

Children or Vampires: The Parasitic Drainage of Parenthood in Edward Bond's *The Testament of This Day*, *The Angry Roads* and *The Hungry Bowl*

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Abstract

Parents children relationship has acquired new dynamics in contemporary world. The draining of parental faculties by children has received considerable attention in contemporary times. The research addresses the problem of parents being driven to extreme measures of self-torture and self-destruction in sustaining their children who grow at the emotional and financial expense of their parents. This raises the question of whether to categorize children as badgering human beings or modern vampires that are draining their parents. The badgering attitude of children depicts how parents are alienated by the children who divest them of their role as human beings and later abandon them. The current research paper endeavours to explore the siphoning relationship of children with their parents and how the paradoxical relationship saps the lifeblood of the parents. Judith Orloff's theory of energy vampires will be used as a theoretical pulpit to explore this paradoxical dilemma in the selected plays of Edward Bond. The study employs qualitative research design as it uses close textual analysis to examine the parental affiliations. The study's major findings reveal that Bond highlights the parasitical relationship of parents and children in a capitalist society where filial affection is clouded by monetary considerations and where parents lose their faculties in sustaining their children.

Keywords: Vampires, children, parental, Edward Bond, capitalist, paradoxical

Introduction

Edward Bond, a British playwright who has authored about fifty plays is considered one of the most influential, prolific and radical dramatists of the living times. The nature of brutality in his plays, along with the radicalism of his views about modern theatre and society, and his beliefs on theatre, have

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been the centre of much critical debate. Klein in her paper entitled “Edward Bond's Use of Sociolects” comments that Bond’s plays irritate the audience due to obvious language exaggeration, yet the author employs these tactics to draw the audience's attention to the dichotomy of the truths presented in his social criticism. Klein further develops on how he allows the audience to build their own reasonable and discerning perception of the scenario portrayed in his plays (95). She reflects upon his work to be tending to build a ‘negative anthropology’ through debate, dramatic occurrences, and the language spoken by various characters, with an emphasis on the deformities of the human beings generated by an illogical society. To convey his message, Bond has carefully sought appropriate forms of speech for each circumstance portrayed in his plays to emphasize the character's participation in the action.

Bond touches on all contemporary issues with great seriousness and force, and the powerful metaphors of abnormality, irrationality, and social injustice in his dramatic world constantly illuminate the “situations of injustice” (Bond 13). Bond's mutual connection is built on aggressiveness, egotism, arrogance, and sex. In many of his plays, Bond sought to show the qualities of an industrialized human being based solely on buyer behaviour, which is completely dehumanizing and creates circumstances of friction that finally lead to violence (97). In terms of language, his plays show something of the need to unleash this energy, which is seldom used in daily routine; it is an energy that, in Bond's opinion, may easily erupt into violence; it serves as a mirror of the social reality of the surroundings (97). Finally Klein ends on her critical note, appreciating his linguistic ability and musical ear; depending on the scenario, there is a continuous rhythm in his plays that transmits either the incommunicative environment or aggression, which can be vividly observed in *The Testament of This Day*, *The Angry Roads* and *The Hungry Bowl* selected from his tenth collection of plays.

This portrayal of violence points in the direction of the child and parent relationship. The current paper endeavors to discuss this violence in terms of the vampiric drainage of life energy of the parents by their children through interaction or upbringing. Judith Orloff’s Energy Vampire Theory will be used as a theoretical framework to address the parasitic nature of such consumption.

