

MANIFESTATION OF THANATOS IN EDWARD BOND'S SAVED

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Abstract:

In the post-Freudian thought, the two driving forces of human beings are Eros and Thanatos. They are the pleasure principle and death drive, respectively. The derivative terminology of these two forces is originated in Greek mythology with Eros as the god of pleasure and Thanatos, on the other hand, as the personification of death. For a long time, the latter force was eliminated off-stage due to theatrical existential reasons. However, one of the few successful attempts to force Thanatos on-stage is detected in Edward Bond's *Saved* (1968).

This paper approaches Bond's *Saved* (1968) aiming to show the poeticity in the Shklovskian defamiliarizing entries that forced the theatrical censorship into accepting the play despite the fact that the play promptly violated the censorship regulations. With these entries, the stage—once again—addresses human feelings while reshaping the Eros-oriented theatre. The result is residing tension in the audience after realizing the unexplored possibilities of the Thanatos-oriented stage and a consequent undoing of the prior anchorage of metaphor into a floating concept that involves the redefinition attempts into same-but-different perspective. The findings of the paper implicate that the employment of irregular techniques makes it possible to challenge people into the recognition of corruption by being charged with the responsibility of taking action concerning paratextual contexts through non-didactic plays.

Key Words: Freud, Thanatos, Defamiliarization, Metaphor, Same-But Different .

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Introduction

The human brain is very complicated and using it on a daily basis is similar to going through a dense jungle, it is hard and costs energy. As the brain's competitive arena does not favor expanding energy, the actions and behaviors, that are done repetitively, leave marks on the jungle of the brain. As one starts doing something, he is to travel through plants and to start doing some improvised trails through the undergrowth; and the more often he does the repeated thing, the more pronounced the trail becomes (Rosenbaum, 2014, p. 114). Over time, it turns into a path that is easier to tread so it is taken more often as it turns into a street. Traversing it becomes familiar, easier, and more comfortable.

When it comes to post-Freudian thought, human beings are driven by Eros and Thanatos. They are the pleasure principle and death drive, respectively. The derivative terminology of those forces is originated in Greek mythology with Eros as the god of pleasure and Thanatos as the personification of death. The Greek and Roman dramas were concerned with ceremonial implications of religious connotations that favored the elimination of Thanatos off stage. Hence, drama became mainly concerned with Eros-related entertainment purposes (Brooks, 1977, p. 294). Up to the Christian prevalence, drama became a mediator between the Bible and the common people in the sense that the commoners did not understand the language of the Bible. Plays with didactic purposes drew their plots and themes from Biblical stories and saints' and martyrs' lives by assuring that they follow the Eros-preferences of the audience (Buckley, 1875, p. 53). With this Eroseean adoption, the dramatic flow turns Thanatos into an Oxbow Lake that is cut off from the stage preference and performance.

The jungle analogy highlights the reason for the improbable difficulty of change; it is because change means treading on untrodden neuropathways through the brain and bypassing the familiar streets untrodden. The familiar streets in this analogy are the Eros-oriented theatrical performances. The spectator is familiar with the positively reinforced didactic plays that involve little to no room for violence and death on stage. The reason for such a preference is the reminiscence of the adoption of the theatre by the church. Because the adopted entity should follow the vicissitudes of the host, theatre followed the regulations and preferences of the church for a long time and the red flags in the church were existential questions for the theatre as going through them, even implicitly, was not an option. Hence, the theatrical productions that paralleled the regulations of the church are likened to the Eros theatrical representations. With reference to the analogy of the jungle, the Eros-representations are the already trodden and marked neuropathways that the brain prefers because they are easier to tread. On the other hand, the untrodden neuropathways in this resemblance are namely the Thanatos-oriented plays, as they are the untrodden neuropathways or non-streets. It is not easy to go through them, and the produced play as such would be censored and get negative reviews from critics and theatergoers.

