension of a human being of the same name signifying dark threat of annihilation. The familiar and secure domestic space of Hatch's world is threatened and invaded by the fear of the unknown exemplified by Colin's corpse. Ironically, the body in relation to Hatch is the other or the abject. Ironically, Hatch himself becomes the abject or the other in relation to Mrs. Rafi, the so called representative of the local society, who threatens and bullies him and refuses to take the fabric she has ordered. In the society of the town, it is Hatch who is treated as an outcast, as a subhuman.

Colin's corpse also challenges Hatch's identity as a human being and is, therefore, an example of the psychological aspect of the abject as anything that threatens the identity, disturbs the system, and evokes abjection. Collin's body is neither a subject as he is dead, nor an object as Hatch regards it as an alien that has

come to attack the planet. The corpse as a cesspool crushes Hatch with its corporeality and pushes him to the edge of non-existence and hallucination. At the social level of abjection, Colin's corpse is a visual reminder of Hatch's insanity and his existence as a poor town draper and a social outcast.

The corpse exemplifies the breakdown of meaning in Hatch's personal world and threatens his social identity and order of things in the outer unjust world. In other words, with its loathsome presence, it threatens all reason. In fact, the seashore where Hatch slashes Colin's corpse becomes a site of abjection because this place questions system and order and challenges Hatch's rationality. The corpse reminds Hatch of his own abjection by offering a parallel with itself. Through the corpse, Bond challenges conventional view of violence by stating that "[r]eason is not yet always effective, and we are still at a stage when to create a rational society we may sometimes have to use irrational means" (Hirst, 1985, p. 157). The dead body as the object is Bond's "irrational means" to underscore the irrationality of violence and unjustness of a social system.

Kristeva's theory of the abject also operates at a literal and symbolic level in Bond's *Passion* (1978), a play he wrote to aid England's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Bond exemplifies Kristevan claim that crime is abjection as it challenges law through numerous subversive images in the play that question human values by presenting the violence of war as something loathsome, criminal and disgusting. War perpetuates injustice, breeds more violence, more hunger and starvation; it is irrational, abnormal, and loathsome. It is the abjection personified. The play begins with the Narrator's account, in Brechtian fashion, of an old woman's only son who was sent to war. He eventually dies on the front. The Old Woman decides to request the Queen and ask for her son back. The Queen's Magician tells her that the old woman cannot have her son back because he is to be cast into a bronze monument that will be installed in the main square to remind the nation of the death of all the heroic young men in the war.

In this play, Bond uses a very significant subversive image of a pig nailed on the Cross. The visibility and corporeality of the pig on the Cross evokes the same level of disgust as a Kristevan image of the corpse, filth, and vomit. It also echoes Collin's body lying lifeless on the seashore as both are dead bodies and both evoke the state of abjection by threatening social system, order and identity. When the Queen reaches the launching pad to declare a monument open, she pushes the button and as the white cloth descends, "[t]here is a full-size cross and on it is nailed and bound a crucified pig. A soldier's helmet is nailed over its head" (p. 247, italics original). Bond subverts the traditional sacred images of holy war and crucifixion by transposing a pig instead of Christ figure on the Cross. The pig's head with the helmet on it threatens to break down the traditional political and religious belief systems about war, politics, religion, and human society. It is a Kristevan substitute

for a corpse, filth, muck and all bodily fluids that evoke a feeling of nausea and threaten all that is rational and normal.

As a matter of fact, the sudden appearance of the pig on the stage in place of Christ introduces the abject in an otherwise formal ceremony of a monument's display and underpins the ironic tone of Bond's perspective on war and violence. The play's narrator then announces the arrival of Christ and Buddha. He gives an account of human suffering and informs the Queen that he must soon die so that he can redeem the world. Buddha points to the cross and tells him that they have reached the right place. The Christ then goes to the base of the cross and glances at the crucified pig. He finally announces: "I am too late. I can't be crucified for men because they've already crucified themselves, wasted their lives in misery, destroyed their homes and run mad over the fields stamping on the animals and plants and everything that lived" (p. 250). War and suffering are presented as normal and inevitable, but Bond's image of the pig on the nail introduces the abject in the midst of a formal ceremony. With its threatening presence on the Cross instead of Christ figure, the pig is the Kristevan equivalent of the abject.