An energy vampire is someone who feeds on other people's emotional or mental energy. Individuals that show energy vampire traits often lack empathy, compassion, and/or emotional development (Orloff 82). Energy vampires are addicted to feeding on the vitality of others in an attempt to alleviate their own inner pain caused by sorrow or uncertainty. A friend, family member, coworker, acquaintance, child, son or daughter, or even a love partner might be an energy vampire. If a person is extremely empathetic and

caring, he or she may purposefully attract energy vampires into their lives. Many experience persistent weariness, depression, anxiety, irritability, or anger as a result of frequent interaction with an energy vampire. Energy vampires can be classified into Martyr, Narcissist, Dominator, Melodramatic, Judgmental and Innocent categories of energy vampirism as discussed by Aletheia Luna in her article, "6 Types of Energy Vampires That Emotionally Exhaust You" which is very metonymical to what Judith Orloff has to say about the subject. As a psychospiritual writer, Luna's writings address spiritual awakening and deliverance of an individual from the dark chasms of his/her psyche. Her enthusiasm was initiated as a result of her claustrophobic disorientation with religion as a Christian, at a tender age. Despite having a different approach to her pursuit, she happens to share a mutual interest in addressing the dilemma of psychological drainage in metonymic variance with Dr. Orloff who acquires her insight about it by her vast experience in empirical practice of the dynamics of human behaviour as a clinical psychiatrist. Talking about the categorizations and the nature of their psyches of parasitic individuals (Loner Wolf), she moves from the delusion of self-pity to other classifications in parallel with Orloff's perspective

Victims/Martyrs believe they are at the mercy of the world and suffer most as a result of others' acts. They continually accuse, manipulate, and emotionally blackmail their victims rather than accepting responsibility for their own lives. Orloff in her work dedicated to the survival of empaths, describes them as observing life with "the world is against me" attitude" (Orloff 89). She explains further how irresponsible is their stance towards life and how they blame others for their inconveniences and misfortunes (89). Their abnormal conduct is caused by their severely low self-esteem. Victim/Martyr Vampires feel inherently worthless and unacceptable since their troubles most likely come from a lack of affection, acceptance, and approval as children - and they try to address this suffering by underhandedly seeking sympathy/empathy from a person by making him feel guilty.

A Narcissist energy vampire is incapable of displaying empathy or real interest in other people. The underlying ideology of Narcissist Vampires is ME FIRST, YOU SECOND. As a result, Narcissist vampires will want one to always put themselves first, fuel their whims, and do what they say - no matter what. When the fancy strikes them, Narcissist vampires will likewise deceive one with fake charm, but will just as swiftly turn around and attack the person in the back. If a person has a Narcissist Vampire in life, he may feel extremely disempowered as he is crushed beneath the gaze of such people. Dominator Vampires enjoy feeling superior and prefer "dominant" guys or females. Dominator Vampires must intimidate one to compensate for their

deep underlying anxieties of being fragile or wrong and so harmed. Dominator Vampires are frequently boisterous individuals with strong opinions and black-and-white views.

The Melodramatic energy vampire delights in wreaking mayhem. Their need to create constant drama is usually the outcome of a dark, profound void in their lives. Melodramatic vampires like looking for crises because it gives them a reason to feel victimized, an exaggerated sense of self-importance, and an escape from life's actual challenges. Melodramatic vampires also like dramatic outbursts since the negative emotions they feed on are compulsive for them.

The Judgmental energy vampire likes picking on others as they have low self-esteem. Their treatment of others is only a reflection of how they treat themselves. Judgmental vampires like preying on people's weaknesses and bolstering their egos by making them feel small, pathetic, or humiliated.

Energy vampires, like innocent vampires, are not necessarily malevolent. They might also be vulnerable individuals who truly require assistance, such as children or close friends who have come to rely on them excessively. Playing the role of continuous support can drain their energies. As a result, one will have little courage to keep oneself going.

Moving to Bond's selected plays, violence depicted in his plays can be observed from the lens of energy vampirism amongst other perspectives. My discourse is directed to the parasitic drainage of parental faculties, committed by children. This drainage is unintentional in nature yet one cannot turn one's eyes from the notion that such action is vampiric in its practice. It sucks out the life-force of their parents making them hollow within. They become self-destructive, melancholic even agonizing to themselves. Parents are consumed to fight on many fronts in their daily life. This as a part of routine does not badger them so much. However, a parent's heart is sourly charged when it comes to his or her own children. This siphoning of life-force is sometimes due to the narcissistic attitude of the child where he/she is consumed in his own being and does not perceive the dilemma of his/her parents even when the basic mental faculties are present for such understanding, regardless of the age.

