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## In Search of Self (Mother) and The Other (Unborn/Dead Infant) in The Holocaust of War-A Study of Edward Bond's War Plays in Light of Levinasian Ethics

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### Abstract

In this paper I have tried to trace a significant connection between Edward Bond and Emmanuel Levinas in *The War Plays*, a trilogy written by Bond in the year 1985, through the ethical encounter of the self or the mother and the other or the dead/unborn child. Bond is revolutionary in his attempt to discover and nourish the helpless other in the face of Nazi genocide as a medium of generating ethical acts of justice or humanity in a world of unbearable suffering and death. Along with "Introduction" and "Conclusion", this paper has been divided into three sections namely, "From Responsibility to Trauma: Rethinking the Human Condition in Bond's War Trilogy," "Face-to-face encounter between the Self and the Other," and "Examining the 'radical innocence' of Bond from the perspective of the 'senseless kindness' of Levinas." This article attempts to hint at the idea that Bond's trilogy is essentially a response to the Nazi atrocities from the perspective of humanitarian justice. The section succeeding "Introduction" deals with the sense of guilt and shock that the self undergoes after witnessing the painful death of the other and faces the trauma of becoming 'always-already responsible' to the other even before being fully aware of the existence of the other. The section titled "Face-to-face encounter between the Self and the Other" seeks to explore the reason behind Bond's depiction of non-human images to indicate the face of the dead child which despite being absent continues to govern the whole existence of the self. The section prior to "Conclusion" deals with the question of justice in the ethical encounter between the mother and her dead child in the world of Nazi violence by bringing to the fore the importance of irrational, ethical acts to defy the despotic regime with the compassionate touch of humanity.

### Keywords:

Dead child, Emmanuel Levinas, ethical encounter, humanity, mother.

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## Savaş'ta Kendini (Anne) ve Öteki'ni (Doğmamış/Ölmüş Bebek) Arayışında: Levinas'ın Etik Anlayışı Işığında Edward Bond'un Savaş Oyunları Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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### Özet

Bu makalede, Edward Bond'un 1985 yılında yazdığı üçleme *The War Plays*'de, benlik ya da anne ile öteki ya da ölü/doğmamış çocuk arasındaki etik karşılaşma aracılığıyla Bond ile Emmanuel Levinas arasında önemli bir bağlantı kurmaya çalıştım. Bond, dayanılmaz acı ve ölümle dolu bir dünyada etik adalet veya insanlık eylemleri üretmenin bir aracı olarak Nazi soykırımı karşısında çaresiz olan ötekiyi keşfetme ve besleme girişiminde devrimci bir yaklaşım sergilemektedir. Bu makale, "Giriş" ve "Sonuç" bölümlerinin yanı sıra, "Sorumluluktan Travmaya: Bond'un Savaş Üçlemesinde İnsanlık Durumunu Yeniden Düşünmek", "Benlik ve Öteki Arasındaki Yüz Yüze Karşılaşma" ve "Levinas'ın 'Anlamsız İyilik' Perspektifinden Bond'un 'Radikal Masumiyetini' İncelemek" olmak üzere üç bölüme ayrılmıştır. Bu makale, Bond'un üçlemesinin esasen insani adalet perspektifinden zulme bir yanıt olduğu fikrini ima etmeye çalışmaktadır. "Giriş" bölümünün ardından gelen bölüm, benliğin diğerinin acı verici ölümüne tanık olduktan sonra yaşadığı suçluluk ve şok duygusunu ele almakta ve benliğin, diğerinin varlığının tam olarak farkında bile olmadan, diğerine karşı "her zaman zaten sorumlu" olma travmasıyla yüzleşmesini incelemektedir. "Benlik ve Öteki Arasındaki Yüz Yüze Karşılaşma" başlıklı bölüm, Bond'un, yok olmasına rağmen benliğin tüm varlığını yönetmeye devam eden ölü çocuğun yüzünü göstermek için insan dışı imgeler kullanmasının ardındaki nedeni araştırmaya çalışmaktadır. "Sonuç" bölümünden önceki bölüm, Nazi şiddetinin hüküm sürdüğü dünyada anne ile ölen çocuğu arasındaki etik karşılaşmada adalet meselesini ele almakta ve despotik rejime karşı insanlığın şefkatli dokunuşuyla karşı koymak için irrasyonel, etik eylemlerin önemini ön plana çıkarmaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Ölü çocuk, Emmanuel Levinas, ahlaki yüzleşme, insanlık, anne.