The inverted image of crucifixion acquires the position of the Kristevan abject as Christ refuses to be crucified for men who have already crucified themselves at the altar of war and violence. Bond abjectifies the irrationality of nuclearization by presenting it as a form of taboo filthy object that eats its own feces, muck, and filth as war eats humans, and destroys all forms of life. With the sickly image of a human corpse, the pig's helmeted head in all its menacing corporeality and hideousness confronts humanity. It represents violence of war and war hysteria as a site where man strays into the territories of animals, where human and animal, Christ and pig are interchangeable. The pig's carcass particularly exemplifies Kristeva's concept of abject and abjection since it literally dismantles the distinction between man and animal, Christ and pig, human and inhuman and introduces something abnormal in a normal rational world.

Gazing at a pig's corpse is a stark reminder of death resulting from violence. The sudden unfolding of the pig's body on the Crucifix reflects "massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness" which is disgusting and loathsome (p. 2). It also questions our sense of cleanliness and transgresses what is sacred and appropriate. The abject disturbs identity, border, rules and the system (p.4). Here the image echoes Kristeva's claim that corpse, waste, muck, and blood are disgusting and our rational mind rejects them or evokes an uncanny feeling. Kristeva's concept of the abject and Bond's dramatic rendering of this concept into a subversive uncanny image, his introduction of the abnormal into a normal, rational world clearly underscores the horrors of war and aggression. This taboo object in place of the holy figure of Christ is what humanity has replaced with reason, justice, and peace.

By presenting a startling uncanny image in the midst of normal surrounding as the abject, Bond draws our attention to what is abnormal, fragile, horrible, and vulnerable. The disgusting image of helmeted pig draws attention to fragility and vulnerability of laws of justice operating in the world. At another symbolic level, just as Hatch replaces Colin's corpse with an alien in his perception, Bond here too employs the pig as a symbol for all that is loathsome and which now has substituted Christ—the traditional image of human suffering and atonement. This reversal of the normal and the thwarting of the reader's perception evoke a feeling of restlessness.

Abjection, then, emerges as a concept that challenges and upsets conventional identity and cultural concepts. The abject connotes objects that are repulsive and loathsome and consequently ousted or driven out. Incest, human body, human waste, cannibalism, violence, murder, decay, death are aspects or facets of mankind that the world considers abject. In *The Swing* (2003), Bond also uses such taboo and repulsive objects in the form of living human bodies turning into corpses exemplifying various forms of threat. This threat, external or internal, is central to abjection and it is this threat that also causes abjection. Bond focuses the reader's attention on the macabre description of the bodies that gradually decay into corpses.

In *The Swing*, the latter of the two short plays that Bond wrote for the American Connection season at the Almost Free; collectively A-A-America!, Bond analyzes the moral values of indigenous American society. When the curtain rises, a Negro named Paul gives a brief overview of the play that concludes with the onstage killing of a traditional black man. He provides a historical backdrop that contextualizes the incident. In Kentucky in 1911, a Negro was sentenced to death for murder. He was bound to a frame on the stage of the local theatre and the paying customers were permitted to fire at him. The more money they paid, the more fires they could get. Through this narrative device, Bond gradually works up his audience's expectations of what they might be watching on the stage. The audience is made conscious that they are about to watch a show on the stage and the space is a stage within a stage where "A simple swing of wood and rope hangs motionless from the flies. It has been decorated with bright paper flowers and bunting. There is a pile of props—cut out trees and birds, folded hangings and so on" (p. 281; sc. i, stress in original stage setting).