Bond's plays among many aspects discuss the nature of violence perpetrated by different elements in society which tend to be social and/or political in nature. In the selected plays for the current paper, violence is discussed on a domestic level in terms of parent-child relationship in which the child is the oppressor. In the tenth collection of Bond's plays I hold three

of them i.e. *The Testament of This Day*, *The Angry Roads* and *The Hungry Bowl* to address the contention stated above.

The first play in the selection is Edward Bond's third original radio drama aired by BBC in 2014. The play centres around "a jobless youth who, struggling in a world imprisoned in technology, catches a train to the edge of reality" (Good Reads 210). However, there is more to it than meets the eye.

In eight acts of the play the scene oscillates between a mansion in the mountainous region and a train compartment. A mother along her son is undertaking a journey across the dense undergrowth to a grand house on the edge of a cliff. The son is reluctant to go further on foot and nags his mother for travelling the mountain in the first place. She instructs him to move further in the dead of the night towards the mansion on his own as his father awaits him. He moves but falls in the ravine. However, his fall is arrested by a ledge which lies down in the path of the ravine and he survives. A man approaches him, disclosing his identity as his father. He further tells him that his mother in instructing him to move forward, meant to kill him and accuses his mother to be responsible for making his life miserable. The boy does not believe him and hears the sound of his mother entering the mansion. He tells what his father had told him but she blames the father in turn. She tells him how he told everyone to leave the house and made her scrub the floors at night for no reason. She believes that the father wants to cut her hands.

During the play where the mansion holds the prime focus, there are short intervals comprising the acts which take place in the train compartment. These acts give an insight into the ravages of capitalism and destituteness of people in the modern times. The dreams of the woman about the boy, in the train gives a foresight regarding the development of the play. In the play, the son undertakes two journeys; one in the train which is the concrete one and the other, across the mountain to the mansion, which is an abstract one. He will find, however, that there is return from neither of the two. The play concludes when the woman remembers the forgotten fragment of the dream from the train compartment which is the depiction of the aforementioned intentions of the father for the mother while living in the mansion. She had dreamt that two hands cut to the wrist are lying on each side of the table. This happens when the son and the woman reach his house through taxi. When they reach there, the house due to reasons unknown, crumbles to the ground, leaving the taxi driver raving for his fare to be paid.

The play progresses on the path of two timelines, one which develops in a house of Georgian times and the other in a train compartment. In the commencement of the play, an abrupt exchange of dialogues takes place

between the mother and the son. The son holds fast to his decision of going back home. His selfish insistence upon the idea gives him the shadow of an energy vampire, narcissistic in nature with no care for his mother concerning the obstacles of the journey she had braved to get to the house and which on the point of arrival at destination is becoming something of an unbearable nuisance:

Mother You will understand when you see it.

Son What will I understand? How far is it...?" (Bond 97).

And further,

Son I am going back

Mother You'd never find your way. Without me you'd

Son I am going-" (97-8).

It does not only stop at that. The son constantly complains about his conditions, not observing the plight of his mother which clearly implies as per the play that the upbringing of the boy had not been easy for the mother. He had been a constant reminder to her of being the trace of a person whom she could not apparently face or like. Not only in this play but in other plays also, there is a clear implication that in terms of being an energy vampire, a child does not adopt a single stance. He may be fulfilling different conditions of energy vampirism at the same time. While he is undertaking the narcissistic drainage of his mother, one can also observe that he is acting as a Martyr vampire at the same time. He is under the perception of having suffered too much on the journey to the house. The mother figure here feels drained, giving curt responses to the son and not being elaborative. Rather, the mother feels her life force drained due to having such a conversation with the son which happens to open her inner wounds afresh. She does not move towards the house with the son herself. Rather she instructs her son to make his way to the mansion:

Son Watched?

