



Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

THE EFFECTS OF THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM ON INDIVIDUALS: *THE FOOL*

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the effects of the capitalist system on individuals belonging to the working class in *the Fool* (1975) by Edward Bond. In the play, the capitalist system is portrayed as cruel because it deprives the individual from their basic needs such as dignity or freedom and as unequal because it makes a class superior to another one. For instance, while working class people cannot even have bread to eat, the parson has a silver pen and gold in his pocket. This wide gap between the two classes brings about inequality, class conflict and dehumanization observed in a capitalist society. This explains the reason why the individuals in the play feel alienated and ineffective. In addition, church and hospital as representatives of social institutions in society will be studied to reflect the fact that how they preserve the interests of the ruling class. The paper will conclude that individuals in the play will survive either by resorting to violence as in the case of Darkie, complying with system as in the case of Patty or revolting against the system as in the case of Clare.

Keywords: Edward Bond, *the Fool*, capitalism and social institutions.

***THE FOOL* ADLI OYUNDA KAPİTALİST SİSTEMİN BİREYLER
ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ**

Öz

Bu çalışma kapitalizmin, Edward Bond'un *the Fool* adlı oyunundaki işçi sınıfına ait bireyler üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Oyunda, kapitalist sistem bireyleri haysiyet ve özgürlük gibi temel haklarından yoksun bıraktığı için zalim; bir sınıfı diğerine üstün kıldığı için de eşitsiz olarak tasvir edilir. Örneğin, işçi sınıfı yiyecek ekmek bulamazken papaz cebinde gümüş kalemler ve altınlarla gezmektedir. İki sınıf arasındaki bu büyük boşluk kapitalist toplumlarda gözlemlenen eşitsizlik, sınıf çatışması ve kişinin insani özelliklerini yitirmesi gibi durumlara sebep olur. Bu da oyundaki bireylerin neden yabancılaşmış ve etkisiz hissettiğini açıklamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, kilise ve hastane gibi sosyal kurumların yöneten sınıfın çıkarlarını nasıl koruduğu bu çalışmada irdelenecektir. Çalışma, oyundaki bireylerin ya Darkie gibi şiddete başvurarak, ya Patty gibi sisteme uyararak ya da Clare gibi sisteme isyan ederek varolabilecekleri sonucuna varacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Edward Bond, *the Fool*, kapitalizm ve sosyal kurumlar.

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Başvuru Tarihi (Received): 31.08.2021 **Kabul Tarihi** (Accepted): 20.01.2022

Introduction

Edward Bond who was born in July 18, 1934 is believed to be one of the most important and controversial British dramatists. Besides writing plays, Bond produces theories explaining the relationship between society and the individuals living in it. According to him, society can be defined as “the Establishment, the social order, rather than masses of people living within it” (Hern, 1996, p. xii). Thus, what Bond aims to show is the relation between the social order and the individual. In this sense, it may be claimed that “his achievement has been a theatre which is Marxist in that his characters are the products of social process whose motivations and actions find their energy in social relationships” (Coult, 1979, p. 35). In *the Fool*, the nineteenth century English poet John Clare’s life and his role as a poet are displayed by referring to the effects of the unjust and class-conscious society on his confinement to the hospital. Through this character, Bond also questions the nineteenth century industrial England’s influence on individuals, especially on those who belong to working class. He explains “plays begin with people and not ideas. To invent things for people to say and then attach people to them would be a very destructive thing to do” (Stoll and Bond et al., 1976, p. 412). Similarly, his theater is defined to be “political, and his focus of investigation is nothing less than the survival of all the human, human equalities of the political animal, the dweller in a contemporary polis” (Castillo, 1986, p. 80).