Due to the saturation of the theatrical productions with the agreed-upon Eros norms, modernism necessitated the redefinition of the traditional narrative plot in playwriting,

which, in turn, depends on resemblance and difference. These two prospects are regarded as the base pillars for the initiation of dramatic production. Modern playwriting synthesizes the two prospects into a new concept that Peter Brooks calls *same-but-different*. This concept revisits the didactic aims of ancient drama that used to tell the audience what sort of a life they are supposed to be having. The result of such a revisiting is to get the aim of the drama redefined to cover the consequences of the failed didactic attempts of the previous drama (Brooks, 1977, p. 295).

As an example of the Thanatos-oriented plays, Edward Bond's *Saved* is taken as a sample that causes an uproar. Set in London during the 60s, the play highlights the cultural poverty and frustration of the young generation in a way that demonstrates the events of a probable future as the consequences of ignoring the red flags of the present. The play was severe enough to divide the room of criticism at first, and then it caused the abolition of theatrical censorship later in 1968.

Theoretical Framework

Only artists can truly appreciate the beauty of still images. Similarly, the repetitive didactic and entertaining scenes in theatres are likened to the still images on the part of the perceptive audience. Regardless of the influential strength of the images used or the ideas deployed, the audience will always get used to seeing these images on stage and their presumable anticipation will be redirected toward a void. Consequently, the action's influence goes numb, the action passes by unnoticed, and its semantic role becomes automatic in the sense that its perception becomes habitual.

The maxims of "without imagery there is no art" and "Art is thinking in images" (Shklovsky, 1997, p. 5) make the still image be revived into the artist's frame of mind. With such a still image that breathes through expressibility, the artist/ playwright is put in the position of unspeakability and he, in turn, starts craving for expressibility. Since he is the only one who is able to appreciate this still image, the artist feels paralyzed for not being able to express those still images in an understandable way to the audience who is artistically unqualified to appreciate the beauty of the still image. However, due to the literature's permeability, the artist is able to modify the habitualized theatre that is likened to the still image, and the artist's role becomes similar to the chained slave in Plato's Cave who could free himself and see then express the bigger picture while his fellow prisoners were unable to. In other words, he is the one responsible for doing the "walk in wisdom toward them that are without" (Buckley, 1875, p. 44).

The term permeability is originated in Physics as a measure of magnetization that different metals obtain in response to an applied magnetizing force (Jackson, 1975, p. 12). When it comes to literature, one is inclined to admit that literature is promptly connected with other disciplines of life in a way that sometimes literature and the referent discipline become inseparable. Since literature is the recipient of the influence of the other applied

disciplines, then literature is likened to a piece of metal that is contaminated with the influence of the magnetizing force and eventually obtained some of its characteristics. Despite the negative terminology, contaminated literature is praised for its potential in producing new prospects because it has higher probability “of finding new angles at which to enter reality” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 15). The example of magnetization is brought up because the magnetic influence is invisible, and this invisibility is detected through a series of tests whose results decide whether the invisible influence is there or not. Similarly, the influence of other disciplines upon literature is invisible, yet sensible and detectable.

In this regard, Viktor Shklovsky highlights the inevitable contamination of literature with philosophy. He points out the possible migration of the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception in such a way that results in a unique semantic modification (Shklovsky, 1997, p. 21). In other words, he suggests targeting the habitual influence in order to present a modern appreciation of the habitualized stances on stage. The recommended technique, for such a devouring attempt, is a revised version of Bertolt Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* (also known as V-effect), which implicates breaking the theatrical fourth wall and upgrading the numb audience into a critical one. On the part of Shklovsky, his technique depends more on the artfulness of the presented images, and it is labeled as defamiliarization (Robinson, 2012, p. 79).

By applying the defamiliarization effect to the already habitualized stances, the theatrical nova is enhanced by depending on the poeticity of the message rather than the message itself or its aftermath. This way, the technique of art becomes turning the familiar art into things that are unfamiliar. This tendency of writing amounts to the manifesto of postmodernism about which John Barth proposes that the literary representation’s conventional modes are used up as their possibilities have been consumed due to overuse. Hence, the probability of producing originality in the works that are being written, or to be written, reached the moment of saturation in which there is no room for new ideas unless the current familiar products and stances are stirred and recycled. This bricolage results in redirecting the criterion of originality toward covering the technique and means of representation rather than the represented message. Barth states that this recycling process is the task of the “Aristotelian conscious agent” who can reverse the exhausted literature by “cunning the artistic effect” (Barth 65).