The play opens just after Skinner, a local trader, has purchased a theatre. He plans to transform it into a profitable shop. Skinner's store is ransacked and robbed and he is injured. In this mayhem someone rapes the theatre's previous owner's daughter Greta who afterwards loses her mind. Skinner holds a black man named Paul and his white friend Fred guilty of this crime. The convict is finally dragged onto the stage. But to audience's shock, the culprit is not the traditional

black man Paul but Fred who is white. In Skinner's staging of the shooting of Fred as a theatrical show within the play, Bond creates a powerful visual symbol of abjection, of a living human body turning into a hanging corpse once again, replacing the traditional black victim with a white fellow much like the replacement of the Christ figure with the pig on the nail, and that of Collin's body with an alien figure. Bond once again inverts the conventional stereotypes about the crime and the criminal through Kristeva's concept of the abjection. Bond's stage instructions serve as psychological preparation for the culminating horror that will soon fall on the audience members. "Skinner leads the audience in applause. Stagehands 1 and 3 return with Fred. He has been dressed in a grey suit and pale shirt (no tie). He is white with terror. The Stagehands are nervous. They try to tie Fred onto the swing. He falls on the ground. Audience whistles, cheers, hoots" (p. 318; sc. iii, italics original).

Presenting the stage as a "hall of justice!" (p. 318; sc. iii), Skinner announces that every member of the audience who has purchased the ticket is entitled to one fire and those who bought the more expensive one will get the first shot. Shaken with horror, Fred, the accused and the stigmatized, is led to believe that he is about to be shot. "Yet", as Bond manages it adroitly, "our expectations are subverted when the clown aims his "pistol" and "shoots" the tethered suspect with water" (Inverso, 1990, p. 130). The audience heaves a sigh of relief on finding that it is just a theatrical performance, a play within a play, and no misfortune will befall Fred. This complacency is what Bond believes to be the normal response of the contemporary spectator to a stage play that is taken for granted to be only a theatre performance. When the audience is convinced that Fred's appearance on the stage is just a part of a fake performance within the play, the unthinkable happens that threatens all boundaries in all its repulsiveness. Fred's nightmare turns real when the clown fires from a real pistol, and the stage audience members follow suit. Inverso further (1990) states: "In the original production of the play, according to Tony Coult, the live theatre audience 'in awed silence' listened to 'their avenging counterparts (on tape . . .) cheer, scream, and empty their revolvers into Fred'". Inverso writes on that Bond's stage instructions describing the shooting scene are "uncompromisingly brutal" (Inverso, 1990, p. 132) and read as "Fred spins, twists, jerks, screams. After screams, blood spurts.... The audience noise seethes in a crescendo.... Last volley. Audience noise explodes. Fred has keeled over. He swings slowly and silently upside down. Blood falls and swishes over the stage" (p. 325; sc. iv). This horrible description clearly shows how Bond thwarts our conventional responses to violence and its victims.

The nightmare of the theatre entertainment, in fact, turns into real horror when real blood spurts out and pours over the stage for the live audience to watch

in horror. While their stage audience is cheering and whistling, the real audience members receive the actual shock of the scene in all its startling manifestations, failing to comprehend as to whether what they have seen was a reality or merely a melodramatic performance on the stage. This sudden uncanniness creates or causes offense and threatens to breakdown all conventional meanings of a stage performance. For the counterpart audience who directly participate in the shooting as a part of the show and also for the real live audience who watch the performance, the stage dilates into an ancient Roman arena reminiscent of characteristic gladiatorial sports of beast baiting and similar forms of barbaric entertainments.

In dramatizing the unlikely killing of a white man Fred instead of a black man as part of a stage show within the actual play, Bond presents theatre as a site of abjection where violence dissolves the boundaries of the theatrical space and the real space in the world outside the theatre hall. All that is logical or rational is questioned and subverted. Fred's body hanging upside down from the flying trapeze is the Kristevan corpse, a disturbing presence that turns the principles of law and justice upside down. It is the abject because it is more shocking than usual and also because the onstage display of a dead body hanging upside down threatens the theatre space with its shocking visuality. It is loathsome and petrifying at once.