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## Introduction

Edward Bond is an iconoclastic anti-establishment figure who appears in the British theatrical scene at a very crucial juncture in the 1990s. His seminal trilogy entitled *The War Plays* encompassing *The Red, Black and Ignorant*, *The Tin Can People* and *Great Peace*, first published in 1985 attempts to fathom the core of the human self in the face of intolerable pain and suffering brought by the terrible World Wars. Bond delves deep into the ungraspable recesses of that self which has been disoriented, overwhelmed and completely unsettled by the advent of what Levinas calls the helpless and destitute ‘other’. Having grown up witnessing the horrible atrocities committed against helpless people by the Nazi government, Bond depicts characters who have been rendered nameless in a post-Auschwitz world that is bereft of the last drop of humanity. These non-entities are inexplicably plunged into the dark abyss of chaos and dementia. Bond’s characters subsist on the margins of extreme infirmity and hunger which testify that cruelty has always been the most effective weapon of the authorities because “killing made life easier for everyone, it was an aid to discipline.” (Bond 248). In such a degenerated wasteland of the holocaust of war, the existence of the self can only be paradoxically ascertained by the ‘other’, the mystery or riddle that is forgotten or veiled by the norms of decency in quotidian life. It is the ‘other’ which radically calls the ‘I’ or the self into question. For instance, in all the three plays of the trilogy, Bond explores the various dimensions of maternal affection where the helpless child, either unborn or killed brutally by the soldiers, appears as the ‘other’ to the grieving mother and questions the very subjectivity of the mother while confirming it. As the mother or the self takes responsibility for the child/other, the former attains a certain sense of freedom and at the same time the self’s identity as a maternal figure becomes questionable because the other is mostly invisible and beyond any comprehension or interpretation and yet an alterity which is always present. The very notion of subjectivity of the self is Bond’s response to the question of ethics and justice in the face of the nightmarish aftermath of war. It seems that Edward Bond’s War Trilogy seems to create a dialogic association with Emmanuel Levinas for whom the idea of responsibility, specifically the maternal nurture and care for the destitute ‘other’ is the only source of alternative humanity in the face of Nazi domination. The seminal book titled *The Plays of Edward Bond* notes that “Bond’s plays are about the strengths, real and potential of individuals in social situations. His politics insist that despite the compromises and failures, a commitment to human freedom must not be lost, that change is possible, that human beings can take control of their lives, that they are, finally rational.” (Coult 53).

A few researchers have tried to trace the influence of Levinasian ethics in the later works of Bond although not much has been written about the presence of the author’s subjective ideas of humanity and ethical relation that can exist between the self and the other in *The War Plays*. In their

article “Being Human: Edward Bond’s Theories of Drama”, David Allen and Agata Handley opine that in the later plays of Bond there is “an innate humanness, a need to care for the Other, and make the world a “home” for all” (Allen, Handley). In the thesis “The Later Edward Bond : Subjectivity, Dramaturgy and Performance, Chien Cheng Chen claims that “Bond’s post-Auschwitz dramaturgy does not aim to represent any historical event in the Holocaust, but he emphasizes the possible existence of the basic ethical relationality of face-to-face encounter even in the most dehumanizing situation. This dramaturgy preserves the ethical moments in which the identity logic of military authorities meets the non-identity logic of ethical encounters.” (Chen 128). The most interesting aspect of Bond’s war trilogy lies in the enigmatic nature of the meeting between the mother and her dead infant which remains perennially absent and yet commands, negates, fulfils the self and seeks nourishment from the same. The dead other is incomprehensible and irreducible to a definitive or conclusive interpretation. In the first part of the trilogy, that is, *The Red, Black and Ignorant*, the child that receives a very painful death in its mother’s womb due to a nuclear bomb blast and doomed to remain perpetually absent, returns in the land of degeneration to live the life he could never live in the form of a Monster, the intriguing other that accords a certain sense of identity or an identifiable voice to his mother. The Monster occupies the mysterious and invisible space ‘between birth and death’ (Bond 1) and ironically claims: “No exiled hero could return to a land more welcoming.” (Bond 1). Bond’s depiction of such a Monster as one of the characters of his play is the helpless other who inspires the self or the Mother to try to articulate, through broken narratives, her concern for the child that was suffocated to death in her womb: “That morning the child had moved in my womb as if it wanted to run away from the world/ Through the womb’s wall it had felt the world’s fear.” (Bond 3).

