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THE ANALYSIS OF "LEAR" BY EDWARD BOND

I

Edward Bond, the author of many plays of international standing has written "Lear", the play in which he consciously draws on Shakespeare's "King Lear". The Shakespearean theme of a father wronged by his children is developed in the modern reality. This is not, however, an attempt to "rewrite" Shakespeare. The two authors and the two epochs they represent are too far apart to be submitted to the same method of analysis. Also the problem tackled by Bond is different from Shakespeare's. He is interested in social aspects of man's life and consciously leaves out the metaphysical ones. The entire conditioning of man in his plays is that of his bonds to other people - his relatives, those he lives among and works with. As Bond himself once said:

"[...] problems aren't consequences of individual ethical positions, they are social problems, and they have their solutions, just as they have their origins in social situations, social structures"¹.

Shakespeare sees man's humanity in his cautious and harmonious abiding by moral principles which are according to nature. Bond sees man's lot on a quite different plane. Bond's characters are lost or destroyed by the social and moral limits that their society has produced. The more advanced they become in devising new organizational and intellectual structures the further they move from their true natural selves. Nature in Bond's play is not evil in itself, neither it is in Shakespeare, but for Bond living in accordance with nature is when man is able to practise freely

¹ The British Council recorded interviews - E. Bond in conversation with P. Roberts.

his needs and natural impulses². How far have we gone away from it into civilization and to what extent have we managed to destroy our inner natural instincts are the questions Bond is trying to answer. He uses the figure of Lear and the theme of a domestic tragedy as a kind of a device - in order to produce a startling effect between what is expected and what is seen, what is well known - and what has been overlooked so far - to make us think. We are all used to the image of Shakespeare's Lear - the man whose folly is punished by his daughters' ingratitude, who suffers it and rediscovers his humanity in suffering. Bond diseases Lear in social terms: he places him in a very direct reality (the court, a farmhouse, a building site) and it is through it and through relationships with other people that we see him. The plot is a free transposition of Shakespeare's story. Bond's Cordelia is not Lear's daughter but a peasant wife to Gravedigger's Boy, and later a guerilla leader. The two cruel daughters act under the names of Bodice and Pontanelle. Bond developed two aspects of the Lear story which, he thought, needed to be accounted for. Following his interests he concentrates upon the characters' responsibility for their deeds in the context of their social and characterological determinants (for e.g. Lear's responsibility as a father for his daughters' characters); he also reconsiders in a different light the problem of the so called "positive" and "negative" characters (for e.g. the dangers in letting the apparently "good" people, like Cordelia, to power). These problems together with the ways of their presentation will be of our concern in this paper.

When we first meet Lear visiting the building site of the wall he is still an autocratic ruler meting out punishment or reward according to his own will. He wants to erect the wall mainly as a symbol of his power and a monument to his name. Lear always wants to have the upper hand, no matter whether he is right or not. He kills a worker responsible for the waste of building material not because of the latter's guilt but in order to demonstrate authority in front of his daughters who were against it. "I wish my father was here" Pontanelle says later on in the play while

² Prefaces to Bond's plays by the playwright himself.

beating Warrington and then orders a soldier to beg for his life. It is an exact repetition of the opening scene only there it was Lear who carried out his will and both his daughters pleaded for the workman's life. The above scene throws significant light on the cause of the daughters' cruelty; however, the time has not come yet for the king to see it. When Bodice and Pontanelle start persecuting their father his first reaction is egoistic self-pity.

(He stares down at the mirror) No, that's not the king. This is a little cage of bars with an animal in it. (Peers closer) No, no, that's not the king! (Suddenly gestures violently. The Usher takes the mirror) Who shut that animal in that cage? Let it out. [...] O, God, there is no pity in this world. (Act II, sc. 1)

The daughters' evil behaviour is not anything inborn. Bond gives us glimpses of them as young girls in a dreamlike episode in prison. The echoes of old days are then recalled, both girls appear as vulnerable and innocent, eager to show affection to their father, yet at the same time lonely, left to themselves, brought up in the shadow of death (dead mother, killing of soldiers, death sentences passed by Lear on his enemies and his subjects). Lear, on the other hand, is trying to act as a good father (he sits Pontanelle on his knees and pulls Bodice to him), yet all the time imposes his will on his daughters - e.g. 3 times repeated command for Bodice to take off her dead mother's dress:

Pontanelle: Do my hair... Father comes home today.