In the introduction of the play *the Fool*, Bond opposes capitalism finding it like a relentless desire to consume and profit. He also touches upon the discrepancies it has. For instance, capitalism wants “the worker must know his place in the factory but be an insatiable egoist outside it” (Bond, 1987, p. 69). He continues by stating “there is a discrepancy between what we have to do keep our society running and what we’re told we ought to do to be human. Our economy depends on exploitation and aggression. We expect business to be ruthlessly aggressive. At the same time, we expect people to be generous and socially considerate” (Bond, 1987, 69). Through these lines, Bond explains what he understands from the capitalist society. He finds it irrational and unjust as its aim is to gain profit which is not shared by the working class. It is cruel and prevents people to have their inherent rights. Bond’s ideas on capitalism are influenced by Marx. For instance, Marx states “the logic of capitalism as a system, premised on the need to generate private profit, produced a system that was both dynamic and capable of enormous productivity but one which was also rooted in class antagonism, inequality, inhumanity and crises” (Bowles, 2007, p. 62).

1.The Effects of the Capitalist System on Individuals: *The Fool*

In *the Fool*, the story of John Clare is given on the surface level but in deeper level there is a very realistic picture of the people who belong to the lower segment of working class in England. It portrays the conflict between these people and the cruel capitalist system. The representatives of this system support the system as they benefit from it. For instance, church as a social institution can be seen as a representative of the system. Bond questions the role of the church in the play and it is seen that the church does not oppose this unjust system but, rather, it supports the system. The system makes this institution become richer while the working class becomes alienated and dehumanized. As a result of this, working class people lose values of dignity, freedom and identity. For instance, there occurs a conflict between the parson and the working class people about cutting the forest in the play. The parson is in favor of its being cut down by stating “we are entering a new age. An iron age. New engines, new factories, cities, ways, laws. The old ways must go. The noble horse and hand are slow. Our land must be better used. Forests cut down. Open spaces put to the plough. All of us must be patient and understanding. We must work for the common good. God bless you” (Bond, 1987, 88). The parson and Lord Milton want to cut the forest to build factories there because they want to earn money to provide the continuance of the capitalist system. However, the workers oppose it. For instance, Clare

mentions “can’t- thass our’s much as his. An’ the fens. An’ the trees. What’s it means boy? We’ll lose our fishin’- our wood- cows on the fen common. How’ll we live? Not on the few bob they pay us for work’ their land. We need us a bit a land” (Bond,1987, p. 93). This can be regarded as a clash between nature and civilization besides the one between the interests of capitalist people and the interests of the workers. Because these workers work all the time like machines they need a place for relief and to feel themselves as being humans. Nonetheless, fishing, wood or cows do not make the rich ones richer and, thus, they are useless for these people. They make the workers feel a bit relaxed as this is like a break from their mechanic and monotonous life. The rich ones like the parson and Milton do not understand the working class people as life of the working class people is quite different from that of the rich ones.

This is the first sermon Darkie has heard in his life. When he confesses this the parson reprimands him and tells Darkie to come to the church. Darkie answers “too tired. Sit on me arse after work not me knees. I’d fall asleep an’ they’d blame your sermon” (Bond,1987, p. 89). This shows how hard Darkie works. Then, the parson continues to talk about Christmas: “Christmas is the gift of god. A time as serene as this night sky. Can nothing lighten your dark spirit?” (Bond,1987). Darkie replies “six day a week I go t’work in the dark an’ come home in the dark- for what? Ten shillin’. Even Judas got thirty- but he come from a good family an’ wouldn’t work for less” (Bond,1987, p. 89). In the case of Darkie, going to church is a kind of luxury instead of a spiritual relief because he does not have time to go. This shows the hard conditions under which the working class people live and work. Besides, Darkie cannot get what he deserves in terms of money both because of the system which is unjust and because of his coming from a lower class family. The society Darkie lives in is very class-conscious one where there are working class who work hard and earn little, and the ruling class who does not work but earn more. Darkie lives like a machine, that is, in a dehumanized way because he goes to work till dark and, then, sleeps in the dark to go to work in return for nothing. As it is seen, he does nothing to feel himself a human being. As Bowles (2007) explains

Workers are destined only to fill roles as wage earners; workers, having only their capacity to labour to sell, have no choice but to sell it. The capitalist system does not work for their benefit but workers are incorporated into it as essential, yet, expendable elements. The individual does not matter in the capitalist system; he or she can be hired and fired as necessary. (p. 65)

All these elements cause him to show aggressive tendencies which foreshadow his inevitable death by being hanged as a result of opposing this system.