Mother (*with him*) From the house.....

Son Who lives there? Whose is it?

Mother Yours

Son No who owns it? Whose house is it?

Mother Yours

Son Mine (Bond 100)

The mother seems to have had enough of the son's badgering. Her deprivation from any reprieve in the past, besides the consumptive nature of conversation the child is having with her, asphyxiates her compassion as a parent. She encourages her child to move forward towards the house without warning him about the ravine which lies concealed in the dark of the night. The abrupt conversation between the two produces a harmonic affect through which Bond carries the reader on at a pace to keep him engrossed in this disturbing journey of the two. Further in the play, the son is procured by his father who had been watching him from the house and had come down in the hope of saving him. The son's presence in front of the father is siphoning the life force in the father. No matter how hard he tries to make the son see what may have actually happened with him and how by luck he had escaped death, he is unable to make the son see that his mother is a traumatized and that it was she who pushed him in the ravine, "She was too quick. As soon as you were on the cliff she pushed you in the ravine" (104).

The futility of his endeavours to make the son understand sends him in one of his rages as his happiness is drained by the energy vampire son and though he becomes violent for a moment, he manages to compose himself somehow:

She tried to kill you! She needs you dead to be at peace! (*Recovers.*) No not like that. I'm with my son today. Tomorrow will be ordinary. Practical. Foolish. You 'll find out about the money. The paintings are priceless. List and inventories. Common vulgar things. Today's almost over and we haven't been happy or at peace in it. We'll pay for that. Tomorrow we'll be much older because we wasted today. Time always makes you pay. You're wet and cold but you're too shocked to shiver. If I fetch you some of my dry things will you- (106)

The parents' side of the stories about each other has great ambiguity about them. It confuses the reader about what side he should take. Who is telling the truth and who is lying? Then, the different timelines which seem to run parallel to each other raise a great many questions regarding the placement of the son in the different scenarios of the play and how his presence tends to exist in a parallel form between the two timelines. These two timelines eventually seem to converge in the end to pave way for a great disaster i.e. the destruction of the house. The presence of the son in the house acts as a Guilt Tripper (a kind of energy vampire) for both the parents who are prompted now and then within the play to give an explanation of the discord in their relationship matters. For the father perhaps the intensity of guilt is too high, for he happens to come up with elaborative reflections regarding the

relationship with his mother. His explanations justify the remorse he feels about not being able to be with his son previously. The presence of the son is the presence of a victim vampire at the moment whose anxiety and confusion are draining the life energy out of both parents.

The second play in the selection, *The Angry Roads* is a verbal vs. non-verbal scuffle by the child with his father regarding the truth about past, about his mother's abandonment. Norman is the son who wants to know the actual reason behind his mother's leaving of the house. It also reveals that he was perhaps not the only son; he had a stepbrother. He was six at the time of the murder and has a very vague trace of it in his mind. The reason of the scuffle is not clear until the end of the play but one does come to realize that the memory of the dead woman he had an affair with and the child is a torture to his father. One can sense the scars of trauma clearly evident in the father's silence. He, despite the longitude of time between the incident and the timeline of the play had not come to make peace with the incident of the death for which he holds himself to be the sole cause of it as it is implied. Norman, struggles to make the pieces of the puzzle come into place, which also entails how long his father, guilt-ridden, had kept mum:

...-you said your last-what did you say? -tell me your last words-(*taps with one finger on the table.*) -whisper-whisper-tell me your last words- they are stuck in your throat choking-tell me so your voice will come back- (**Father starts to knock. Norman grips his hands to stop. Struggle.**)- no say it proper way (167).

This argument pushes further as Norman pushes his father to break his self-constructed barricades of silence, "I want to hear my father's last words in the proper way-. **Father stamps on the ground**" (167).