Bodice: I must put on my dress.

Pontanelle: O you dress so quickly! Do my hair.

Lear: My daughters!

Bodice: They're burying soldiers in the churchyard. Father's brought coffins on carts. The palls are covered with snow. Look, one of the horses is licking its hoof.

Pontanelle: This morning I lay in bed and watched the wind pulling the curtains. Pull, pull, pull... Now I can hear that terrible bell.

Lear: Pontanelle, you're such a little girl. (He sits on the stone shelf) Sit here.

Pontanelle: No.

Lear: On my knees. (He sits her on his knees) Such a little girl.

Bodice: (listening) Father? I must get dressed. (She struggles frantically into her dress).

Lear: That's better.
 Pontanelle: Listen to the bell and the wind.
 Lear: (wets his finger and holds it in the air) Which way is it blowing? (Bodice gets into her dress and comes down to him. He points at her) Take it off!
 Bodice: No.
 Lear: Take it off! Your mother's dress!
 Bodice: She is dead! She gave it to me!
 Lear: (pointing) Take it off!
 Bodice: No.
 Lear: Yes, or you'll always wear it (He pulls her to him) Bodice my poor child, you might as well have worn her shroud. (Bodice cries against him...)
 (Act II, sc. 2)

The contrast between Lear's demanding and offering love, between his sentiment and his tyrannical disposition is evident in the passage. The scene is both lyrical and dramatic. Blowing of the wind and ringing of the bell are reflected in the language. It seems as if words were flowing in the air with the music of the wind (e.g. the monotonous "This morning I lay in bed and watched the wind pulling the curtains. Pull, pull, pull...") broken by the heavy sounds of the bell ("No [...] No [...] No"). The dream world of the vision is the projection of Lear's imagination but at the same time it is connected with reality. The wind of Pontanelle's sad morning may be the real wind accompanying Lear in his lonely cell while the sound of the bell may be the sound of the prison bell signalling luncheon (Lear is brought food by the Old Prison Orderly in the next scene). The dramatic qualities of the scene are brought out in the rapid pattern of short commands and quick repartees. The characters behave as if they were in a trance. Feverish commands (e.g. Lear's "Take it off") are accompanied by theatrical gestures (e.g. Lear's pointing at Bodice's dress for a long while, while he is demanding that she should take it off).

Shakespeare's Goneril and Regan were full of hatred and cruelty. Bond's Lear, full of self-pity, thinks the same about Bodice and Pontanelle when they deprive him of power and this is what we are inclined to think watching their atrocious behaviour. The naturalistic scene in which Lear is examining the dead body of Pontanelle

throws different light on this problem. Lear is watching her entrails and is astonished to find that the inside of her body is a perfectly harmonious creation of nature. He is shocked and terrified by the contrast between the beauty of her physical part and her beastly character. He is also terrified by the conclusions following from this comparison. Fontanelle's character was, after all, the product of long years of upbringing; the corruption of her ethical code was not the matter of a moment but the result of steadfast, long-run influence of different people, first of all her own father. Lear suddenly realizes that he had a share in the downfall of this woman - and is in despair.

Lear: Where is the beast? The blood is as still as a lake. Where?
... Where?...

[...]

She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child.
The things are so beautiful... Her body was made by the
hand of a child, so sure and nothing unclean...

[...]

Did I make it ... and destroy it?

(Act II, sc. 6)

Earlier, he learnt from Gravedigger's Boy about himself as seen by common men: he is hated, he has ruined people's lives and the land they cultivated. Unprotected by his court Lear sees for the first time that the world is not for his benefit but it is he himself who is at the world's mercy.