The parson meets Darkie, Bob, Miles, Marry, Betty and Hamo at the village in the evening. Darkie accuses the parson of being a liar. Miles wants the parson to show his pockets. Then, Darkie goes to the parson and says “silver in this pocket. Notebook in a silver case. Corn prices in that. Silver pencil. Gold ring. Cross on chain, Gold. Silver knob end his stick” (Bond,1987, p. 104). The gap between the two classes is quite a big one, which shows the inequality in the society once more. Later, Mary and Betty try to take off the parson’s buttons which are pearly. The parson asks all of them whether they are ashamed or not for what they have done to him. Betty answers “No. No. No. No. don’t ashamed. I’m ashamed I can’t feed my kid” (Bond,1987). As it is seen, the society in which these poor people live is unjust as a result of capitalist system which makes believe people that they need artificial possessions such as silver case or pearly buttons. The parson expects respect from these people without questioning whether he really deserves it or not. The other characters also answer the question of the parson:

PETER: I’m ashamed I work in parson’s field an’ crawl home like an animal.

MILES: I’m ashamed the sweat roll off me while you git fat.

HAMO: I'm ashamed t'goo t'sleep with the dirt out your fields on me hands every night. (Bond, 1987, p. 104)

These lines provide a very clear portrait of the capitalist system under which these characters have to survive. The parson wants these people to be ashamed of but after seeing that the parson has silver and gold with him while these people even cannot feed their children the parson should be ashamed of. However, because the capitalist system is not moral or humane but economic the parson actually expects these people to be ashamed of what they have done to him. This is because he is not regarded as just a man but as the representative of the church which is one of the most important social constitutions in the society. For instance, when Milton and gentlemen find the parson naked in the village they say "a mob destroying in a minute the work of centuries" (Bond, 1987, p. 107). Nonetheless, neither the parson nor Milton and other gentleman who are supposed to be responsible for these poor people have any interest in them. This is because of capitalism's being cruel and unjust. In this regard, Bond puts it:

Capitalism has no social responsibility or even duty. The market takes the place of these things. The holders of political power are no longer politicians. They are salespeople with the culture and ethics of the salesroom. They have power but no responsibility. Profit replaces responsibility. Politicians have become comics and clowns. (Bond, 2019, A Letter o the Sane)

After taking all his belongings of the parson, the workers do not stop humiliating the parson. They start to undress him. When he is undressed Betty mentions "my baby. My baby on't got proper baby skin like that. Look how soft that is. Like silk lace. My baby's born hard- hev animal skin like summat live in the road. Look at that. Come away in handfuls" (Bond,1987, p. 105). The parson is claimed to have a more proper skin compared with a baby of the worker. This is another signifier revealing the unpleasant living conditions of the working class. Because the parson does not have to work and has enough food, he has a proper skin. Miles and Hamos show their surprise by saying "handful a flesh! Handfuls" (Bond,1987, p. 105). Then, the rest shows their reactions as follows

DARKIE: Our flesh. That belong t'us. Where you took that flesh boy? You took that flesh off her baby. My ma. They on't got proper flesh on em now.

BETTY: My flesh.

BOB: Her baby's flesh.

PETER: Our flesh.