The father ran the woman down with his car. The incident is imprinted very deep in his mind. The shock seems to have wiped out the verbal ability of communication from his existence.

His vow of silence is his effort to come to terms with himself and forgive himself for the incident. And this is where we see Norman playing an active role of an energy vampire. Instead of trying to understand his father's silence, he plays the role of a Guilt Tripping or Victim Vampire and a rageaholic. He is also a narcissist in this matter as he disregards the fact that his father's shock despite the fact that it had been a long time has not subsided. He seems to be worming confessions out of the aggressive tapping of his father's hands. One almost starts to think that Norman's father is a mental patient, but there are patterns of aggressive tapings by his hand on the table,

not to forget his body language within the play on different occasions when Norman has something to say:

Norman Look the head's come off..... Thanks a lot.

Father stands. *Goes towards the kitchen. Stops. Comes back.*
Raps on the table (160).

Father rattles the mini-puppet on the table (162).

Father hammers out angry regular isolated beats (163).

Father hammers out angry regular beats (163).

Father stamps on the ground (167).

The above references are some of the many references in the play which signal father's anxiety and his impatience. Norman's rigid stance as a Guilt tripper is making his father consume within himself. His rageaholic attitude is making his father descend into the abyss of silence which keeps on reminding him of his guilt of being responsible for the death of the woman and his illegitimate child and therefore he is unable to make peace with himself. Norman's approach to truth regarding the actual occurrence of their deaths is Narcissistic. It develops more into a sense of self-obsession as if the whole world revolves around the tragic incident. He badgers or rather tortures his father verbally which is draining the life force of his father. Norman's demeanour is preventing him from returning to normal psychological condition. Instead he performs absurd actions which depict his aggression towards Norman, as a result of consistent confrontation. This can be observed in some of the following instances:

What was she shouting? What was the row? (**Father hammers on the table.**) ... she ran down the – (**Father begins to rap a slow regular denial beat with both fists clench together. Jeering**) ... **Father hammers in agitation...**What's she shouting? You got out- (**Father hammers rapidly.**) ... (166)

He becomes more depressed and reclusive in himself. It consolidates his father into not making a return to normal life and makes the seal of silence even more difficult to break.

The vampiric assault of Norman continues until the final episode of the play which shows a possibility that the murder of the woman and the child might have been unpremeditated, but it was a gruesome deed done in the heat of anger to reach home on time in order to escape the suspicion of his wife (Norman's mother). The father eventually exhausts under the parasitic

drainage of his composure and faints in the final stage of the play before getting up to go about his work.

The third play *The Hungry Bowl* tells the story of a family in an endangered city. The nature of threat is not clear but one thing is certain, that a ghostly loneliness dwells in its streets. People are afraid of the blasts of air which shake the vicinity and damage their houses. The parents have to face the dilemmas inflicted from the external world and things get even more painful when their daughter starts having an imaginary friend which turns out to be very real in the end although its physical presence is never stated throughout the play. The girl despite all the entreaties of her parents does not stop believing the 'friend' with whom she spends most of her time. She does not know that her behaviour brings despair to her mother and fuels a self-consuming rage in her father, "She is my own daughter and I'm not comfortable in the same room with her. I don't know where to look when I'm talking to her. I she won't do-" (Bond 182).