The blinding of Lear symbolizes, as in Shakespeare's play, the transformation of Lear's consciousness (gaining the inner sight). However, here again Bond provided a different context for the scene and therefore obtained new interpretative possibilities. The mutilation is a pseudoscientific operation, like those in concentration camps. It is performed by a scientist-prisoner who seems to believe strongly in the purposefulness of his action. The soldier behind him tells him to do his job quickly and stop his clever quibble. Who is the agent of Lear's blinding? Bond seems to ask. How is this act motivated from the point of view of his wrongdoers? The scene is significant in many ways. First of all the contrast between the victim and the persecutor, a "good" man and a "bad" man gets blurred. The scene introduces a strange chain of victimization (Lear - prisoner - soldier - Cordelia) where each of the king's enemies seems to act on "higher motives":

for the sake of science, for the sake of a just social order (the soldier is a revolutionary appointed to punish the late ruler, who was generally hated), finally a new political doctrine (Cordelia) which is supposed to change the world for the better. The terrible irony of the scene lies in the fact that all these just motives lead to the suffering and mutilation of man. Science and politics are used in a perverted way. Instead of helping and liberating they put him in still heavier chains. Lear is a victim but so are his wrongdoers. Thus the scene becomes of double importance: it is not only crucial as far as Lear's revelation of his own past is concerned but it is also a turning point in his social outlook. He says towards the end of the play:

What can I do? I left my prison, pulled it down, broke the key, and still I am a prisoner. I hit my head against the wall all the time. There's wall everywhere. I'm buried alive in a wall.
(Act III, sc. 2)

He is a victim of the system which let him victimize others but made himself a prisoner as well. With the awareness of this fact comes Lear's need to confirm his own identity, to act as a worthy human being. Lear is granted his life chance ... in terms of Bond's own materialistic outlook:

If a God had made the world, might would be always right, that would be so wise, we'd be spared so much suffering. But we made the world - out of our smallness and weakness. Our lives are awkward and fragile and we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and the man without pity is mad.
(Act III, sc. 3)

People are making the world and it is on their will that its shape depends. Man must not be self-centred. He should pity those whose fate is still worse than his own and try to help mankind according to his abilities. Lear's final act of shovelling soil from the top of the wall at which he gets killed receives thus a symbolic meaning. By coming to the wall Lear chooses his own death in such a way that it ennobles instead of humiliating him. He dies in a symbolic act of destroying the hated symbol of oppression and isolation of man from man that he had once created, and though his work has no practical importance it is the intention that matters. Lear has accepted his responsibility to the world.

Similarly to Lear. Bond's Cordelia is given a position quite different from her Shakespearean prototype. She is not a king's daughter. She lives away from political intrigues on a peaceful farm. She is pregnant. In this way Bond excludes her from any evil influences of Lear's court and stresses her conventionally understood "goodness", under no pressures from the outside. It is also quite significant that Bond has not changed the name of Cordelia as he did in the case of Regan and Goneril (Bodice and Fontanelle)³. It seems the author did it quite deliberately. Shakespeare's Cordelia has been traditionally accepted by the generations of readers and playgoers as a symbol of virtue and goodness that has not been fully appreciated. It seems that by not changing her name Bond wanted to draw our attention to her person. He consciously intended to produce a clash between our expectations of this character and its realization in the play. Bond looked at Cordelia from another angle, not from the point of view of her relationship to Lear but from the point of view of her own life. In Shakespeare's play the innocent Cordelia is banished and goes away to France with her husband. When she appears on the stage again she has come back with the army of the king of France against her own sisters. Is she still the same innocent creature who could not find words to express her feelings? Bond seems to be asking. Thus the problem he analyses in the play is different from Shakespeare's. It is the problem of transformation of a "good" man into a "bad" man, or perhaps the amount of evil latent in each of us at all times, which can easily be activated?