The point of departure between V-effect and defamiliarization is that the first one takes the familiar scene and modifies the internal components in a way that makes the scene critically provocative to the audience, whereas the latter penetrates the personal sphere with the public account in a way that makes the context uncanny to the audience. It is possible to state that defamiliarization intends not to alter the perception of things in the theatrical presentation, but rather negatively highlight them and pause for the audience’s feedback in a dramatically suspense scene. This feedback is dispositioned after an intimidating manipulation that aims at making the audience relate personally to the happenings of the stage (Robinson, 2012, p. 167).

Peter Brooks re-reads the Shklovskian defamiliarization technique with reference to narratology. The narrative transformation further elaborates the technique as a synthesis of difference and resemblance. The uncanny synthesis is somehow between the criteria of resemblance and that one of difference in a way that can be called “same-but-different” (Brooks, 1977, p. 280). The still point of balancing difference and resemblance gives a sense of disharmony on the part of the receptor in an identical way to the penetrative maneuver that the public account got involved in the personal sphere, as was the case of defamiliarization.

Affirming the mastery of metaphor in its same-but-different calibers, both defamiliarization and V-effect appear to be equally relevant and the chief value of metaphor. In this case, Shklovsky’s resides in its uncanny aftermath that irritates the audience into taking action towards the presented actions or inactions on stage. This very uncanny aftermath is the point of recognition of the Thanatosean plays, as it is the defamiliarizing effects that are being lacked in the Eros-oriented plays and their contents are normalized and accepted as they are, and they do not nix with the expectations and intellects of the audience. The reason for the Thanatosean opposition to the expectations and intellects of the audience is that plays are mainly there in order to help the audience understand their problems and fill the gap between the two; otherwise, “we wouldn’t have any need of mythologies and absurd religions to close that gap” (Innes, 1992, p. 166). In other words, keeping its normative values, the expiry of the Eros-oriented plays announced the need for a more efficient mediator that helps people represent and understand their problems.

Conceptual Implementation

Bond’s *Saved* is a play that features members of the working class. The opening scenes depict how the proper family life is lacking and the supposedly family members are isolated and dehumanized. During the play, violence is sensed visually and verbally. The play involved shocking incidents in different places, and in Scene Six, an incident of stoning a toddler brings the play into controversial recognition.

The conceptual implementation centers on spotting the normalized stances and targeting them with defamiliarizing techniques. The first normalized entity that *Saved* attacks is the disrespectful disobedience of linguistic commitment to Standard English by the new generations as well as the commitment to the regulations of politeness. It is normalized that every new generation regards the language of their ancestors as the model language that their own language is supposed to depart from as a coping mechanism in order not to feel left out of their surroundings.

In *Saved*, the linguistic commitment is broken with the excessive use of abbreviations that makes the written word misunderstood unless they are read out loud. This technique subconsciously prioritizes the spoken language over the written one. The defamiliarizing technique by Bond makes this prioritization be seen as a message that the coming

generations shall override the significant role of the written language. The decreased significance of the written language can be read as an existential threat to the thousands-year-old archeological system that pins down the chronicles of human development. For example, from the beginning of the play, non-understandable lines “E’ll be late, won’t ‘e! I ‘ope they dock ‘is bloody packet” (Bond, 2000, p. 15) and “‘Oo’s bin’ ‘aving a bash on me duckboards?” (Bond, 2000, p. 27) are thrown and misunderstood unless their spoken form is imagined in the frame of mind of the reader/ audience.

Furthermore, commitment to the regulations of politeness is violated with the repetitive usage of explicitly sexual language jokes, and implications. In a way, the new generations in *Saved* are directly deviating from respecting the elderly as well as respecting what they stand for and what they are known for. Regulations of politeness are typically associated with the elderly and violating those regulations stands for rebelling against the ancestors.

The play begins with a female character, Pam, who brings home a guy that she just met, Len, in order to have intimate intercourse with in the living room. Her father passes by them multiple times and decides not to be involved. Then Len moves in to live with Pam in her parents’ house, yet Pam is attracted to another guy, Fred. Moreover, the next scene shows that Pam had a baby with Fred. She is put in a position of despise with the guy she brought in, and she is despised by the guy she had a baby with. Her parents show no comment on the situation, as they do not speak to each other. Much of the time off stage during this scene, the baby cries incessantly and is ignored by Pam.