Hence, from the very beginning of the trilogy, Bond establishes an undeniable correspondence with Levinas who claims in his seminal study *Time and the Other*: “The relationship with the Other is the absence of the Other; not absence pure and simple, not the absence in a horizon of the future, an absence that is time. This is the horizon where a personal life can be constituted in the heart of the transcendent event,...the victory over death.” (Levinas 90). Such a perception of ethics which Bond’s trilogy attempts to project can shatter the binary of the centre and the periphery because Bond’s nameless characters are fluid or identifiably inseparable and yet they occupy the entire dramatic space. Whether it be the plight of the Monster in *Red, Black and Ignorant*, or the inhuman murder of the infant brother by the Son who happens to be a Soldier blindly following the unjust orders of his superiors in *Great Peace*, or the brutal killing of an unknown, nameless man by his fellow-beings who suspect him of carrying an infectious disease in *The Tin Can People*, the ideas of suffering and death are incessantly present throughout the trilogy as

the only glaring reality in the post-war epoch.

Bond depicts the disillusionment of his characters with the aid of an honest or unpretentious juxtaposition of graphic theatrical images of extreme violence and uses desultory, broken dialogues to portray the inhuman conditions to which man is subjected as he struggles to survive amidst the acute crisis created by the war. Bond rejects the commercial culture of West End British Theatre that was preoccupied with light-hearted sentimental pieces for the entertainment of the soldiers. The English stage dismissed with indifference Bond's war trilogy that threatened to dismantle the pre-existing theatrical conventions. Bond severed himself from the English stage only to find a significant place in the French theatre. *The War Plays* received a positive response from the audience when it was staged as *Pieces de guerre*<sup>1</sup> in Odeon Theatre de l'Europe in 1995.

Quite vocal in his anti-structural stance, Bond attempts to bring to the fore the inability of any theoretical or philosophical discourse to delve deep into the unfathomable realms of human suffering and pain when violence has become the norm of the day. The war trilogy radically challenges all shrewd attempts by various edifices of dictatorial structures to drift the attention of the audience away from the unnecessary carnage caused due to the World Wars. Through the depiction of some insignificant, unknown characters in *The War Plays*, Bond tries to explore the primal self of man that exists untainted by the restrictive bounds of ideological culture. Such an inner core of human self, Levinas believes, is always influenced by the responsibility of the other. Trudging along the ruined landscapes of war, Bond's characters are like strangers who transcend the boundaries of death because they continue to evoke the responsibility of the self even after they have ceased to exist. Levinas claims: "There is in the Other a meaning and an obligation that oblige me beyond my death!" (Levinas 115).

### **From Responsibility to Trauma: Rethinking The Human Condition in Bond's War Trilogy**

"We speak of our children before they are born  
 Carry them before we can hold them  
 Fold their clothes and lay their bed before they can wake  
 Sew and harvest and market their food before they can eat  
 For them we build streets before they can walk  
 And guard them from sickness before they can draw breath." (Bond 1).