Normalizing the shooting of Fred, the abject, as only a theatrical performance, a play within a play, leads to a realization of the abject within the normal and it is precisely this subversion and reversal of black and white that produces an uncanny effect. In her book *Abjection and Representation*, Rina Arya (2014) cites Kiki Smith's artwork of a waxen body of a woman squatting on her legs. From her back, a yellow beady trail of urine pours that forms a pool. The woman's face is hidden in her legs. Her peeing body is an "act of degradation" that becomes a "shared act" of representative humanity (Arya, 2014, p. 1). Arya further says that this life-sized waxen body causes repulsion as it makes us realize that we are looking at bodily waste leaving the body's boundary. The "subject of artwork transgresses our moral sensibilities, which are programmed to stave off our corporeal turmoil and maintain boundaries between public and private acts" (Arya, 2014, p. 1). Being a witness to such a sight evokes a sense of the abjection as we do not want to witness an act that should be a private activity. What it portrays and how it impacts the viewer is what causes this abjection (Arya, 2014, p.2). Fred's hanging body evokes the same state of the abject and abjection as Smith's statue of the urinating woman. He, too, is treated as abject, a criminal, and an outcast that must be expelled or ejected from the society by being shot, but his dangling abject body reminds the reader of the fragility of the laws and systems.

Likewise, in *The Crime of the Twenty-first Century* (2003), a character named Sweden, a hapless victim of human violence, vents out his aggression on a destitute mad woman named Hoxton who has taken sanctuary on a wasteland. The

abject is personified in the figures of Sweden and Hoxton as both are social outcasts who have been driven out and ousted from the normal human world after the devastation of war. The visual horror of one victim killing another hapless creature echoes Hatch's slashing of Colin's corpse and audience's shooting of Fred underscore violence of the oppressed against their own equally vulnerable fellow human beings. Hoxton has been living on a rubble heap with only a single water tap to keep her alive. Sweden also arrives at the same place seeking shelter. He asks for her help and the woman reluctantly agrees when she sees Sweden waving a knife in the air. In a mad fit of anger, he tears her clothes, knives her arms, stabs her in the back, and finally drives the knife in her chest licking his hand that has the poor woman's blood on it. He then lifts her jaw and makes her taste her own blood: "Sweden (turns to face Hoxton): Not dead. (He gropes back to her and stamps on her) Dead?" He even holds her dangling body and dances with it: "her body sways, her feet drag on the ground" (pp. 253, 254, 255; sc. vii).

Hoxton represents the same external threat Hatch feels when he sees Colin's body. To Sweden, Hoxton is the abject as Hatch thinks Colin's body is offensive. The macabre description of one victim slaughtering another and then dancing with the corpse is what subverts the social and political order. In case of Sweden and Hoxton, one abject confronts death, violence, and murder which correlates Kristeva's description of the concept of abjection. It also warns of the fatal consequences of how violence of war leads to other more macabre forms of devastation and loss of human values. Sweden is a savage picture of abuse and irrationality which calls forth wars and other forms of destruction such as madness, injustice, poverty, and starvation. Visible shades of aggression and madness that Bond collectively presents as the taboo object of Hoxton's corpse emerge as extremes of irrationality and abjection. Bond presents violence as abjection and the corpses are its symbolic manifestations in his dramatic world.

In point of fact, Sweden himself is a Kristevan abjection personified; he is an outcast, a remainder of war ejected from the normal human world much like the urinating statue and bodily waste leaving the boundary of the body. When he appears on the rubble heap, he is "Unshaven and white-faced A white swathe of dirty bandage binds his chest from under his arms to his lower ribs" (p. 224; sc. ii). His boots are tied with a string; dry blood is smeared on his jacket and trousers. What makes him a ghostly figure, as is mentioned in section six of the play, is that he has no eyes; instead, he has "two enormous cavities" (p. 242) that are painted black. With his hollow sockets, bandaged chest, and the stubs at the ends of his legs bound in thick frayed cloth, Sweden is a ghostly Kristevan reminder of what is now left of humanity. He is a repulsive object, a loathsome figure that the war has ousted and driven out from the normal rational world. His frail body with hollow sockets

draws attention to the fragility of law and all social systems of the world. His fragile physical condition represents misery and abjection.