When we first meet Cordelia she is a very feminine, sentimental woman ready to cry at the slightest provocation during her pregnancy. However, even in the pastoral idyll of her married

³ K. W o r t h, *Revolutions in Modern English Drama*, p. 180. Bodice's and Fontanelle's names have clearly feminine connotations: "Bodice" - a close fitting undergarment for the upper part of a woman's body, "Fontanelle" - a French word for the crown of one's head. "Fontanelle" implies something delicate and easily damaged. "Bodice" implies something hidden and intimate, at the same time it may symbolize a form into which living flesh is fitted, something that is imposed on man and limits his natural reactions. There is, it seems, a clear correspondence between the word "bodice" and a "death dress" the girl Bodice is wearing in the scene of Lear's dream vision.

life she betrays signs of egoism and selfishness. She wants to turn homeless Lear away from the farm and refuses to look after him. She dominates her husband thwarting his humane impulses towards Lear. When she suffers personal losses her true self comes out. In fact she is hard and masculine enough to lead a revolution, overthrow a government and become the leader of a totalitarian state. She has people executed and tortured as mercilessly as Lear had done in the days of his tyranny (let us remember the blinding of Lear was done on her orders). Her revolution does not change anything. The same story with a different setting is being carried on. She still continues to build the wall which during Lear's reign became the symbol of all evil. In this way, the kernel of political injustice remains unshaken.

Lear: Don't build the wall.

Cordelia: We must.

Lear: Than nothing is changed! A revolution must at least reform.

Cordelia: Everything e l s e is changed!

(Act III, sc. 3)

Bond accuses her and the like of her, and this is perhaps the most poignant criticism I have read in Bond's plays:

Lear: I have lived with murderers and things, there are limits to their greed and violence, but you decent people devour the earth!

(Act III, sc. 3)

Bond's world is a beastly world where natural laws of coexistence have been destroyed. The characters peopling this world behave like angry frightened animals. Cruelty and sadism have become inseparable elements determining human relationships. The whole play functions as a gloomy metaphor of our reality. Men have been reduced to little worm-like creatures either toiling or fighting with one another. They are doomed to die from the moment of their birth. The overpresence of death is confirmed in recurring images of digging the soil. In the first scene the workers are digging the soil in order to put up the wall and one of them gets killed in the mud. In the final scene Lear is digging up the wall and dies. Gravedigger's Boy is a farmer, thus his name corresponds ironically to his profession as digging soil to plant

seed is compared to burying dead bodies, which produces the effect of bareness and futility. In Act II, sc. 2 Cordelia and Kent are watching the burying of soldiers and Lear's men digging graves for them.

II

Despite its formal directness the play is highly symbolic. Each scene, each action is not important for its own sake but as an illustration of the general thesis. As K. Worth has pointed out Bond "constructs his plays poetically around images". The playwright himself said on another occasion that he often built his plays around some phrases or sentences which seem to have some sort of curious atmosphere about them, that one wants to open up and explore⁴. "Lear" is a good example of such treatment. When we look at the play from the point of view of its imagistic structure we shall notice a regular recurrence of certain symbolic actions (digging, beating), of a symbolic object (the wall) or a figure (Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost). The images of the wall and Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost are central for the play. They are complementary images, each corresponding to adequate notions which Bond put in contrast with each other. The image of Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost is active and develops linearly. We can see his fading figure many times in the play, each time thinner and more wasted. He accompanies Lear at all stages of his spiritual struggle and may function in the play as his positive alter-ego, or conscience⁵. Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost symbolizes all Lear may become - the gentleness and understanding of human suffering, the ability to forgive and endure. The more self-aware Lear becomes the weaker and more faded seems to be Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost - as if all the qualities of the latter were transmitted

⁴ Ibid., p. 168.