The play *Red Black and Ignorant* (1985) begins with the assertion of the existence of the other that demands protection from the self. The child or the other cannot be neglected at any cost particularly in the epoch of Nazism when children are treated as disposable commodities as the

<sup>1</sup> "Pieces de guerre" translated as Pieces of War.

four corners of the world have been engulfed by terrible famines. Bond is revolutionary in his exploration of the presence of the other without which social existence remains devoid of any ethical foundation. However, it must also be noted that while delineating a predominant presence of the child as the other, Bond does not hint at any kind of master-slave relationship between the self and the other. The connection is one of mutual compassion and interestingly, the desire of the self to nourish and protect the other comes into being even before the latter makes itself accessible. While tracing the ungraspable nature of the other in his book entitled *On Thinking of the Other* published in 1998, Levinas opines that the self begins to understand the inexplicable incomprehensibility of the other as the former starts addressing the latter. Levinas believes: “Our relation with him certainly consists in wanting to understand him, but this relation exceeds the confines of understanding. Not only because, besides curiosity, knowledge of the other also demands sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation, but also because, in our relation to the other, the latter does not affect us by means of a concept. The other is a being and counts as such.” (Levinas 5).

At the very beginning of his trilogy, Bond brings to life the character of a child who died in the womb of the mother who now speaks about its un-lived life and this very act of speaking and being spoken with becomes an indispensable part of the human self because speech confirms that the existence of the other has already been taken into account. The incoherent narrative that Bond uses in his plays is not subordinate to the consciousness of the self or that of the other but serves as a catalyst facilitating the realization of the radical possibilities of the existence of ethical dimensions in the relationship that the mother shares with her child. For Bond, it is essential to animate the Mother with the aid of the Monster as the latter goes on to narrate scenes from the life he wished for but could never live. The horror associated with the human condition after the war can be deciphered from the way the Mother speaks about her unborn baby. The Mother or the self who gives recognition to the other or the unborn infant seems to be steeped in a traumatic trance for the sudden and inhuman death of the child she was obliged to but could never save: “I was so intent I did not hear the explosions and passed into death without knowing/ My body’s spasm crushed the child/ My flesh burst open and threw him into the furnace of my burning house.” (Bond 4).

The character of the Mother shows that sympathy and responsibility of a mother for her child is such that it has the potential to defy any explanation or categorisation. The Mother’s responsibility is perhaps the only ray of humanity that can come forward to nurture the life of the infant or the other which is as beautiful and harmless as a dewdrop. The unborn infant turns to a Monster because he is enraged by those barren ideologies that cripple the society with false

promises of equality and peace. The desire of the unborn child to live a life of freedom is charred by the despotic edifice of Nazi culture with its pretentious show of charity. In the post war era human condition is degenerated to the extent that helpless children are cruelly sold like commodities in markets where “they suffer as much as a living animal sealed in a can on a supermarket shelf.” (Bond 17).

In such inhuman circumstances the responsibility of the self for the other gets imbued with a sense of trauma. Bond’s trilogy claims that the human self is left with nothing but the miserable death of the other so that there has emerged an inevitable urgency to look at the human condition and speak for the human life from an ethical perspective. Bond’s nameless characters roam like strangers in the land of devastation where the human self is crippled by a sense of guilt that stems from witnessing the death of the other like passive puppets. In the second part of the trilogy, that is, *The Tin Can People* (1985), Bond depicts some humiliated victims of war who meet and interact with one another and are suffering from a sense of separation. The guilt-ridden self of the Third Woman is unable to either accept or justify her responsibility for her dead parents: “My parents talk to me in my sleep: they don’t know they’re dead: I feel guilty as if I’m keeping the secret from them.” (Bond 57). As the quandary of the Third Woman augments she seems to reach a point where she can no longer find any medium to ensure some sense of humane justice to her deceased parents. Is it really plausible to find any ground for ethical treatment of the innocent victims of war? Perhaps Bond hints at the idea that those searching for the last remaining traces of humanity in a war ridden society often appear to be insane figures inhabiting a surreal world or a dreamscape. The nameless entities in the play are in constant struggle with the war that has encroached upon their private existence. The battlefield spreads its gore amongst men totally crushed under the feet of an unjust socio-political order. In such a situation human psyche is strangely adorned with the desire to respond to an alterity, to the other who gropes for some long-forgotten touch of compassion, humanity and justice. In this context, the thesis titled “The Later Edward Bond: Subjectivity, Dramaturgy, and Performance” by Chien Cheng Chen attempts to relate Edward Bond with Emmanuel Levinas by proclaiming that the very response of the self to the other disrupts the rationale of some predominating ideologies that treat human beings as mere subjects that are meant to be slaughtered in the battlefield. The author writes, “Suspicious of artworks that are constructed as subject-object correlations, and skeptical of artworks that entice total participation of or enjoyment, Levinas advocates artworks that can both disrupt subject-object rationality and resist producing pleasure. In Levinasian aesthetic experience, what matters is the ethical encounter with the alterity of the face revealed in diachrony. Moreover, this encounter destabilizes the self-identical subjectivity of the receiver and further requires the receiver to