In the first scene of the play, the poor economics lead the young generations to use the living room in the middle of the house for private usage. Pam’s father, who is supposed to have a saying at this apparently impolite action, makes several passes in and out without being involved. Perhaps in the beginning, the passes of the father open the room for at least judgments and comments, but the repetitive and quick ins and outs, as well as his presence and role, are normalized and his comment or action is the least expected. The entries of Harry, the father, are interruptive and quick as read in “The door opens. HARRY comes in. He goes straight out again” (Bond, 2000, p. 13) and “They try to laugh quietly. The door opens. HARRY puts his head in. He goes out. He shuts the door” (Bond, 2000, p. 18). The impact of the quick interruptions of the father helps normalize his presence. According to the analysis of the scenes in which he is present, it is evident that had he not eventually left the scene, the intimate activity would have taken place anyway regardless of his approval.

The implementation of the synthetic narrative plot makes the violation of the regulations of language and politeness more relevant. In comparing the lifestyle and the acceptability of values of today with those of the probable future—as shown in the *Saved*—one is inclined to assess the verisimilitude of this future and definitely pause on the pillar points upon which this future departs from the one that the perfectionist audience would like it to take over.

Unlike the plays from the older generations, Bond's *Saved* shows how the new generation takes over and the lifestyle norms that are known by default are violated and exploited in order to modulate the day to be more personalized to them rather than to the overseeing perfectionists that used to dominate the previous plays.

The local park embraces the central scene of the play. Pam is there to confront and beg Fred to visit her and the baby more often. The confrontation is concluded with Pam walking off and leaving the baby with Fred, who disclaims the baby's supervision immediately. With increasing enthusiasm, the friends of Fred torment the baby to the extent that when they, including Fred, flee, there is no doubt that the baby has been killed.

The second defamiliarizing technique in *Saved* is detected in the incommunicable storytelling of the play. The previous narrations were concluded with a resolution that was either shocking or relieving. In *Saved*, the uniquely shocking element is the stoning of the anesthetized toddler in the pram. However, this event is positioned in the first half of the play rather than at its end. This disposition heightens the senses of the audience into wondering about the way through which this toddler is avenged. Yet, this vengeance does not take place as per expected and the span of events goes smoothly as if nothing happened. In the indifference toward tremendous events, such as stoning an innocent and helpless toddler, lies the defamiliarizing technique of storytelling. The anticipation of a void reaction keeps the audience on their toes and waiting for the action to be taken. By the inaction that the end of the play presents, the audience feels obliged to relate to, and take action toward the inaction of the actors.

The previous storytelling makes the audience falls in the purpose fallacy of theatre-going. The didactic plays gradually change the audience into dilettantes who go to theatres for the sake of entertainment. However, Bond makes sure that his audience is not mere dilettantes but rather critical observers who will be motivated to do something about the improbable possibility of their future.

One of the techniques that Bond uses in order to stimulate the audience into feeling objectified is displacing the audience away from the usual safety zones of theatre and placing them in the shooting line instead. This tendency is sensed in The Guardian's review follow-up of the play for Ronald Pickup, a critic who attended the play and wrote a review about it back in 1965. In a review follow-up in 2022, he remembers the performance by recalling "horrible, infinitesimal detail of how accurate you had to be, partly because you didn't want stones bouncing off the pram into the audience" (Costa, 2011). Bond arranged the stage in such a way that the target of the shooting stones is strategically placed between the shooting gangsters and the audience. This way, the audience feels involved as the stones thrown at the pram might miss and hit the audience instead. This technique makes it extremely difficult to decide on the part of the audience whether they want the stones to hit the innocent toddler in the pram and prefer their own safety, or decide to sacrifice their own well-being and let the stones miss the pram.