⁵ The same device was used also in "Early Morning". Bond split up one dramatic persona into two: Arthur's figure is given an "extension" in the person of George, his Siamese brother who appears to be his socialized version. Arthur is the soul, George - the body and its direct links with the outer world (family, social institutions) together with its physiological needs (hunger, cold).

to the former. In more general terms, Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost stands for the emotional and moral sphere of man's life, thus embodying the immaterial factor of our existence. Bond's pessimism and dramatic irony made him endow a shadow, a dead man's ghost with human positive qualities. Thus, while dramatically he has obtained the effect of illusiveness, of the full disembodiment of the spirit and its separateness from the matter, he also stressed the unreality of the values the ghost represents. Just as the figure of Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost so his qualities belong to the world of shadows, to the realm of death. Thus, the source of goodness for Lear is not to be found among living men. The moment we can identify Lear's insights with Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost's wisdom he is doomed to die.

Another stage image which has become central from the point of view of the construction of the play is that of the wall. Like the previous one it is an active image, reappearing directly or indirectly a number of times in order to reveal the mechanisms governing man and the social system he has created. The wall is apparently being built by Lear to protect his people against enemies and then continued by Cordelia for the same reasons. It stands for suppression and artificial limitations imposed upon people by their rulers. It may also symbolize alienation of man from man, the impossibility to communicate. The two interpretations of the symbol seem to be best seen in the conversation between Lear and Cordelia quoted above (Act III, sc. 3) when the wall is both a physical obstacle and the hinderance in mutual understanding of the two characters. Behind the wall a father ought to be authoritarian and should be loved by his children, each husband should be devoted to his wife because these are certain social requirements and expectations. Nobody asks about the price or the value of those relationships as long as life goes on smoothly. Thus workers are killed because the work must go on and those who hinder it should perish. Lear never really understands the needs of his children but takes it for granted that he will be for ever loved by them. Bodice and Pontanelle marry for convenience because their status will allow them to carry out their plans safely. Such examples can be multiplied. In each of them a human being is showed acting separately, in isolation, trying to realize his or her goals only.

Looking at the overwhelming images of the wall and Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost we begin to wonder what or whom the play is really about. Is it about Lear, or Cordelia, or the two cruel sisters? Paradoxically though it may seem the tragedy "Lear" is not about Lear at all. None of the characters in the play lives as a psychologically rounded hero. The protagonists of the play are not people but certain notions or concepts, or philosophies which are juxtaposed. The clash between the sordid reality and the faded unreality, the material and the spiritual, the expansive real wall and the shadow-like but all the time penetrating ghost of man's doubt and search for his own identity - these are, in fact, the "heroes" of Bond's tragedy. Lear, Cordelia, the sisters - by their long dwelling in the history of drama - have become certain stock characters and it is on this basis that they function in the play. Bond's Lear becomes a kind of an Everyman whose humanity is to be lost or regained in the battle of illusive goodness versus overpowering evil.

III

Formally, "Lear" is a great artistic achievement of the playwright. Unlike his earlier plays where certain styles were used too overtly and therefore did not render proper effects - in this play the author managed, on the whole, to keep the proper balance between the subject matter and the means of presentation. He uses different styles (realistic, naturalistic, surrealist, lyrical), all of them with much skill. In particular, the use of surrealism in the play where violence becomes an essential theme is highly effective. The surrealist method makes use of a collage technique which depends on the author's conscious selecting the given elements of reality and then putting them together in form of a new fictitious reality of a dream vision⁶. One of the best examples of this style and imagery is the scene of beating up Warrington.

Fontanelle: (addressing the soldier) Use the boot! Jump on him!
Jump on his hand! [...]

⁶ K. J a n i c k a, Surrealism, Warszawa 1976.