respond.” (Chen 60).

The way Bond depicts the relation between the mother and her infant or between the parents and their children negates the possibility of any existence of an independent entity after the war. Every word that the self utters becomes a medium through which the other approaches the existence of the self. Although the connection between the two is one of command as well as plea, the self, in the holocaust of war, is not able to erase the indelible wound created by the other's death as a result of which the self remains passive and unprepared to accept the other. Bond perhaps tries to suggest that a certain sense of alienation that the self suffers from being apparently separated from the other is questionable. That is so because the peripheral self, which is a victim of violence, never had any well-defined identity in the first place and hence there's no question of losing it. The plight of the self suffering from a sense of accusation echoes Levinas' claim in *Otherwise than Being* (1974) that the “traumatic hold of the other on the same,...does not give the same time to await the other.” (Levinas 141).

The Levinasian concept of traumatic responsibility can also be deciphered in the concluding section of the *Great Peace*(1985). Just like the Mother in the first part of the trilogy feels responsible for and is at the same time is traumatised to recall the death of the infant in her womb which determines her whole being, the character called Woman in the *Great Peace* is equally traumatised and shocked to witness the brutal murder of her baby at the hands of her own son who is a part of the army. Initially the Woman who is happy and contented to take care of the baby now comes under the grip of an indescribable horror when her son kills his own brother so much so that she eventually loses her sanity. In a state of dementia, the self of the Woman encumbered by the death of the other wanders for seventeen years in the wilderness trying to replace her dead child with a bundle of rags. The intricate connection between the self and the other becomes evident as the Woman cries out to the bundle in agony: “I carried you for years!” (Bond 194). When a soldier dismisses the other as a bundle of rags, the Woman vehemently protests which shows that the existence of the self, no matter how traumatised or accused it might feel, is inseparable from the other: “I know that's what it looks like-a bundle of rags like its mother!” (Bond 181). By calling the bundle her child the Woman calls upon it. As long as the bundle is with the Woman she remains alive and the moment she lets go of it, her life succumbs to death. Bond writes: “She lets go of the bundle. Without looking back she clenches her fists and walks a few more steps. She stops. She drops dead.” (Bond 243). The death of the Woman resembles Levinas' idea that the self won't let the other die alone but rather desires to die along with the other. “What compels is the disturbing imagery and real menace involved in the experience—when a character the audience understands, or a clearly recognizable situation, is



viewed “on the brink” of destruction or increasingly out of control in a moment etched in memory with powerful stage imagery.” (Spencer 8).

### Face To Face Encounter Between the Self and The Other

Why does Bond choose to depict violent images of the dead infant in the form of rags, torn newspapers or decayed skulls and what is the compelling force that binds the self of the mother to the ruined remains of the child? Bond’s non-human images all throughout his trilogy symbolize with glaring truthfulness the irredeemable destitution and helplessness of an infant in the face of unimaginable violence. Man is completely dehumanized by Nazi domination and has become too powerless to comfort or shelter human life from the clutches of brutal murders. Bond’s characters are traversing a landscape where infants are stuffed in dustbins to protect countries from famine. The inhuman images of death arouse the conscience of the self and overwhelms it with an infinite urge to ethically respond to the death of the other. In the first part of the trilogy things come to such a pass that the Monster and his Wife decide to sell their baby who is “made of newspaper” (Bond 19) and the Buyer “reads from the print on its face.” (Bond 19). What can such distorted face imply?

