A new introduction for *Saved* written for the programme of its production at the Lyric Theatre, London, in October 2011.

By Edward Bond

**Then, Now and To Be**

The great depression was followed by war. The post-war world was black and white and the greys in between. Food was frugal, clothes utilitarian, winters cold, and survival meant scrimping and saving. If you have not lived in regimented poverty it is difficult to imagine it. Society was still surprisingly feudal. The rigid class disciplines of Victorian England and the Industrial Revolution were still in place. The world was changing but working people were not yet part of it. They had built the nation and been expected to die for it. Now they were losing their political cohesion and power and with it their social self-respect. Their resentment grew -- much as it did in the Middle East before the Arab spring. But they had no “dictator targets.” Authority was bland and confident in its superiority.

Working people had lost their traditional place in a national culture -- and, as culture is largely the way self-consciousness knows itself, they had lost themselves. If their culture did not respect them they could not respect themselves -- because shared community is the core of humanness. This was the beginning of the strange new modern form of violence. It is caused not by the traditional needs of poverty but by the need for respect. Because they did not understand its cause the people turned their anger against the nearest target: themselves --- and inevitably against the weakest among them. That is the psychological logic of rage: to find the highest it must seek it amongst the most debased. It is the paradox of drama. It is the core of this play. The young people murder the baby in the park to regain their self respect. If you do not understand that you do not understand the times you live in.

The world changed again. Affluence and abundance replaced the poverty of scrimping and saving. Everything exploded in blinding colours and deafening noise. Money and new technologies stimulated each other into a raging fever. All things were valued in money and made to be sold. Society was a market and culture was money. You did not need your culture to respect you, you needed the respect of the market: money. If you were integrated into the Cash Culture you were a paid-up member of society. There was no need to understand the invisible bands of obligation and care that bind communities together, and you certainly did not need to live them. You could not afford them anyway. Instead it would all be done by money. Money is like a machine that breeds itself. Its laws are not human. It has (as philosophers would say) no ontology and cannot transcend itself. It is a parasite. It preys on humans and takes them over so that the host ends up living the parasite’s life for it. This corrupts the whole of our culture and -- as that is largely the way self-consciousness knows itself -- it corrupts us. First culture destroys the reason to be human and then it seeks to destroy the motive to be human.

How is this? The hungry poor need food and food is given to the stomach. This fits into the natural *and* cultural order of things. In the same way the poor wear shoes on their feet. But in
the consumer culture trainers are not worn on the feet -- they are worn on the head, by the brain. They are not shoes anymore. They are a symbol of social membership. They earn you respect and let you respect yourself. Extend this logic to all aspects of life, inner and outer, casual and profound, to the hours and seconds of each day -- and you are in the consumer culture. A man was murdered for his trainers! But surely common decency, the human imperative, should assert itself? No no it is too late to say that. It has been destroyed, rotted, eaten and corrupted away.

Corruption as a semblance of society only works while the money-market works. When it doesn’t work for you, you can’t pay for respect and must look elsewhere -- but now there is no elsewhere. And there is something else that is less obvious: though the need to be human is tenuous it is also tenacious. It tells you that the respect you get from your corrupt society is corrupting. It degrades your self respect. That realisation is profound, and it is not selfish because the humanness of the self is a sense of shared community. There is one final complication. The new affluence might satisfy you if you grew up in regimented poverty. But if you were born into the new affluence it begins to pall. That should lead to a political awakening. It doesn’t, because Thatcher destroyed political memory and understanding. Instead there is a boredom that craves for new excitement and stimulation because that is all there has ever been. The combination of boredom, the training in cupidity, the lost respect and panic at a new unknown poverty -- in fact, at social destitution -- is a strange mixture. It penetrates the whole of life. It is deeper, angrier, more destructive -- yet in its way more human --- than the resentment of fifty years ago. It led to the riots. And as in the past, and for the same reason, the rich are not looted and the penthouses are not burnt. The anger is turned against the self and its own people. To jump ahead in the argument, perhaps it is like the resentment before the Arab spring -- the first stirrings of a British awakening.

The riots were finally ignited by the gang of bankers and the gang of corrupt corporations -- in particular, because it was much in the news, the gang at The News of the World (I describe elsewhere its part in the culture of corruption). These gang-sters looted and corrupted our society to an extent outrageous even by its own twisted standards. Their predations on the poor made them poorer, the sick sicker, the disabled more encumbered, and have broken more homes so that more children will be neglected and assaulted and reduced to the misery of Victorian waifs, and more drugs and alcohol will be consumed, and there will be more suicides and more violence not in the public blaze of riots but in obscure and hidden haunts of despair. And the victims were forced to pay these rich aggressors bail-outs and bonuses beyond the ambitions or even desires of the looters in the streets. And anyone holding public office must have known that this would be so. It is beyond belief that this could happen even in a society, such as ours, that has already degraded democracy to be a comfort station for the rich.

When it was elected I said this would be the worst British government since the nineteen-thirties. I had not anticipated all of Cameron. In the House of Commons he showed his sense of statesmanship and grasp of the subtleties of any argument by braying like a beered-up lout -- or I suppose a Bullingdon-boy tanked up on champagne -- “Calm down dear! Calm down!” He did not try this on the rioters. His mantra-excuse for all his failings of leadership is “Broken
Britain.” It is broken -- at, by and from the top. His remedy is “readjustment”, which used to be called repression, and Victorian charity. Later this will be replaced by violence -- always in politics this fills the vacuum of incompetence, ineptitude and sheer incomprehension.

The government does not understand the problem or see the consequences of its attempts to solve it. There is only one way to reduce crime -- to make society more just. Doing that is against everything that Cameron knows. Now the talk is of troops on the streets, plastic bullets (they killed in Ireland), harsher sentences, street evictions and the promise to do whatever it takes. It will get worse. Cameron did not give the looters -- even the children -- a second chance. He gave that to his ex-editor friend Coulson. Cameron brayed on and on about it as if he were St Francis walking on the water or a dewy-eyed public schoolboy standing up for British fair-play. The rioters should have been warned they were not devious, cunning, deceitful, culturally corrupt, arrogant, bent, perhaps crooked -- but the courts are not yet open -- or rich enough to be his friend.

This government has a mission: nihilism -- intellectual emptiness with an under-seam of crankiness, and violence. We have not yet seen the inflated arid trauma of nihilism practiced on a modern democracy: reality will hallucinate. The gilded parchment rhetoric will go. The violence will come out of their fear. They will be so afraid they would bury the dead in straightjackets. They have stamped on the fire to put it out -- they stamped it underground.

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