DARKIE: Where you stole that flesh boy? Your flesh is stolen goods. You're covered in stolen goods when you strip! How you climb your altar steps like that? What god say when you raise Chriss flesh in service?- more flesh they stolen doo he say? You call us thief when we took silver. You took us flesh! (Bond,1987, p. 106)

This scene harshly criticizes the parson and the class he belongs to. He is accused of stealing from the workers because he forces them to work for the upper class. As Bond mentions, "the worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces...Labor not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a commodity" (Bond, 1976, p. 324). The scene described above-quotation also criticizes the existing legal system. As Darkie says that the workers are called thieves when they steal something but the ruling class apparently is not being called thieves for what they steal from the workers. This shows that the capitalist system is not moral but legal once more. The ruling class decides what is right or wrong not according to ethics but according to their legal system which is made up by themselves. Darkie continues to state "you steal from us. Parson steal from us.

What we doo t'parson? Make a mock. Took- what? Trinkets! When I steal from parson what you doo t'me? Law hang us. Thass the on'y difference 'tween you an' me: you on't think twice 'fore you use violence" (Bond,1987, p. 108). It obviously shows that law is in favor of the powerful people and, thus, there is not justice in this society. The working-class people are hanged when they show violence; however, this is not the case for the ruling class. Darkie says that the ruling class does not hesitate to use violence, which means that law does not hang the ruling class when they show violence. Moreover, this scene is portrayed by Bond intentionally as a technique.

What compels is the disturbing imagery and real menace involved in the experience- when a character the audience understands, or a clearly recognizable situation, is viewed "on the brink" of destruction or increasingly out of control in a moment etched in memory with powerful stage imagery. Fully playing Bond's extreme images is crucial to the vision inscribed in the plays, which may explain one difficulty in getting them more widely produced. Bond calls such deliberately choreographed moments "aggro-effects" to fulfill a didactic function. (Spencer, 1992, p. 8)

Furthermore, the capitalist system does not differentiate individuals according to their race, nations or ethnicity. It is based on the class division between proletariat, that is, working class and bourgeoisie, that is, capitalist class. Money decides who will be dominant (Giddens, 1971, p. 10). This is exemplified in the play with the situation of three Irishmen who look for a job. First Irishman says "if they bring any more machines on the land they won't need us. When the harvest's over we'll try the railroads. Buildin' Railroads every bloody where" (Bond,1987, p. 145). They want to work because they need money to feed their families. However, human beings are replaced with the machines. As it is seen, technology is exploited by the capitalist system to enhance their profit, instead of making individuals' lives more comfortable. Another interesting thing is that these individuals are reduced into machines. As individuals, they do not mean anything in the society. They are easily replaced with the machines. If they are not useful, they are not valuable as human beings in the capitalist system. Then, these Irishmen meet Clare and make a deal with him. They give bread and cheese to Clare on condition that he gives Mary for one night to them. Clare accepts this. As seen, these people are in such a desperate condition that they sacrifice everything just for bread. If one is hungry there is no priority for love. The Irishmen give their food to Clare but he does not give Mary to them as he cheats on them. He is saved from them by the coming of the keeper.

Afterwards, all the characters are told to be in prison because of what they have done to the parson. Clare cannot help laughing at the prison. He laughs and asks about Mary to Darkie. In the next scene, Clare is told to be a famous poet. He meets Mrs. Emmerson, Mary Lamb and her brother Charles Lamb, and they complain about not being able to afford living in London. Besides, Mary Lamb is told to have killed her mother and is put away on condition that her brother will be with her all the time. Charles is also a poet and states:

Truth isn't governed by the laws of supply and demand. When it's scarce its price goes down. So it's not a luxury, it's never found in palaces, or paraded by judges. Truth shelters in the gutter. Only the man who stoops finds it...Truth is often ugly. The spit on god's face. Yes, the truth is spat into the golden faces of all idols. God's face is covered in spit. Fool think that's his mask and worship it. Dangerous! But it is even more dangerous when the truth is told by a wise man. The goddess of wisdom is a bird of prey, the owl. But the fools have hunted her and put her in a cage. If you try to let her out she savages your hand. Only a wise man tries to do that- or another sort of fool. (Bond,1987, p. 121)