Perhaps Bond tries to suggest that the newspaper does not represent the face of a child visually or in the literal sense of the term. It rather hints at the innermost being of the infant mutilated by intolerable pain and torture. For Bond, to ignore or overlook the humanitarian responsibilities that arise from the degenerated face of the baby is the root of violence. Unbounded cruelty finds its latent abode in that self which allows itself to be driven like some machine by the violent system and refuses to look at the pleading face of the other. That is why the apparently insignificant and nameless characters tending to the needs of the other occupy a central space in Bond’s trilogy and not the so-called powerful soldiers who turn their faces away from the helpless infants. In the *Tin Can People* the miserable characters roaming in search of food are devastated to see a “baby’s skull sticking out of the ground” (Bond 53) and the Second Man laments: “We knew the deepest humiliation possible to us: to be with the dying and not able to help or comfort them.” (Bond 56).

The face of the dead baby seems to share a dialogue with the epiphanic face of the other that Levinas speaks about in many of his works. The Levinasian face is revolutionary because amidst the crisis of war it can become a powerful site of ethical encounter by radically dissuading the onlooker from committing unbridled cruelty and cause unnecessary murders. The Wife with her torn newspapers or the Woman with her bundle of rags become perennially engaged in an obligation of infinite compassion for the dead other. Such an engagement is the face-to face ethical

encounter that Levinas writes about in his seminal studies. In its extreme ‘defenselessness’ the face commands: ”Thou shalt not kill” (Levinas 104) which ethically bounds with empathy the lifelong responsibility of the self. In *Alterity and Transcendence*, Levinas claims that “the nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me-and this is its very nudity.” (Levinas 74-75).

It is interesting to note that Bond does not associate the death of the infants with mourning or emotional excess. For Bond suffering or death is the origin of ethical thinking and it is the dead other which accords a certain sense of identity or freedom to the self. Owing to the other’s encounter with the self, the latter can choose to act ethically which is a radical means to defy the violent norms of Nazi regime with the compassionate touch of humanity. This is evident in the concluding section of the *Great Peace* when the Woman refuses to part with her bundle and accompany the Man who has come to rescue her from the wilderness and take her to a safe place of residence. The Woman feels that amidst the meaningless atrocities of war, it is her responsibility for the dead other that can impart some sort of meaning to her existence. The Woman cannot live peacefully in a safe haven while the helpless infants become victims of murder. She says to the Man: “This may be my last winter-I’ll choose’ow I live it.” (Bond 241).

The face of the other cannot be reduced to the domain of rational interpretation. It is because of the defiant face challenging all notion of visibility and going beyond the borders of physical attributes that the other continues to exist even after death. The Woman’s bundle of rags starts crying like a baby who is alive thereby questioning the boundaries that separate life from death. The bundle speaks as the Woman saves it from the army and she is overwhelmed with tears of joy: “Don’t cry/ I could’ve spoken a long time ago/ But then if I did you’d miss my voice/ So I didn’t speak.” (Bond 193). In its defiance of the concrete form of a physical being, Bond’s face shares the qualities of Levinasian transcendence that Michael L. Morgan writes about in *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas* (2011): “The primordial or originary encounter with the other person presents us with a face that means something other than and more than how the other person looks; so the height of the face presents us with a status of God as King or as Father.” (Levinas 146).

Bond’s depiction of the other’s face suggests that the self-other encounter forms an integral part of all social interaction. Perhaps the idea of the distorted and dehumanized face of the other occurred to Bond after coming across the horribly disfigured faces of many soldiers who participated in the Nazi atrocity. They had to go through multiple surgeries and their faces became unrecognizable which would cause psychological distress while interacting with people or looking at the mirror. Amidst such a culture of violence and corruption, every act of humanity is bound to

get tainted with injustice. Then what can be the nature of ethics or ethical acts that Bond is hinting at to bring humanitarian justice to the victims of war?

