Body, War, and Resistance: Potentiality in Edward Bond’s Have I None and Howard Barker’s Scenes from an Execution

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses two contemporary plays—Howard Barker’s Scenes from an Execution (1990) and Edward Bond’s Have I None (2000)—in accordance with Agambenian terms, including the notions of bare life, the state of exception, and potentiality, to deconstruct the intersection between body, war, and resistance. Mainly focusing on Agamben’s post-Foucauldian reading of biopolitics, the study argues that the notion of sovereign power reduces the human body to mere bare life; however, paradoxically, this reduction simultaneously reveals the body as a site of potential resistance. In both plays, the body becomes an object where control, violence, and potentiality converge—serving as a catalyst for the possibility of freedom. In the light of Agamben’s conceptualization of potentiality and impotentiality, the act of resistance appears as both an ethical and aesthetic gesture that opens the possibility of alternative forms of being. The role of art and the artist itself becomes a space that possesses the power to resist the biopolitical order.

Keywords Agamben; Bare Life; Potentiality; Resistance; Contemporary British Drama

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