This constant flipping in referents for the decision-making process results in unfavorable undecidability of priorities and the audience is unable to decide which target of the stones has an advantageous priority in order to deserve survival. Moreover, this constant decision swing is relevant in the semiotic triangle in which the processing takes place in the middle ground between the symbol and the referent. This middle ground is labeled as “thought” and it can be seen as the synthesis of the symbol and referent stages with a result that looks like neither one of them (Ogden and Richards, 1923, p. 11).

The defamiliarization of the action of stoning the toddler is analyzed on multiple levels. The first level is the anesthetization of the toddler as an action to begin with. In order to avoid undesirable probabilities of the natural needs of the toddler, such as crying and seeking attention, the mother—Pam—decides to give the toddler anesthetic pills to make him go to deep sleep so that the walk through the park will not be disturbed. The analysis of the deed of anesthetizing the toddler shows that the surrounding people in the park will not notice the attention-seeking or cries of the toddler. even if they did, fulfilling the needs of the toddler have never been considered shameful to the extent that requires the mother to follow such an inhumane approach that will negatively intervene with the growth and upbringing of the toddler.

FRED: What yer give it?

PAM: Asprins.

FRED: That all right?

PAM: Won't wake up till t'morra. It won't disturb yer. (Bond, 2000, p. 58)

In addition to the action of putting a toddler on medicine that it does not need, the choice of Aspirins shows the insufficient medical knowledge of the mother because Aspirins are not sleeping pills. It is true that they help with minor aches and assures better sleep, yet it has a lower influence than those instant sleeping pills and has more side effects on the toddler. The prescription of Aspirin states that “Some patients found that they were unable to take aspirin because it caused gastric irritation, heartburn, stomach ulcers or seemed to promote minor bleeding disorders” (Souter and Meade, 15). Moreover, this choice of medicine shows the recklessness of the young generation in proceeding with dangerous decisions with irreversible effects on their supposedly loved ones and offspring.

On the part of the audience, the act of putting a toddler on pills is not normalized in the first place and the deed is defamiliarized by default. From the viewpoint of the modern narrative plot, it is less likely to be similar and more likely to be different; however still, the surroundings of a young mother taking a walk in the park with her toddler in the pram are natural and replicative. This replicative feature forces defamiliarization on the stage because one would relate and be put in the same scenario as a relative or an immediate family to the toddler in the pram.

The second level of toddler-stoning analysis is the action of the verbal abuse that is directed toward the toddler. It starts with parental irresponsibility toward their toddler. The

accumulative building up for the alerting defamiliarizing element is detected with the mother, Pam's, behavior "PAM goes out. She leaves the pram" and the following adult's full disclosure regarding the parenting responsibility "FRED (*calls*). I ain't takin' it! It'll be bloody stay 'ere!" (Bond, 2000, p. 60) noting that both parties are aware of the environment in which the pram and the toddler are being left in.

As for the environment in which the toddler is being left unsupervised, it comprises a group of young gang members who argue the possibility of putting the baby to sleep with a brick in a quite literal way.

BARRY. Put it s'sleep?

COLIN. 'E'll put it t'sleep for good.

PETE. *With a brick.*

MIKE. 'E don't care if it's awake all night. (Bond, 2000, p. 62; emphasis added)

When it comes to the audience watching such an argument that resembles a setting of consequential decision-making, it becomes irritating how it is possible for the collective consciousness to grow criminal and violent insights that can actually affect the social fabric of society in an apparently familiar and civil set of circumstances. The defamiliarizing detachment of the course of storytelling is chinked in Scene 6 not when the toddler becomes the target of the conversation, but in the way that this deed is determined.

The sequenced set of events ends with pinching, spitting, punching, hitting the toddler as well as jerking the pram violently. With the violent behavior towards the toddler, two instances necessitate the sensation of defamiliarization. The first instance that triggers the defamiliarizing sense is the one with the toddler falling dead out of the pram, "*He falls dead. BARREY pushes the pram over him.*" (Bond, 2000, p. 63) and it was not enough for the young gangsters to stop and realize their wrongdoing. This incident triggers the emotions of the audience because, in addition to being defenseless while alive, the toddler was even more helpless while dead and the gangsters' deeds are not justified not in terms of self-defense nor in terms of entertainment.