### **Examining Bond's Radical Innocence from the Perspective of Levinas' Senseless Kindness**

Bond is well aware of the fact that during the war people can at least hope for peace but one does not have anything to look forward to in a landscape of infernal catastrophe after the war. There is an ever-augmenting urgency for justice as every public institution, ideology and culture entrap people in a vicious cycle of violence and injustice. The state manipulates the war victims in a subtle way by training them to think and act in certain ways so that everyone becomes a subject, either politicised like the army, police, or de-politicised like women, children and old people. In such a scenario of corruption, Bond's characters have a vague desire to reach out to the victims but inevitably every act of compassion gets imbibed with a latent cruelty. Bond opines that unjustifiable acts can only be understood from the perspective of 'radical innocence' (Bond 251). It is a condition when the self learns to interpret the world according to the arbitrary meanings imposed by the authoritarian regimes: "We are born radically innocent, and neither animal nor human; we create our humaneness as our minds begin to think our instincts. As we grow our radical innocence becomes embroiled in the social contradictions which turn our cities into armed camps in peace and ruins in war." (Bond 251).

From the very moment of its birth, the self cannot escape being radically innocent and it is torn asunder the misleading compulsion to perpetrate Nazi discipline as well as by the ethical need to care for or become responsible for the other. Bond opines that in the post war society there can be no such act of pure kindness or pure ethical goodness. In the face of unbearable violence there can only be irrational and disintegrated acts of compassion and that alone can culminate into a revolutionary flouting of the despotic system and provide justice to the other. Unreasonable acts of kindness challenge the conventional binaries of good and evil, morality and immorality. The firebombs of violence cannot set ablaze the radical destitution of the other which continues to arouse the compassion of the self. In the *Red Black and Ignorant*, the Son of the Monster is enrolled in the army and has to kill somebody as per the orders of the higher authorities. The Son initially decides to kill the senile old neighbour, too helpless and weak to protect himself, but then the Son changes his mind and kills his own father. "Why did he kill his father and not the stranger?" (Bond 38). The justification of the act lies in the ethical foundation of the helpless nudity of the other which never allows the self to kill. The Monster says: "My son learned it was better to kill what he loved/ Than that one creature who is sick or lame or old or poor or a stranger should sit and stare at an empty world and find no reason why it should suffer." (Bond 38).

While discussing the influence of one of the books of Grossman on Levinas, Morgan opines that Levinas never believed in transforming the world of the holocaust through change of regimes but wholeheartedly relied upon senseless acts of goodness which lay outside the system of totalitarianism, that is, those rare acts of goodness which can never be annihilated by the dictatorial regime. Morgan claims that Levinasian ethics is based on such acts because of their “commitment to goodness or kindness outside of systems, institutions, ideologies, something about how one acts toward the other person that is beyond theory, rules, and explanation and that is indestructible and permanent, albeit unique and particular.” (Morgan 24). If the inhuman world of Nazism can give rise to radical innocence, it can also lead to unexpected and surprising acts of compassion and that is where Bond’s path coincides with that of Levinas. Amidst irredeemable despair humane or ethical actions are possible. Even at the cost of sacrificing something precious and valuable, the self continues to remain compassionately indebted to or responsible for the other. This is evident when the Second Man in *The Tin Can People* makes an ethical decision of killing himself rather than brutally murdering the helpless First Man who is supposedly carrying an infectious disease: “I’ll sacrifice myself for the community.” (Bond 78). Similarly, the Son in the *Great Peace* is unable to kill the neighbour’s baby and ends up killing his own brother perhaps out of a certain sense of strange kindness which owing to the sense of fear generated by the Nazi culture of injustice and corruption, is steeped in violence or cruelty.