- Bodice: (knitting) One plain, two pearl, one plain.
- Fontanelle: Throw him up and drop him. I want to hear him drop.
[...]
Kill his hands! Kill his feet! Jump on it - all of it! He can't hit us now. Look at his hands like boiling crabs! Kill it! Kill all of it! Kill him inside! Make him dead! Father! Father! I want to sit on his lungs!
- Bodice: (knits) Plain, pearl, plain. She was just the same at school.
- Fontanelle: I've always wanted to sit on man's lungs. Let me. Give me his lungs.
- Bodice: (to soldier A) Down on your knees.
- Soldier A: Me?
- Bodice: Down! (Soldier A kneels) Beg for his life.
(Act I, sc. 4)

The scene is rendered in terms of a nightmarish family situation. Fontanelle behaves like a little whimsical girl urging a soldier to act more cruelly so that she could see Warrington's suffering better, while Bodice is knitting a jumper. Lear is absent but we feel his presence in continual references to his person. The atmosphere is that of a nightmare in which fragments of realistic situations and actions (knitting, jumping, beating) have been compiled in such a way as to create a new surrealist situation which cannot be read in terms of realism. When Fontanelle orders the soldier to jump on Warrington's hands we are shocked and terrified but the situation is still credible; when she demands of him to kill the latter's hands and lungs the limits of reality are finally abandoned. Warrington does no longer exist as a human being. Neither do Fontanelle and the soldier. He becomes parts, fragments - all of them separately objects of assault, each of them separately to be exterminated ("Kill his hands! Kill his feet", "Look at his hands like boiling crabs"); they become animals blind with fury, speaking and acting out their inner hate. As in a dream people, facts and situations from the past and the present are mingled and impressed upon one another Bodice's cool "One plain, two pearl", an imprint of an ordinary domestic situation, is an ironic refrain, its ordinariness brings forth even stronger the sadism of the scene, yet it may be also a recollection of some earlier events (especially the comment: "She was just the same at school"). The structure of the whole scene is, as it

has already been pointed out before, an ironic inversion of the first scene of the play where the two sisters were pleading for the workman's life (here the soldier is begging for Warrington's). The language of the scene which - after all - tells us about crime is hysterical, yet methodically logical. It has a strange simple regularity, like the Jack-and-Jill melody of a children's nursery rhyme. If we take a short sample from the scene (Act I, sc. 4) and put the text in verse form it becomes quite obvious:

Kill his hands!
Kill his feet!
Jump on it -
All of it!
He can't hit us now.

Of the other styles used by Bond the pseudoscientific style of the surrealistic scene of blinding Lear - as mentioned above - is worth stressing. The overall effect is based here on the antithesis: the clash between body and intellect, between physical suffering and its rational motivation. The scene is built with meticulous care. Props are of extreme importance, Lear being provided with a special surgical chair, the machine for extracting eyes looking like an implement of science rather than a device of torture. The language is a cool, objective scientific jargon in which the word "to blind somebody" has been nicely replaced by "to extract an eye" and the extracted eye is to be put into "a soothing (!) solution of formalhyde crystals". The tone of the Fourth Prisoner is that of hopeful encouragement and professional civility. The grotesqueness of the situation comes forth when we suddenly realize that the operation is not going to cure the patient but to mutilate him.

Fourth Prisoner: (produces a tool) Here is a device I perfected on dogs for removing human eyes.

Lear: No, no. You mustn't touch my eyes. I must have my eyes!

Fourth Prisoner: With this device you extract the eye undamaged and it can be put to good use. It's based on a scouting gadget I had as a boy.

Soldier N: Get on. It's late.

Fourth Prisoner: Understand, this isn't an instrument of torture but a scientific device. See how it clips the lid back to leave it unmarked!

Lear: No - No!

Fourth Prisoner: Note how the eye passes into the lower chamber and is received into a soothing solution of formaldehyde crystals. One more, please.

Lear: Aaahhh!

Fourth Prisoner: (looking at the eyes in the container) Perfect.
(Act II, sc. 6)

The implications of the scene in which the operation takes place (the prison, the presence of the soldier) make the situation absurd and macabre.