Despite her father's strong stance against her 'friend' she does not see the difference between the reality and the imagination she had concocted. She pacifies her 'friend' by telling him to not be upset. She deems him to be 'better than proper' (182). She thinks her parents are jealous of her because she is happy (183). Her father's confrontations with her from the perspective of reality backfire on him. When the girl brings a cushion for her ghost friend, he picks it up and throws it away. This ought to have proved to her beyond any doubt that she is just seeing things but it goes in vain. She does not realize that by her unnatural behavior she is banishing her parents and particularly her father from the locale of reality. She thinks her ghost to be more real than the care and concern of her parents. This behavior traumatizes her father. Seeing the ghost's mauve bowl makes him feel depressed and he does not feel like eating with the bowl on the table (183). On the contrary, his act of cushion-throwing infuriates his daughter:

He fell on the floor! He could've broken his leg! (*Stands over the chair.*) Please get up. Please-you pushed him on the floor on purpose! -please, please. (*She puts the cushion back on the chair. Waits a moment. Then goes to her place. Leans her elbows on the table and covers her head with her arms. Cries.*) I am so ashamed of him! He did it on purpose. Why won't he leave us alone? Why, why, why? He doesn't do him any harm. If he drives him away I'll never forgive him... (184).

The above incident and many different others occur between the daughter and the father. As the reader begins to move to the end of the play, it

is revealed that it was her father who ate the food from the mauve bowl which strengthens her belief about her 'friend' in the first place. A person may rightly say that he had quite a role in the creation of her imaginary friend. Later it is seen that there is a 'No One' who makes its entrance into the house.

The girl's attitude has consumed the patience and sanity of her father. He starts with depressive emotions which well up into frantic outbursts thus leading him to insanity. There is a great question mark about the authenticity of the makings of this 'No One', but its presence speaks for itself. However, this complicates things in the play for it is only the father and the daughter who can see it, while the mother cannot and gets to keep her sanity.

In the girl, the clear representation of an Energy Vampire can be observed. She acts as a narcissist for whom the whole world revolves around her imaginary friend and not around the reason to which her parents adhere. She worries consistently about the friend which does not even exist in the first place. She acts like a victim and believes that a great wrong is being done in reprimanding her for the superficiality of her 'friend' to the extent of 'insensitivity.' Judith Orloff while discussing the different categories of Energy Vampires in her book, *The Empath's Survival Guide: Life Strategies for Sensitive People* sheds light on the classification of Victims,

Energy vampires with a victim mentality drain empaths with their "the world is against me" attitude. They don't take responsibility for the problems that happen in their lives. Other people are always the cause of their distress. Empaths often fall into the compassionate caretaker role with "victims," trying to solve their list of problems . . . the victim's barrage of complaints is too much for sensitive people to take (89).

Furthermore, the girl fulfills the criteria of another kind of Energy Vampire i.e. Drama Queen. Orloff discusses this category in her book right after the Victim classification. She distinctively reflects from an empirical point of view as a psychiatrist asserting that Drama Queens and Kings get energized by the reaction to their drama, but they don't get rewarded when the latter remains calm (90). The Girl has been breeding like a parasite on her father's overwhelming concern for her well-being. She emphasizes vehemently the existence of her figment of imagination as a narcissist to an extreme degree. Her delusion along with her vampiric behavioral traits during the course of the play brings about the parasitic drainage of her father's sanity and composure and he runs out of the house leaving his daughter 'energized' as ever. While it is true that Bond's plays hinge on social and/or political perspectives and contentions on violence, the self-consumption of parents and

the evident parasitic drainage of parental faculties in terms of composure and life force by their offspring gives rise to skepticism about children's inherent innocence, making a person wonder whether a child is really a child or a vampire.

Conclusion

On a concluding note, Bond's plays have been explored in terms of rationality and theatre of violence. Through his plays he calls to attention the ravages wreaked by capitalism and the dichotomy of standards of life existing in a society. This goes on to necessitate that no stone should be left unturned regarding the exploration of binaries of society i.e. parents and children. The current study endeavoured to establish that while societal atrocities are being perpetrated, the established governing systems do not go unexplored, and even the familial binaries do not go unaffected. Under problematic societal and governing structures, in Bond's selected works, the parasitic nature of parent-child relationship exists as a parallel, where symbolically, the child is a vampire and the parent, a victim. Among the dilemmas of modern times, is the consumptive nature of the filial bond, as it exists underneath societal violence.

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