Bond substantiates the plausibility of such irrational or undefinable acts of kindness by giving examples from the ‘Palermo Improvisation’ (Bond 247) included in his *Commentary on The War Plays*. Bond asks a group of students at Palermo University to perform the role of a soldier who has been ordered to kill a baby from his street. Quite spontaneously the students always perform the soldier killing his mother’s baby instead of his neighbour’s. Bond also refers to the 1942 prisoner-of war camp in Russia where the Commandant asks the guards to shoot the prisoners to instill a sense of fear and obedience in the army. One day a prisoner who happened to be the Communist brother of the guard was brought to the war camp and the guard refused to shoot him which shows that it is “easier to kill someone at a distance than when you are face to face with them.” (Bond 248). Bond believes that these acts do take place in everyday reality and are absolutely unpretentious in their ethical approach to save the life of the other from Nazi genocide. Levinas also believes that strange, incomprehensible ethical acts can exist amidst inhumanity by referring to an incident where a woman who hates Germans is rescued from war camps where a German officer is suffocated while rescuing dead bodies and quite unexpectedly the woman who loathes the Germans and is sadistically enjoying the misery of the officer walks up to him and offers him the last piece of bread that she has. Thus, “Levinas agrees that whatever this kindness or

goodness is, it occurs in everyday life. It is what the human is all about; it is rare, in one sense, and yet it is fundamental and primary to human life in some sense or other.” (Morgan 24). In *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*”, Morgan very appropriately describes the mode of thought that was embedded in such apparently irrational acts of kindness. I believe that Morgan’s rendition of the episode reiterates the necessity to bring together Levinas and Bond in their urge to find a humane ground of ethical response in the holocaust of war. He writes, “Levinas extracts from this episode an act of utterly senseless goodness. Is it an act of generosity?... Or was it more simply a way to avoid killing the officer, a virtually automatic way of preventing herself from doing what she both wanted to do but also could not bring herself to do? ...Perhaps, for all its complexity, the episode has at its core the meaning Levinas found in it: there was an act of goodness, and it was wholly senseless and isolated. It was an act of goodness because it gave life to the officer...an act of grace, of giving, of taking responsibility for the other person’s need and life. And it was rare, isolated in an inhumane world filled with suffering and misery” (Morgan 22).

### Conclusion

“An tell me why I suffered an ‘oo its for, an why we live on this earth an are buried in it?” (Bond 238). Bond is very vocal in his anti-authority stance in a degenerated landscape where technological boom has sounded the death knell for humanity or human subjectivity. His war trilogy questions the rudimentary organisation of the modern society which compels the human self to reside in the margins of self-doubt. Like Levinas, who has always been a keen and empathetic observer of human violence, Bond dispenses with historical narratives which end up disrespecting and deforming the victims of death camps in an attempt to represent the unrepresentable ordeal of man. When violence becomes the norm of the day, the dramatist can only think of a radical theatre which can provide an ethical rendition to the human condition in the holocaust of war.

Like Levinas, Bond vehemently rejects the culturally approved moral behaviour in the name of ethics. He decides to confront the dehumanising process of ‘cultural socialisation’ that strives to shape human psychology and dictate the human instincts of hunger, pain and suffering from the perspective of ideological dictatorship. In his *Commentary on The War Plays* Bond claims that “no one willingly gives up the name of human. It takes a great deal of culture to make us beasts.” (Bond 249). The playwright further claims, “Our psychology is formed socially. Under the human instinct of hunger, forming and informing it are psychological concepts which are ultimately derived from social experience and social teaching...That is why it takes a great deal of culture to turn people into killers-whether they kill in uniforms, suits or rags” (Bond 251). Amidst the agony and crisis of the death camps, the maternal figure of Bond’s trilogy comes across as a

disruptive force that threatens to shatter to pieces the throne of Nazi genocide. The book titled *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond* makes a seminal assertion about the importance of Bond's works that "provide narrative contexts that call for social change, situations which demand some moral action from the characters, and by extension, the audience as well. But none of Bond's characters are automatically endowed with an enlightened perspective: they come to it through the concrete social interactions recorded in the plays." (Spencer 8).

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