Realism and naturalism are quite often used by Bond, as mentioned earlier. Realistic is the killing of a workman in the first scene, the attack on Gravedigger's Boy's farm, killing Lear in the last scene... The use of such direct methods, especially when presenting violence, sadism, cruelty may be of double consequence, both in favour of and to the disadvantage of the play. It seems the playwright wanted to transmit his message to all spheres of modern man's personality - his common sense, his intellect, feelings, the subconscious. He wanted to shock his spectator out of his self-complacency, he wanted us to leave the theatre with a feeling of disgust with ourselves rather than with a consoling feeling that we had been purified through "terror and pity". Looking at his stylistic and imagistic devices one gets the impression that in showing the progressive dehumanization of our society Bond thought that the stronger the visual effect the more likely we are to respond to his message. He sometimes seems to show evil through its direct representation and not by means the symbols of evil. Such method has obvious drawbacks. Direct violence always includes some sensational element which usually cheapens the idea conveyed through it. There is, I think, a great difference between being shocked and being moved. The scene of autopsy, for example, should have been more stylized to convey its emotional message fully. Lear's words about beauty and nature somehow do not fit the naturalistic presentation of the operation on the stage. In this context beautiful lyrical passages stand out as real achievements. They give touches of humanism to the otherwise dehumanized reality of the play. Let us consider the following example:

Ghost: The soldiers are moving into the village. They're sealing you off. Will you send your people away?

Lear: No.

Ghost: I thought you'd forget all this: crowds, wars, arguments... We could have been happy living here. I used to be happy. I'd have led you about and watched you grow old, your beautiful old age...

Lear: We buried your body here. And Warrington's. It's beautiful under the trees. I thought I might think here of something to tell Cordelia. I don't know... They're coming to bury me and I'm still asking how to live. Can you hear the wind?

Ghost: No. My mind goes. You hear very well when you are blind.

Lear: Yes.

Ghost: Can you hear an owl on the hill?

Lear: Yes.

Ghost: But not the fox.

Lear: No.

Ghost: No. (He starts to cry).

(Act III, sc. 5)

The language of this passage qualifies it as a piece of good poetry on a truly Pinteresque level. In the beautifully balanced regular lines with meaningful confirmations and negations (yes, no) the relationship of Lear and Ghost finally finds its culmination: the Ghost loses his self-consciousness ("My mind goes") for the sake of Lear who in his blindness has gained inner knowledge ("You hear very well when you are blind"). Lear's newly gained wisdom is expressed in the question "how to live?" which proves him human since it formulates man's eternal existential doubt - the essence of all humanity. Its symbolic representation is an owl who lives on the hill - i.e. some height we all want to attain one day. Ironically, Lear's question, his humanity comes in the hour of his death. The symbol of the owl is opposed by the fox which symbolizes the cunning and unscrupulousness of Lear's enemies whom he is unable to "hear" and therefore defend himself. The Ghost starts crying at the revelation of this ironic truth: the fact that a single honest man is helpless against the flood of evil, against all those who are trying to "seal him off".

Another interesting linguistic device employed by Bond here is the use of the word "to hear" which expresses a sensory biological function as a metaphor for "to know", which, after all depends on

an intellectual process. "Can you hear an owl on the hill" stands for "Do you know who you are? Why is this so?" If we turn back to the scene of autopsy the meaning of this metaphor becomes clear. Lear's revelation of his existence came through physical experience - looking (court scene - watching himself in the mirror), pain (blinding), touching (autopsy) and not an intellectual process which has been ridiculed in the play in the persons of the Fourth Prisoner, a pseudoscientist, and Cordelis, a short-sighted politician. Bond's views about our civilization which got perverted through the misuse of intellect make him turn for solution to natural human impulses and experiences. This is not, however, a "return to nature" in the style of Rousseau. Such a conception has been also criticized in the play (life on Gravedigger's Boy's farm). It is a conscious, we may say, "rational" existence finding its backbone in primary human functions.