The second instance that triggers defamiliarizing feelings on the part of the audience is the scene of stoning. Similar to the previous scene, the stoning makes the audience go through a state of mental freeze to analyze the reasons behind the young gangsters' decision to throw a defenseless toddler stones. Moreover, this scene shows determination and aim in wrongdoing because the one who threw the first stone and missed the toddler became the subject of mockery among the rest of the gangsters and went on throwing stones until he proved his aiming abilities (Bond, 2000, p. 66-7).

The following scenes up to the last scene encompass nothing significant, as the events are complicated in a relevant manner to the overview of the play. The last scene is harmlessly quiet. As the play starts in the living room and goes around the town, it ends in the living room in to complete circle and concludes in the same place it began. Pam and her

parents are busy with usual domestic activities, and Len is mending a chair. Throughout the scene, nothing is said and everything seems to be well.

The third level of toddler-stoning analysis is the consequential actions of post-stoning incidents. The first thing that the audience should think of after such a horrible demonstration of murdering the innocent is an act of vengeance in any form or at least rising actions toward avenging the toddler. The pending disaster starting from the scene of stoning up to the end of the play triggers the defamiliarizing sense in which inaction is more provocative than action. In other words, the familiar approach to such a tragedy should be action and vengeance, yet inaction and lack of the slightest thought of vengeance make the audience observe with active defamiliarization the anticipated resolution.

In the analysis of differentiating the inside from outside stage witnesses of *Saved* and alike plays, Laura López Peña participates in the theoretical arena. She states “One of the major achievements of these plays is that their influence is not limited to the theater but tried to extend beyond it by entering the minds of spectators and by attempting to raise their awareness” (Peña, 1995, p. 113). Hence, raising awareness requires a sample to be followed in front of the audience. It is observed that the only character who is actually doing something about the play’s inaction is Len as he emerges as a more mature character by the end of the play by “understanding the necessity of getting implicated and of assuming responsibilities” (Peña, 1995, p. 114). In an indirect way, the spectator replicates the responsibility assumption and considers the play as a trigger for further para-theatrical referents.

Conclusion

When the topic of raising children is presented on the table, one is inclined to realize that “Repression leads to aggression” (Innes, 1992, p. 163). Critics read this aggression as the driving force for social progress regardless of the efforts of the supervising generations to stop that fact from coming into action. The scene of stoning the anesthetized baby in the pram as a representation of infanticide is read as a consequence of social conditioning. Culture and its components revolve around dehumanizing their subjects and killing them psychologically and emotionally. The subjectification of citizens aims at getting abiding citizens who are unable to pose a threat to the ruling system.

The discussed elements in this paper list the disrespectful adaptation of the young generation towards standardized written English as well as to the regulations of politeness that are to be inherited by their ancestors. The latter is supposed to be the living beings of the present who attend the *Saved*-like plays in the present. Hence, by communicating Bond’s ghost-double, the audience is inclined to feel targeted and this could be their offspring in the probable future unless they do something about it. Realizing that there is nobody out there to influence this future, the audience feels provoked to take action in any possible way in order to stop this future from taking place. Hence, the unfavorable gang

members presented in the play are the result of the varying social conditioning attempts and repression, which were supposed to make them align with the regulations and favorable norms of the society. Instead, they backfired and the result was as frightening as represented. On the part of the playwright, presenting such an idea in an Eros-oriented play brings out a still image that is approachable only by artists; whereas presenting the same image in a Thanatos-oriented play made it filled with defamiliarized stances that are appreciated by the normal audience, and analyzable by the critics and artists.

Moreover, the power balance makes it impossible for the two generations to share authority. More explicitly, it is either the older generations, today's theatergoers, or the young generations, the ones who would stone helpless babies, who hold the authority. The play suggests the latter and the consequences of that probability are presented in the play explicitly. Similar to satire and irony in the traditional Eros-oriented plays, the defamiliarizing technique in the current Thanatos-oriented plays implicitly redirects the audience into the recognition of things to do as well as those to avoid. Due to the disappearance of the concept of the concluding moral lesson at the end of the plays in modern times; the implicit moral lesson of *Saved* can be read as the highlight of the inevitable power abdication. The present generation can either be in a state of inaction and bear the consequences of the play or do something about a better upbringing for their children in order to have different prospects for a future.

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