In another play titled *Innocence* (2011), Bond takes another taboo object to portray a world, riddled with machine guns, where death and devastation rule everywhere. In part 2, scene ix of *Innocence*, a deserted world appears before the reader or the spectator. The dead are whining from the ground. The Son (a character in the play), who is looking for his twin brother, encounters a deceased soldier named WAPO₃. While he is conversing with the dead man, the Son draws his attention to a Silhouette Soldier in the Village Woman's room. The Soldier takes an infant from the woman's lap and hangs it. In the stage directions, Bond describes the baby as "A charred child from Hiroshima. It dangles on a string from the end of Silhouette Soldier's weapon" (p. 84). The innocent child's puny body with its charred stumps in place of arms and legs disrupts our normal perception of human world and is a visual reminder of the destructive potential of war and injustice. The scientific excesses of the modern world have reduced human form to a shrunken, burnt child. The playwright visually recreates the memory of the nuclear attack on the twin Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through the dangling corpse of the innocent baby.

The abject corpses of Colin, Fred, and Hoxton, and mad, blind, violent, loathsome, leprous and corpse-like characters of Hatch, Skinner, and Sweden confront humanity with their fragile states much like Kristeva's threatening corpse image and Arya's art work of a urinating woman. They are all abjects: half human half corpses, living on the fringes of civilization. Straying on the uncanny territories, they are the human negatives or impressions on the execution wall of violence. These characters were once a part of the so-called rational human society, but their brutal hanging and shooting by the sane members of that society cast a shadow of doubt on the sanity of people and their "inhuman rationalism" (Smith, 2007; Introduction 2). Between the stage and the audience what is on the stage becomes the "abject and abjection", something that turns the audience away from "defilement, sewage, and muck" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Bond's catalogue of taboo objects, his use of subversive images to Gothic proportions is what makes his plays subversive of conventional religious and ethical values.

Bond portrays these human negatives, outcasts, drifters as the reminders of an irrational, abject humanity in a world misguided by irrationality and injustice. These leprous, emaciated, bulleted, hanging, hacked bodies are stark reminders that everything that remains of humanity is now only abject and abomination. What now remains of the vast body of humanity is disease, poverty, death, tumour,

leprosy, and reduction of the human form into a bundle, a handful of soil in a plastic bag, or mere shreds of charred children and human bodies on the execution wall of war. Violence has irreparably damaged and impaired the inward and outer cover of humanity that guarantees integrity, social contract, and identity.

Building on Kristeva's concept of abject bodies further, Bond introduces the wall as a body, as a paradoxical symbol of execution, marginalization, oppression, and man's irrationality. Building and mending walls in Bond's world is a crime and any offensive act is abjection as it underscores the frail frame of the law (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Bond's walled structures visually exemplify the notion of the abjection like the image of a diseased body the sight of which is revolting to the eye. Like Robert Frost's wall in "Mending Wall," Bond's walls are two-way controversial constructions. They are initially built and then ironically demolished by those who erect them. They are constructed from one side but demolished from both the sides. The symbol of wall appears first in *Lear* (1969), and recurs in *Bingo* (1973), *The Woman* (1977), and again in *Summer* (1982). These walls have existed since the times of the Trojan War as a symbol for injustice, oppression, political persecution and wholesale destruction. Bond uses the symbol of the wall as a site that evokes states of abjection in their association with killing, persecution, injustice, crime, and oppression.

Bond's *Lear* (1969) begins with the shooting of a worker by King Lear who allegedly caused delay in the construction of the wall. He drives people out of his territory, but claims to protect them. The wall keeps the outcasts of the land out by marginalizing and stigmatizing them. The boundary wall thus undermines law and justice as Lear manipulates it to protect and solidify his own regime. The wall clearly demarcates the boundary between the rich and the poor, the elite and the abject or outcasts of the society. It also exemplifies Lear's xenophobia. He later realizes that the wall, in fact, marginalizes people and divides them.

