

# *The Chair Plays* Trilogy by Edward Bond

## Edward Bond'un *Sandalye Oyunları* Adlı Üçlemesi

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### ABSTRACT

This review is based on a textual evaluation of Edward Bond's trilogy *The Chair Plays* which is a thought-provoking work set in a bleak, dystopian future where individuals struggle against oppressive systems of control. Published by Methuen Drama in 2015, each play—*Have I None*, *The Under Room*, and *The Chair*—portrays characters who, despite living under constant surveillance and dehumanizing conditions, find ways to resist in their own personal ways. Bond's stark settings mirror a vivid critique of oppressive systems and constant surveillance that feel all too familiar. As this review attempts to show, the trilogy is both a warning about the dangers of oppressive systems and a profound reflection on the resilience of the human spirit, and it draws striking parallels with contemporary socio-political realities.

**Keywords:** Edward Bond, *The Chair Plays*, *Have I None*, *The Under Room*, *The Chair*

### ÖZ

Bu inceleme, Edward Bond'un bireylerin baskıcı kontrol sistemlerine karşı mücadele ettiği kasvetli, distopik bir gelecekte geçen ve kışkırtıcı bir eser olan *The Chair Plays* (*Sandalye Oyunları*) üçlemesinin metinsel bir değerlendirmesine dayanmaktadır. 2015'de Methuen Drama tarafından yayımlanan üçlemenin her bir oyunu, *Have I None* (*Ben Yokum*), *The Under Room* (*Alt Oda*) ve *The Chair* (*Sandalye*) sürekli gözetim altında ve insanlık dışı koşulların hâkim olduğu bir ortamda yaşamalarına rağmen mevcut şartlara kendi kişisel yöntemleriyle direnmenin yollarını bulan karakterleri anlatıyor. Bond'un seçtiği sade mekanlar, çok tanıdık gelen toplumsal yapıların canlı bir eleştirisini yansıtıyor. Bu incelemenin göstermeye çalıştığı gibi, üçleme hem baskıcı sistemlerin tehlikeleri hakkında bir uyarı hem de insan ruhunun dayanıklılığı üzerine derin bir düşünce niteliği taşır ve günümüzün sosyo-politik gerçekleriyle ilgi çarpıcı paralellikler kurmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Edward Bond, *Sandalye Oyunları*, *Ben Yokum*, *Alt Oda*, *Sandalye*

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## Review

This review is based on a textual evaluation of Edward Bond's trilogy *The Chair Plays* published by Methuen Drama in 2015. Set in 2077, *The Chair Plays* portray a dystopian world where the individual is "chained" and controlled in an oppressive regime by various means and resists the disciplinary mechanisms. In other words, the individual is deliberately portrayed to be enslaved within a totalitarian state and carceral society. In spite of all the mechanisms to control her/him in such a repressive system, each person attempts to resist in her/his own way since even a totally dystopian work of art carries traces of utopian thought.

Although many dystopian works adopt a futuristic setting, they are often viewed as critiques of our contemporary reality. Therefore, by criticizing and satirizing the status quo, the plays shed light on the not-too-distant future which can be taken as a warning. Moreover, since all the plays contain various forms of subordination of the individual in an oppressive regime, understanding the dynamics of control of the citizens, which has been a controversial and significant topic in social and political sciences, becomes crucial.

In all the plays in the trilogy, the individual is depicted in a dystopian and futuristic society where mechanisms of control are exerted in various ways and methods and constant monitoring and surveillance are seen. Since dystopian discourses carry traces of utopian impulses, the individuals in each play try to resist the apparent forms of subordination in their own unique ways. In all the plays, the individual is seen as one who does not have free will and therefore who is "chained" by the totalitarian regime on the grounds that he will be disciplined via various methods. However, in spite of all the methods to keep the individual under surveillance and obedience, s/he uses certain methods to resist against disciplinary and totalitarian methods.