The use of a variety of tones and styles in "Lear" does not cause dissonance or break the unity of the play. Moreover, when we read the play carefully it appears that the changes of style do not strike us as artificial or abrupt. This is due to the fact that the language of the play is all the time the language of the playwright himself. It has the same "deadpan"⁷ quality, the same dispassionateness, the same compactness from the beginning till the end. There is no individualization of the personal style of characters just as there is no psychological motivation of them. The play is the dramatist's own vision and his own expression - like a long poem in which the world and men have been filtered through the speaker's imagination.

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ANALIZA SZTUKI EDWARDA BONDA „LEAR”

W artykule przeprowadzono analizę ideowych i formalnych walorów sztuki Edwarda Bondy „Lear”. Autorka dokonała przeglądu po-

⁷ W o r t h, op. cit., p. 179.

staci sztuki w ich wzajemnych uwarunkowaniach, jak również zależnościach od szerszego kontekstu społecznego. Sztuka E. Bonda nie jest powtórzeniem szekspirowskiej wariacji "Króla Leara", lecz indywidualnym spojrzeniem autora na świat współczesny. "Problemy nie wynikają z indywidualnych postaw etycznych, lecz są problemami społecznymi i mają swe rozwiązania, tak jak i swój początek w społecznych sytuacjach, w społecznych strukturach" pisze Bond. Zgodnie z powyższym twierdzeniem autor upatruje źródło zła i upadku ludzkości przede wszystkim w niesprawiedliwym systemie politycznym, który wikłając jednostkę w skomplikowany mechanizm władzy i ucisku, powoduje wynaturzenie lub zanik podstawowych naturalnych reakcji człowieka. Danie lub pozbawienie jednego człowieka władzy nad drugim określa i kształtuje w sposób zdecydowany jego charakter i działanie. Stąd pojawia się problem względności w ocenie jednostki. Polemizując niejako z tradycyjną recepcją postaci szekspirowskich przez widza, Bond udowadnia - na przykładzie Cordelii - jak konwencjonalna dobroć przekształcić się może w bezgraniczne okrucieństwo z chwilą uzyskania władzy. Z kolei "złe córki" Bodice i Fontanelle ukazane są jako istoty, których charakter wypaczyło błędne wychowanie w nieprawidłowym systemie społecznym. Na przykładzie osoby Leara Bond ukazuje możliwość odzyskania przez jednostkę człowieczeństwa poprzez odrzucenie fałszywie pojętych ról społecznych - władcy, wodza, ojca-tyrana. Ciężkie i świadomy powrót do natury mają wyzwolić w człowieku uczucie litości, będące - wg autora - podstawowym wyznacznikiem humanizmu.

W drugiej części artykułu dokonano stylistycznej i symbolicznej analizy utworu. Sztuka utrzymana jest w jednolitym tonie. Brak indywidualizacji języka postaci czy motywacji psychologicznej. Autor posługuje się innymi środkami, wprowadza sugestywne symbole (mur, Duch Chłopca Grabarza) oraz rozmaite style (surrealizm, naturalizm, liryzm, styl pseudonaukowy), atakując widza na różnych poziomach percepcyjnych. Mur opasujący królestwo Leara, mający "chronić" obywateli, jest symbolem ucisku i przemocy, ale także izolacji, braku porozumienia między ludźmi. Duch Chłopca Grabarza to symbol człowieczeństwa - delikatności, litości i wyrozumienia, a poprzez fakt przypisania tych cech duchowi nieżyjącego człowieka - również ironiczny w swej wymowie. Wielokrotne pojawianie się obu symboli w sztuce tworzy jej swoistą konstrukcję na wzór średnio-wiecznego moralitetu, gdzie symbole dobra i zła "walczą" o duszę człowieka (humanizm Leara). Zwycięża poczucie dobra. Lear w ostatniej scenie sztuki zaczyna burzyć mur, lecz ten pozytywny akcent niczego nie zmienia (Lear zostaje zabity w trakcie swej pracy; totalitarny system Cordelii pojawia się w miejscu autokratyzmu państwa Leara). Mur pozostaje.