In this capitalist society, everything is evaluated according to the laws of supply and demand. Being good or bad, harmful or harmless do not matter in it. For instance, Patty says about Clare "he on't harm a fly. But what use is that to us?" (Bond,1987). The only thing that matters is

being useful or not. The concept of truth is one of the values, which is not looked for in this society. As Charles explains, when it is scarce it is not valuable because people do not want truth as it is ugly. That is, powerful people wear a mask and behave as if they do not abuse poor people and all the things they have done are necessary for the common good. This is the ideology, that is, inverted version of reality in this society. That is why Admiral Radstock criticizes the poems of Clare because they undermine the authority in the society. Admiral believes that there will be chaos and the poor will suffer from this. There are many myths who try to justify the exploitation by the ruling class. Bond attacks these myths in his all plays as well as in *the Fool*:

Bond attacks society's dominant and too readily accepted myths: that man is innately violent; that science and technology will solve all of man's problems; and that the free-markets stems best because it appeals to man's natural aggressiveness. To counter these myths offers what he labels a "rational theatre" because, as he says, theatre, when it's doing what it was created to do, demonstrates order in the chaos, the ideal in the ordinary, history in the present, the rational in the seemingly irrational". (Jones, 1980, p. 505)

Clare argues with his wife Patty who wants him to work and to earn money instead of writing poems. He keeps thinking about Mary and cannot stop writing poems. The village he lives does not read his poems and he cannot publish them for a wider audience due to the lack of money. However, he mentions "can't help what I am. God know I wish I couldn't write me name! But my mind git full a songs an' I on't feel a man if I on't write 'em down. O god I on't even know if thass truth anymore" (Bond,1987, p. 132). As seen, the capitalist society does not make the poor to make true their dreams. There is no room for poetry in a capitalist society which values money over everything else. Because Clare cannot do anything except for writing he cannot exist in this society anymore. He is confined to the hospital at the end of the play. Patty is fed up with the bad conditions she has to endure and says

On't try git round me. My sympathy run out years agoo. On't fed right. Thass all the matter with you. Bring regular wages in the house an' I'll soon hev you fed up. Forgit Mary an' think a me. On't rowin. On e kid on my hands an' another on the way. Tired a all this self. You think a someone else. Feed us. Thass your job boy. On't goo out workin' while I'm carryin'. An' they on't let you on the parish while you got your health". (Bond, 1987, p. 132)

At first sight, the case of Patty would be more tragic than that of Clare but it is vice versa. For Patty at least accepts the situation in which she lives and she survives at the end. However, Clare seems to be in-between. On the one hand, he wants to be a poet but his poems do not appeal to the public in the society, and, on the other hand, he has to work and feed his family. However, life seems brutal for both Patty and Clare.

While Clare and Patty are arguing Mrs. Emmerson who likes the poems of Clare visits him. When Mrs. Emmerson and Patty are alone Patty tells that Clare thinks himself a boxer and Lord Byron, and he will be sent to hospital. Upon this, Clare mentions "on't Patty's fault she on't the gal I want. Bin a good wife. Good mother. Stood by me. But how'd I live with her? No, I remember her: the other one. An' all I want's t'lay my head on her breast. Peace then. Laugh again. Talk like a sensible man. I'm so alone" (Bond,1987, p. 138). Then, when Clare mention Mary Mrs. Emmerson asks who she is. Clare answers by saying that she is his second wife. Mary symbolizes the life he wants to live in which he is free from responsibilities; he can write poems and he is not desperate. The real world he has to endure is unbearable for him as there is no room for dreams in this capitalist society. Thus, he is dissatisfied and distressed from his present life. In this sense, a different wife can be thought as a different life. Besides, Mary can be also

interpreted as pre-industrial rural England where one is not aware of the brutality and unjustness of the capitalist society when the play is evaluated in a general sense. In accordance with this view, Patty symbolizes the capitalist society where he has to give up dreaming and work hard in order to survive.