In the first play of the trilogy, *Have I None*, the past has been somehow abolished, the city is in ruins and mass suicide has emerged. The nightmarish setting with two chairs and a table is in harmony with the relationship of the existing three characters: Sara and Jams's unhappy marriage is evident from the very beginning of the play. Jams is already a symbol of the totalitarian state since he works for the security services and has just returned from a patrol as the play opens. Sara is irritated by the constant knocking on the door which she claims to have been hearing for days. The fear of Sara is depicted in a way that is reminiscent of Foucault's notion of docile bodies created by governments to control people. The problematic relationship between Sara and Jams is

further worsened with the arrival of Grit, who claims with a photograph that he is the brother of Sara. Jams refuses the claim just like Sara since all documents including the photographs were destroyed in the course of the abolishment of the past. Thus, there seems to be no “free” individual with a subjective and personal history and memory, which is a direct result of a carceral system. Such an individual in the play would only define herself/himself when s/he feels attached to “something” and that something is a chair in the play. Grit’s arrival seems much less important than his sitting over Sara’s chair, which is an act to be punished and thus the couple decide to poison Grit. However, after a series of arguments between the couple, Sara deliberately drinks the poisonous soup at the end of the play and the satirical tone arrives at a peak when her husband crazily dismisses her before anyone sees her, dead or alive, in this repressive, disciplinary state. Whether futile or not, Sara and Grit seem to resist against disciplinary methods, Sara by using her free will to die and Grit by using his free will to de-erase his past.

In the second play of the trilogy named *The Under Room*, Joan, a woman living alone in a bleak dystopian environment under military rule, finds her life disrupted when an illegal immigrant breaks into her house. In this play, Bond uses a striking technique in order to defamiliarize the audience; the illegal immigrant is represented and acted by a cloth, stuffed dummy while his words are spoken by a real actor from the side of the stage. After a short time, Joan believes what the dummy tells her, and she is persuaded that he is not a robber. Having survived by shoplifting until now, he has no legal documents to prove his identity. The only thing he has is a knife to which he has an attachment reminding him his bitter history with his parents: In a dehumanized government, the soldiers wanted him to kill his parents with that very knife. The brutality of the repressive state apparatus has undoubtedly traumatized the dummy. Both the issue of immigration with its dehumanizing outcomes, and his past compel Joan to decide to hide the dummy in her cellar. However, with the arrival of Jack, who is an immigrant-smuggler, she and the dummy feel helpless in the hands of a more powerful figure who ironically confesses that he is actually working for the military forces. He has the power to smuggle the dummy to a safer country, but the devouring capitalistic system needs a vast sum of money for this dream to be realized. The fear and the methods to “discipline” both Joan and the dummy are met with resistance by Joan who hysterically tears the dummy apart at the end of the play, a sort of rejection to be disciplined.

*The Chair*, the last play of the trilogy is no different from the previous plays in setting a military and oppressive state. The middle-aged Alice lives with Billy, whom she has rescued as a

thrown-out baby and mothered him since then. Billy is twenty-six years old and since he is mentally-retarded, he has no experience of the outside world. He lives in a state of semi-wishful confinement within the house, imposed by Alice, whose main goal is to protect him from falling into the hands of the military authorities. His world is only coloured by colourful drawing pencils which enable him to envision and create a world on the paper. The beginning of the play is marked by Alice's looking through the curtains of the window to a clearly disturbing sight. We soon learn that a soldier with a prisoner who is referred to as "escortee" has been waiting for the bus at the bus station for hours, which arouses pity in Alice. Upon the naive suggestion of Billy to take a chair down to offer to the prisoner woman, Alice does so, and we are now in a dystopian world of an authoritarian repressive state where humane feelings like kindness make you pay the price because humane behaviour means resisting the status quo where the state apparatuses are repressive. Since even looking at the faces of prisoners is forbidden, this law-breaking attitude of Alice causes her to be questioned by an officer from the Welfare Department. Fearing that the official will discover Billy's existence, Alice has removed all his pictures from the walls. The series of events lead to a point when Alice feels an urge to leave Billy. However, Billy, who knows nothing more than colourful crayons in his naive world, is unable to survive in this contrasted repressive regime.

Edward Bond's *The Chair Plays* is a powerful exploration of resistance which portrays confrontations with the mechanisms of control and the ways individuals struggle to reclaim agency, no matter how futile their efforts might appear. Each play encapsulates a unique yet universal way of resilience—whether it be Sara's defiant self-determination, Joan's rejection of dehumanizing power structures, or Alice's quiet acts of kindness that challenge the state's authoritarian grip. Ultimately, Bond uses these dystopian narratives to reflect on contemporary societal issues, offering both a critique of present-day inequalities and a warning of what could come. Yet, within every portrayal of resistance lies a glimmer of hope—a reminder of the enduring human spirit that seeks autonomy even in the face of overwhelming oppression.

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**References**

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