The wall image recurs in another play, *Summer* (1980) that takes place in an anonymous country. It was captured by the Germans during the fighting and witnessed a social revolution afterwards. Three elderly war survivors from the past happen to face each other. Xenia is a member of the ousted ruling class who now lives in London but spends each summer in the house that was once the family home. Marthe is the second survivor of the war times. Formerly a servant in her household, she is the caretaker and part-owner of that house now; the third survivor

is a comic German tourist who had shot hostages in the island prison camp during the war. “The German tourist tells a frozen-faced Xenia of the horrors that took place on the island beach on which they now sunbathe: the sunny cliff once an execution wall, corpses floating in the sea” (Eva Figs, p. 50). The German says, “That was the execution wall,” where they killed innocent victims so that their shreds flew and became imprinted on the wall so much so that the entire place smelled of human fat (*Summer*, p. 381).

From the Kristevan perspective, the wall is the abject as it calls attention to the fragility of human law and all systems that govern this world. It presents violence and war as an abnormality. The abject is manifested in the symbol of the wall, which contains the shreds of people’s bodies persecuted on the spot during the war with their blood, and imprints of other body parts. These bodily parts and fluids on the wall are outside the boundary of what is normal and healthy. With the shreds imprinted on it, this execution wall evokes a revulsion, a reaction from a sane mind much like the life-sized waxen female statue that evokes revulsion as it makes us realize that we are looking at bodily shreds, waste, and liquid. The abject here produces a nauseating reaction as it threatens to dismantle meaning and questions our moral sensibilities.

As taboo structures like Colin’s dead body, the pig on the nail, Fred’s body hanging on the frame, Hoxton’s swaying body, and the charred bodies of innocent children dangling from the guns, these walls are symbols of persecution, an act of degradation and a shared act of representative humanity. Who has built them? Who demolishes them? Who is looking at them? These are some crucial questions, but instead of providing any finite answers, Bond leaves them open to the audiences and the readers.

A close analysis of Bond’s plays in the foregoing pages shows that Kristeva’s concepts of the abject and abjection provide a useful theoretical position to critically appraise Bond’s employment of crude forms of horrific violence. Edward Bond presents the violence of war and other prevalent social evils of modern society as equally disgusting and despicable as Kristeva’s concept of the abjection, which hinges on inherent human revulsion to corpses, filth, faeces, and other body fluids. Seen in the light of Kristeva’s account of disgust, Bond employs horrific forms of violence at the same level as she treats corpse, filth, waste, and vomit. Kristeva’s view of abjection and Bond’s perspective on violence, war, crime and injustice may be used synonymously as both abjection and violence are “immoral, sinister,

scheming, and shady” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Violence is a crime against humanity and any crime, Kristeva argues, is abject as it defies law.

References

- Bloom, C. (2010). *Gothic histories: The taste for terror, 1764 to the present*. Continuum International.
- Bond, E. (1978). *Passion*. Edward Bond: plays 2. Methuen Drama.
- Bond, E. (1978). *The sea*. Edward Bond: plays 2. Methuen Drama.
- Bond, E. (1980). *Summer*. Edward Bond: plays 4. Methuen Drama.
- Bond, E. (2003). *The crime of the twenty-first century*. Edward Bond: plays 7. Methuen Drama.
- Bond, E. (2003). *The swing*. Edward Bond: plays 7. Methuen Drama.
- Bond, E. (2011). *Innocence*. Edward Bond: plays 9. Methuen Drama.
- Botting, F. (1996). *Gothic*. Routledge.
- Figs, E. (1982). Time literary supplement, 5 Feb, Bond on file. pp. 49-51.
- Hirst, D. L. (1985). *Macmillan modern dramatists: Edward Bond*. Macmillan Publishers.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror*, trans. By Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP.
- Morris, P. (2003). *Realism*. Routledge.
- Arya, R. (2014). *Abjection and representation: An exploration of abjection in the visual arts, film and literature*. Palgrave.
- Smith, A. (2007). *Gothic literature*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Taylor, J. (1971). *British dramatists: The new arrivals newer than new. Plays and players*. Palgrave.

Abjection and Taboo

Roberts, P. (1985). *Writers on file: Bond on file*. In Trussler, Simon (Ed). (pp. 113-114) Methuen London Ltd.