Subsequently, Clare is sent to hospital and his expense will be covered by Lord Milton. Clare's confinement can be interpreted as the defeat of the people who do not accept the present conditions and try to be true to himself and his passions in life. The capitalist system does not want men like Clare who represents the revolt even if in an imaginary level. His revolt is considered in an imaginary level because he does not take any action against the system. Clare is the symbol of imagination, poetry, thought which are not seen as valuable in this system as they do not provide any gain. Besides, they may cause revolt in future because poems, that is, literature, appeal to feelings and mind but the workers are asked to be obedient instead of being imaginative. Clare's thoughts as a poet and as a human being are made invalid as a result of being confined to the lunatic asylum. Thus, it can be said that the ruling class can dictate their truths to the society through silencing the dissidents. In the level of action, the working class is already defeated by the hanging of Darkie and of his other friends who oppose the system. At the end of the play, Clare imagines that he sees Mary and Darkie who is now blind and a boxer like himself. Darkie's becoming blind is a very effective symbol because he protests the system in the level of action. Portraying a blind boxer as a character means that individuals are powerless against the capitalist system in this society because there is not a chance for a blind boxer in the ring. Even though Darkie is blind he tries to punch Clare mercilessly. Besides, Mary is interested in Darkie and shares her bread with him. At the first scene of the play, she shares it with Clare. If Mary is thought to be a trophy of an anti-capitalist and equal society it can be claimed that neither Clare nor Darkie can win her. They both fail.

In the last scene, Milton visits Clare who is in a strait-jacket and unrecognizable. Lord Milton behaves very kindly towards Clare. It might be because of the fact that Lord Milton is a suffering man since he lost his wife and has problems with his son. In addition, he is dissatisfied with the changes in the village. Now, he can empathize with Clare who is also dissatisfied with his life and unhappy. Besides, Mary Lamb and Napoleon play chess in an imaginary world at the hospital. Mary Lamb mentions how she killed his brother who was supposed to look after her. Napoleon does not believe her by saying that she is trying to impress him. He continues "I ruled Europe. The pope handed me the crown like a waiter and I put it on my head" (Bond,1987, p. 138). Clare's having these imaginary friends is interesting in the sense that the world of these characters is full of violence. Mary Lamb kills her mother and brother. There is not family relation based on compassion and love in her world. Clare does not have a family now. Napoleon is a warrior and is famous for saying 'money, money, money'. It may be claimed that these two characters represent the capitalist system in modern century in which there is no room for compassion and love. In other words, these two characters show Clare's understanding of the society he lives in. In addition to these two imaginary characters, Clare has Mary and Darkie as well in his imaginary world at the hospital. They may be interpreted as an escape from the bitter realities of cruel and unjust society. However, Clare admits that Mary and Darkie are not real at the end of the play by saying that "No. No one there. Never was. On'y songs I make up on them...Walk four days. What, ninety mile? Head git mix up" (Bond,1987, p. 66). After a while, he escapes from the asylum to see Patty and his sons. He seems to give up thinking about Mary and accepts the real situation he is in. His giving up thinking about Mary, which is a possibility for escaping from the capitalist world, may be interpreted that he stops struggling for a change in the system.

2. Conclusion

To conclude, *the Fool* is a good example in proving the necessity of Bond's ideal socialist society because the capitalist system is cruel and unjust one. These features of the system makes the working class people feel themselves alienated, ineffective and dehumanized. In order to survive in such an unjust society, the characters either show violence as in the case of Darkie, comply with system as in the case of Patty or revolt against the system as in the case of Clare. Even if the characters fail at their attempts to oppose the existing social order the play should be considered an optimistic one in that it at least shows us the possibility of change.

Moreover, the working class is under the oppression of the ruling class. The ruling class makes use of some social institutions such as church and hospital to justify their exploitation of the working class. These institutions ensure the continuation of the capitalist system through deciding the ethics, law, and sanity of one in the society.

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